



# Alcibiades

*P J Rhodes*

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## **Alcibiades** P J Rhodes

Alcibiades is one of the most famous (or infamous) characters of Classical Greece. A young Athenian aristocrat, he came to prominence during the Peloponnesian War (429-404 BC) between Sparta and Athens. Flamboyant, charismatic (and wealthy), this close associate of Socrates persuaded the Athenians to attempt to stand up to the Spartans on land as part of an alliance he was instrumental in bringing together. Although this led to defeat at the Battle of Mantinea in 418 BC, his prestige remained high. He was also a prime mover in Athens' next big strategic gambit, the Sicilian Expedition of 415 BC, for which he was elected as one of the leaders. Shortly after arrival in Sicily, however, he was recalled to face charges of sacrilege allegedly committed during his pre-expedition reveling. Jumping ship on the return journey, he defected to the Spartans.

Alcibiades soon ingratiated himself with the Spartans, encouraging them to aid the Sicilians (ultimately resulting in the utter destruction of the Athenian expedition) and to keep year-round pressure on the Athenians. He then seems to have overstepped the bounds of hospitality by sleeping with the Spartan queen and was soon on the run again. He then played a devious and dangerous game of shifting loyalties between Sparta, Athens and Persia. He had a hand in engineering the overthrow of democracy at Athens in favor of an oligarchy, which allowed him to return from exile, though he then opposed the increasingly-extreme excesses of that regime. For a time he looked to have restored Athens' fortunes in the war, but went into exile again after being held responsible for the defeat of one of his subordinates in a naval battle. This time he took refuge with the Persians, but as they were now allied to the Spartans, the cuckolded King Agis of Sparta was able to arrange his assassination by Persian agents.

There has been no full length biography of this colorful and important character for twenty years. Professor Rhodes brings the authority of an internationally recognized expert in the field, ensuring that this will be a truly significant addition to the literature on Classical Greece.

## REVIEWS

“...this treatment of Alcibiades by P. J. Rhodes, one of the most outstanding Greek historians of our time, is successful in bringing one of the most interesting and controversial characters to a wider audience in an intelligent manner that should also prove valuable as a classroom text... with a masterful control of literary and epigraphic sources, he places Alcibiades in his proper context as an ultimately disastrous figure who was, however, profoundly successful in convincing his contemporaries?and posterity as a result?of his importance. This book is particularly useful not only to the general reader, but as a classroom text for upper-level courses. I should add that it also provides an outstanding summary of fifth-century political and military history; the necessarily close coverage of the period from 412-406 BC, which is fraught with controversy, is especially good.”

Bryn Mawr Classical Review

“...quite informative...a clear and multifaceted portrait of Alcibiades that should be informative and useful for newcomer and veteran reader alike. The book has a distinct academic edge and clearly does it best to strive for scientific objectivity, but it never goes so far as to become a dry read...”

Ancient Warfare, VI Issue 3

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