

Russell's Anthology of Greek Prose

Text 66: Alcibiades at Sparta (Plutarch)

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a) Source:

Alcibiades 23. 3-9.

b) Background (synopsis quoted from Russell's book):

"Alcibiades, condemned at Athens, has been welcomed at Sparta and accepted as an adviser in the conduct of the war. Plutarch interrupts his narrative to describe his "chameleon-like" behaviour wherever he went. It seems to be a traditional characterization of Alcibiades."

c) Language comment:

Very unusual vocabulary in lines 2-6, relating to types of food and of clothes. Lines 22-25 offer the quotation of some then well-known sentences; the sentences are in fact very simple, but what they mean here, because of the context, may offer some difficulty.

d) Content:

Plutarch describes here the different attitudes that Alcibiades could adopt, always in order to please the leaders of whichever land he happened to be in at that moment. Suddenly, Plutarch explains the affair that Alcibiades had with the wife of the Spartan king and how he even boasted about it, instead of dissimulating for fear of punishment.

It must be noted that, in the Vitae, Plutarch parallels Alcibiades with Coriolanus - both are "mixed" characters.

e) Distribution of content:

(numbers refer to the lines in the printed edition)

1-6:	Astonishment of the people.
7-11:	His greatest quality: adaptability.
11-17:	Different roles performed.
17-21:	Why he did this.
21-25:	His "epithets".
26-32:	Affair with the king's wife.
32-34:	Alcibiades boasts.
34-40:	The king rejects his son.

f) Notes for help:

1) note sense pauses after two parallel participial clauses (ending with antithetical *δημοσίᾳ* and *ιδίᾳ*).

2) *τῇ διαίτῃ* = "with respect to his way of life".

3-4) result clause *ὥστε* + acc. and inf.

ὀρῶντας note subject understood from previous *τοὺς πολλούς*; and *ὀρῶντας* followed by accusative and pple.

3) *ἐν χρῶ̃ κουριῶντα*: not "close shaven" (Russell), but "in need of a close shave" (*ἐν χρῶ̃* by itself means "close to the skin"). Theoretically, *κουριᾶω* means "to have the hair too long", but of course here it means the opposite. observe that this *ὥστε* will be followed by infinitives, so meaning only a possibility.

4) *συνόντα* = "living with" + dative.

4) *ζωμῶ̃*: "broth", not "bread" (Russell).

5) ind. question, reflecting past tense of direct question: what makes them surprised is that he did ever have his own chef etc.

5) *ἔσχεν*: aor. indic. *ἔχω*.

6) *προσέβλεψε*: aor. indic. *προσβλέπω*.

6) *ἀνέχω* = "to stand, resist" (here).

6) *ἠνέσχετο*: aor. indic. *ἀνέχομαι* (note augmentation both of prefix and of main stem)

with this verb).

6) *θιγεῖν*: aor. infin. *θιγγάνω*, 'touch'.

6) *χλανίδος*: gen. after verbs of touching, hitting etc.: Goodwin 1099.

7) *δεινότης*: remember that *δεινός* means "skillful".

7) *αὕτη* as often, looks ahead - explained by the infinitives in 8: "this was the unique skill among the many he had and his strategem for the hunting (*θήρας* is gen. sing.) of men, that he . . ."

9-10) *τρεπομένῳ* (goes with the former *αὐτῷ*) *τροπάς*: cognate acc. (see Goodwin 1051 [typo. in Russell] on cognate acc.). Then *τοῦ χαμαιλέοντος* gen. of comparison. "making quicker changes than a chameleon."

11) *ἐξαδυνατέω* = "to find yourself with your forces finished".

12) *διά* + gen. = through (Goodwin 1206, 1), tr. here = "in good and bad conditions", cf. e.g. *διὰ φιλίας ἰέναι*, to be on terms of friendship.

13) *ἀνεπιτήδευτον* = "impossible to be tried".

16) *ὄγκος*: it means usually "amplitude, bulk", but here it's taken in the sense of "majesty".

17) *οὐχ αὐτὸν ἐξιστάς* (pres. act. pple. *ἐξίστημι*, transitive). . . : "not dislodging himself all that easily from one character into another".

17) observe that participle from *ἐξίστημι*, in the sense of "take away"; of course, the direct object is the reflexive pronoun just before it.

18) *ἐξ ἑτέρου*: sc. *τρόπου*.

19) *ἔμελλε* with pres. rather than fut. infin., as sometimes.

19) *ὅτι*: causal.

20) *τὸ πρόσφορον ἐκεῖνοις σχῆμα*: "the style suited to them" (*ἐκεῖνοις*, dat. after *πρόσφορον*, picks up "those who met him", *τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας*).

21) *γοῦν*: "at least then"; often little different from *γε*, often as here introducing an example; its negative is *οὐκ οὐν* ... *γε*. See Denniston 448 ff.

22) *ἦν* = *ἐξῆν*.

22) *ἦν*: "it was possible." The quotation is anon. from tragedy.

23) *Lycurgus*: the founding law-giver of Sparta.

23-24) all of these datives go together, and here the dative means "in respect to", a meaning for which we would rather have expected an accusative.

23-4) hyperbaton: emphatic pulling forward of *τοῖς ἀληθινοῖς* away from its nouns

πάθεσι καὶ πράγμασι, for initial position to contrast πρὸς τὰ ἔξωθεν in 22. The datives are after the ἐπι- compound verb.

24) ἄν + aor. indic.: "one might have commented on ...". Quot. = Eur. Or. 129 (Electra of Helen).

24) the meaning of ἐπιφωνέω is "to dedicate, consecrate"; this use here as "to add" is unusual.

27) ὅσπερ: here it is really a fact, it did happen, and we find an infinitive (two, in fact), as being a possibility, maybe because Plutarch wants to show the possibilities of Alcibiades rather than the result.

27-8) ὅσπερ + inf. result clauses (negat. μή), with change of subject in the second: "so that she . . ., and her male child when she gave birth was called L."

28) τεκούσης (gen. fem. aor. ppl. τίκτω): gen. absol., or else genitive with παιδίον ('the child of her having given birth . . .').

29) this neuter article goes with ὄνομα next line.

29-30) τὸ ... ὄνομα: word-order to emphasise ἔντος (initial emphatic position, balancing ἔξω μὲν): "but indoors his name as it was whispered was Alcibiades".

31) note asyndeton in summarizing gnomic comment.

32) observe that the verb λέγω may have also a construction of infinitive, not only ὅτι.

34) βασιλεύσωσιν: subjunctive, it could have been oblique optative, as the introductory verb is secondary.

34-5) ὅπως + subj.: purpose clause, in vivid sequence in indirect speech after past verb (ἔλεγε).

35) the subject of the verb ἐπίστευσε is Agis.

36) Note ὅτε, temporal "when". TEXT: should be ὅτι.

36) σεισμοῦ γενομένου: genitive absolute.

37) παρά w. gen., 'away from' (a person).

37) δέκα μηνῶν: "within ten months", gen. of time within which, instead of the expectable accusative of time "during which". Goodwin 1136.

38) μεθ' οὓς closely with γεγόμενον: lit. "after which (months) being born"; tr. "and since L. was born after those months he declared that L. had not been born from him".

38-9) ἀπέφησεν (aor. indic. ἀπόφημι) ... μὴ γεγονέναι: "he denied he had

been born". See Goodwin 1615: negative verbs taking the infinitive may add μή to the infinitive.

39) ἐξέπεσεν: aor. indic. ἐκπίπτω, w. gen., lit. 'fell out from' the kingship.
