Plotting Alcibiades' Downfall
Plutarch's Use of his Historical Sources in Alc. 35.1-36.5
by
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Abstract

Plutarch's account of the first stage of Alcibiades' final downfall (Alc. 35.1-36.5) is especially suitable for a study of the biographer's use of his historical sources because we can compare it not only with Xenophon's Historia Graeca and several texts that are directly related to Theopompus' Hellenica and/or Ephorus' Historiae (viz. Hellenica Oxyrhynchia; Diodorus Siculus; Cornelius Nepos' Alcibiades), but also with Lys. 5.1-4. By means of both kinds of comparisons, I try to demonstrate that Plutarch has carefully constructed his story so that Alc. 35.1-36.5 would constitute a coherent whole and Alcibiades' downfall would appear tragic.

1. Introduction

Plutarch's account of the first stage of Alcibiades' final downfall (Alc. 35.1-36.5) is especially suitable for a study of the biographer's use of his historical sources because we can compare it not only with Xenophon's Historia Graeca and several texts that are directly related to Theopompus' Hellenica and/or Ephorus' Historiae (viz. Hellenica Oxyrhynchia; Diodorus Siculus; Cornelius Nepos' Alcibiades), but also with Lys. 5.1-4. By means of both kinds of comparisons, I will try to demonstrate that

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1 This is a revised version of the paper I gave in the “Plutarch and History” panel of the 134th annual meeting of the American Philological Association (New Orleans, January 2003). I would like to thank Prof. Dr. H. Martin Jr., Prof. Dr. Ph. A. Stadter, and all other participants in the discussion for their valuable comments.

2 Theopompus, Ephorus and Xenophon are mentioned together in Alc. 32.2 and seem to have been Plutarch's main sources for Alc. 27-39; cf. Pelling, 1996, pp. xxxix-xl. I subscribe to the view that Ephorus drew upon the Hellenica Oxyrhynchia (cf. e.g. Bruce, 1967, p. 21; McKechnie & Kern, 1988, p. 8) and constituted the principal source for the history of the Greek homeland in books 11-15 of Diodorus' Bibliotheca historica (cf. e.g. Andrewes, 1985, p. 189; Sacks, 1990, p. 13; Stylianou, 1998, pp. 49-50). Cornelius Nepos names Theopompus as one of his sources for his Life of Alcibiades (Alc. 11.1-2) and probably used Ephorus as well, like he did in several other Lives (see Bradley, 1991; Geiger, 1985, p. 56 n. 93).