

Tord Østberg

Alcibiades and athens a political biography from the first century of radical democracy

Alkibiades og aten. En politisk biografi fra det radikale demokratiets første århundre

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The Greek general Alcibiades was a contemporary of Socrates, Plato, Pericles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Thucydides and Xenophon, and for a while he outshone them all. From the Peace of Nicias in 421 BC to the fall of the Athenian empire in 404 BC, he was a major political figure in the Greek world. Today he is perhaps best known as Socrates' spurned lover in The Symposium, but for many Athenians, he was a great war hero, and he is believed to have been one of the most written and talked about people in Greece in the fourth century BC.

Alcibiades was undoubtedly the most controversial of Athens' many generals during the Peloponnesian War, and the main driving force behind the disastrous Sicily campaign – the Stalingrad of the classical era. He was charged with religious transgressions, and fleeing prosecution he went over to the main enemy Sparta. Later he fell out of favor among the Spartans as well, probably because he seduced their Queen Timaea, King Agis' wife. He then found his way to the Ionian coast, where he became an advisor to the Persian satrap, another one of Athens' powerful enemies. In spite of all his transgressions he was given a hero's welcome when he later returned to his native city, and the Athenians appointed him the "leader of all, with absolute authority." These are just some of the extraordinary events of one of antiquity's most remarkable lives.

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