

75 AD

THE COMPARISON OF LUCULLUS WITH CIMON

Plutarch

translated by John Dryden

Plutarch (46-120) - Greek biographer, historian, and philosopher, sometimes known as the encyclopaedist of antiquity. He is most renowned for his series of character studies, arranged mostly in pairs, known as "Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans" or "Parallel Lives." Lucullus and Cimon Compared (75 AD) - Compares and contrasts the lives of Lucullus, a Roman general, and Cimon, a Greek general.

COMPARISON OF LUCULLUS WITH CIMON

ONE might bless the end of Lucullus, which was so timed as to let him die before the great revolution, which fate, by intestine wars, was already effecting against the established government, and to close his life in a free though troubled commonwealth. And in this, above all other things, Cimon and he are alike. For he died also when Greece was as yet undisordered, in its highest felicity; though in the field at the head of his army, not recalled, nor out of his mind, nor sullyng the glory of his wars, engagements, and conquests, by making feastings and debauches seem the apparent end and aim of them all; as Plato says scornfully of Orpheus, that he makes an eternal debauch hereafter the reward of those who lived well here. Indeed, ease and quiet, and the study of pleasant and speculative learning, to an old man retiring from command and office, is a most suitable and becoming solace; but to misguide virtuous actions to pleasure as their utmost end, and as the conclusion of campaigns and commands, to keep the feast of Venus, did not become the noble Academy, and the follower of Xenocrates, but rather one that inclined to Epicurus. And this is one surprising point of contrast between them; Cimon's youth was ill reputed and intemperate, Lucullus's well disciplined and sober. Undoubtedly we must give the preference to the change for good, for it argues the better nature, where vice declines and virtue grows. Both had great wealth, but employed it in different ways; and there is no comparison between the south wall of the acropolis built by Cimon, and the chambers and galleries, with their sea-views, built at Naples by Lucullus, out of the spoils of the barbarians. Neither can we compare Cimon's popular and liberal table with the sumptuous oriental one of Lucullus, the former receiving a great many guests every day at small cost, and the latter expensively spread for a few men of pleasure, unless you will say that different times made the alteration. For who can tell but that Cimon, if he had retired in his old age from business and war to quiet and solitude, might have lived a more luxurious and self-indulgent life, as he was fond of wine and company, and accused, as has been said, of laxity with women? The better pleasures gained in successful action and effort leave the baser appetites no time or place, and make active and heroic men forget them. Had but Lucullus ended his days in the field, and in command, envy and detraction itself could never have accused him. So much for their manner of life.

In war, it is plain they were both soldiers of excellent conduct, both at land and sea. But as in the games they honour those champions who on the same day gain the garland, both in wrestling and in the pancratium, with the name of "Victors and more," so Cimon, honouring Greece with a sea and land victory on the same day, may claim a certain pre-eminence among commanders. Lucullus received command from his country, whereas Cimon brought it to his. He annexed the territories of enemies to her, who ruled over confederates before, but Cimon made his country, which when he began was a mere follower of others, both rule over confederates, and conquer enemies too, forcing the Persians to relinquish the sea, and inducing the Lacedaemonians to surrender their command. If it be the chiefest thing in a general to obtain the obedience of his soldiers by goodwill, Lucullus was despised by his own army, but Cimon highly prized even by others. His soldiers deserted the one, the confederates came over to the other. Lucullus came home without the forces which he led out; Cimon, sent out at first to serve as one confederate among others, returned home with authority even over these also, having successfully effected for his city three most difficult services, establishing peace with the enemy, dominion over confederates, and concord with Lacedaemon. Both aiming to destroy great kingdoms, and subdue all Asia, failed in their enterprise, Cimon by a simple piece of ill-fortune, for he died when general, in the height of success; but Lucullus no man can wholly acquit of being in fault with his soldiers, whether it were he did not know, or would not comply with, the distastes and complaints of his army, which brought him at last into such extreme unpopularity among them. But did not Cimon also suffer like him in this? For the citizens arraigned him, and did not leave off till they had banished him, that, as Plato says, they might not hear him for the space of ten years.

For high and noble minds seldom please the vulgar, or are acceptable to them; for the force they use to straighten their distorted actions gives the same pain as surgeons' bandages do in bringing dislocated bones to their natural position. Both of them, perhaps, come off pretty much with an equal acquittal on this count.

Lucullus very much outwent him in war, being the first Roman who carried an army over Taurus, passed the Tigris, took and burned the royal palaces of Asia in the sight of the kings, Tigranocerta, Cabira, Sinope, and Nisibis, seizing and overwhelming the northern parts as far as the Phasis, the east as far as Media, and making the South and Red Sea his own through the

kings of the Arabians. He shattered the power of the kings, and narrowly missed their persons, while like wild beasts they fled away into deserts and thick and impassable woods. In demonstration of this superiority, we see that the Persians, as if no great harm had befallen them under Cimon, soon after appeared in arms against the Greeks, and overcame and destroyed their numerous forces in Egypt. But after Lucullus, Tigranes and Mithridates were able to do nothing; the latter, being disabled and broken in the former wars, never dared to show his army to Pompey outside the camp, but fled away to Bosphorus, and there died. Tigranes threw himself, naked and unarmed, down before Pompey, and taking his crown from his head laid it at his feet, complimenting Pompey with what was not his own, but, in real truth, the conquest already effected by Lucullus. And when he received the ensigns of majesty again, he was well pleased, evidently because he had forfeited them before.

And the commander, as the wrestler, is to be accounted to have done most who leaves an adversary almost conquered for his successor. Cimon moreover, when he took the command, found the power of the king broken, and the spirits of the Persians humbled by their great defeats and incessant routs under Themistocles, Pausanias, and Leontychides, and thus easily overcame the bodies of men whose souls were quelled and defeated beforehand. But Tigranes had never yet in many combats been beaten, and was flushed with success when he engaged with Lucullus. There is no comparison between the numbers which came against Lucullus and those subdued by Cimon. All which things being rightly considered, it is a hard matter to give judgment. For supernatural favour also appears to have attended both of them, directing the one what to do, the other what to avoid, and thus they have, both of them, so to say, the vote of the gods, to declare them noble and divine characters.

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