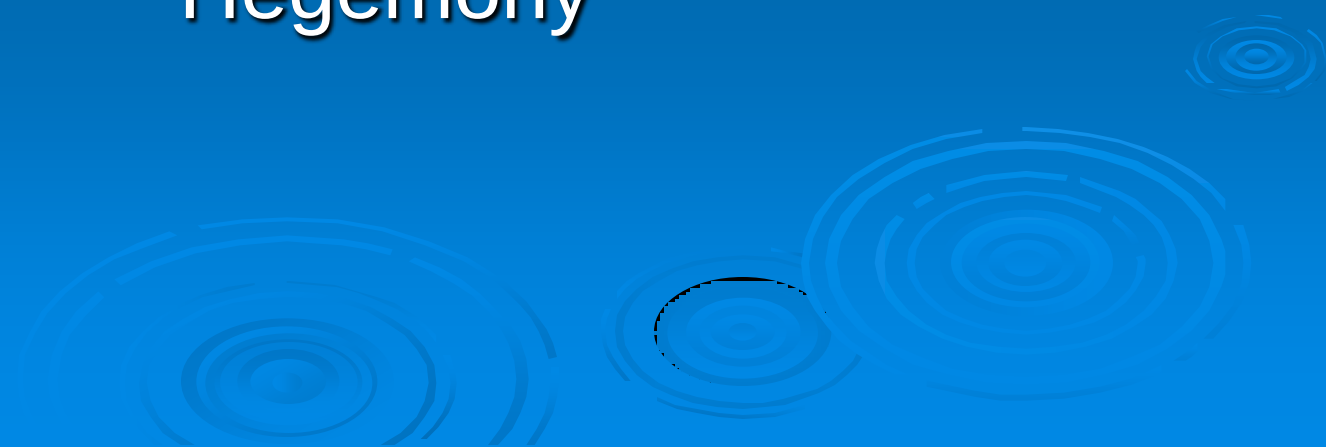


CLAH4005

Lecture 14: The Theban Hegemony



Thebes

- Thebes was one of the poleis of Boiotia.
- When Boiotia exists under a federal constitution, Thebes is its leader.



A Permanent Solution to Theban Ambition

- Thebes had the potential to be a great power in the Greek world.
- Her potential came from the power that dominion over Boiotia afforded her.
- With the autonomy clause, any chance of Boiotia uniting under Thebes was crushed.

Federalism

- Federal states are organizations in which the separate poleis of a geographical and ethnic region were combined to form a single entity at any rate for purposes of foreign policy, while for local purposes retaining their separate identity as city states and their separate citizenship.

Sparta's Fear of Federalism

- Sparta was powerful because it was big and had a large population.
- A large population meant a large army.
- A union of poleis under a federal constitution meant that Sparta's advantage over her enemies was lost.

The Kadmeia Affair

- When Phoebidas heard this, he was filled with bouyant hopes; for he was a man with a far greater passion for performing some brilliant achievement than for life itself, although, on the other hand, he was not regarded as one who weighed his acts or had much practical wisdom. And when he had agreed to the plan, Leontiades directed him to set out on his way, prepared as he was to depart from Thebes. “And when the proper time arrives,” said Leontiades, “I will return to you and act as your guide myself.” [29] Accordingly, while the senate was in session in the portico in the market-place, for the reason that the women were celebrating the festival of the Thesmophoria in the Cadmea, and while, inasmuch as it was summer and midday, the streets were entirely deserted, at this time Leontiades rode out on horseback to overtake Phoebidas, turned him back, and led him straight to the Acropolis. And after establishing Phoebidas there with the troops under his command, giving him the key to the gates, and telling him to let no one into the Acropolis unless he himself so ordered, he proceeded at once to the meeting of the senate. Xenophon *Hellenika* 5.2.28-9

A violation of the Peace

- The Spartan capture of the Kadmeia was a clear violation of the King's Peace.
- Sparta was too powerful, however, for anyone to militarily object.
- It did create great disaffection with Sparta in the Greek world.

Unrepentant Sparta

- When these things had been accomplished, they chose another polemarch in place of Ismenias, but Leontiades proceeded at once to Lacedaemon. There he found the ephors and the majority of the citizens angry with Phoebidas because he had acted in this matter without authorization by the state. Agesilaus, however, said that if what he had done was harmful to Lacedaemon, he deserved to be punished, but if advantageous, it was a time-honoured custom that a commander, in such cases, had the right to act on his own initiative. “It is precisely this point, therefore,” he said, “which should be considered, whether what has been done is good or bad for the state.” Xenophon *Hellenika* 5.2.32

The Height of Spartan Power

- As a result the Lacedaemonians at this particular juncture reached their greatest power and won the overlordship of Greece on both land and sea. [4] For the Thebans were secured by a garrison; the Corinthians and the Argives were safely humbled as a result of the previous wars; the Athenians, because of their policy of occupying with colonists the lands of those whom they subdued, had a bad reputation with the Greeks; the Lacedaemonians, however, had given their constant attention to securing a large population and practice in the use of arms, and so were become an object of terror to all because of the strength of their following. [5] Consequently the greatest rulers of that time, the Persian King and Dionysius the tyrant of Sicily, paid court to the Spartan overlordship and sought alliance with them. Diodoros 15.23.3-5

Reaction to Sparta

- The reactions to the capture of the Kadmeia were not immediate but they were very powerful.
- The Athenians set up the Second Athenian League against Sparta.
- The Thebans decided upon an attacking pattern of conduct.

The Second Athenian League

- When Calleas was archon at Athens, the Romans elected as military tribunes with consular power four men, Lucius Papirius, Marcus Publius, Titus Cornelius, and Quintus Lucius. During their term of office, following the failure of the Lacedaemonians at Thebes, the Boeotians, uniting boldly, formed an alliance and gathered a considerable army, expecting that the Lacedaemonians would arrive in Boeotia in great strength. [2] The Athenians sent their most respected citizens as ambassadors to the cities which were subject to the Lacedaemonians, urging them to adhere to the common cause of liberty. For the Lacedaemonians, relying on the size of the force at their disposal, ruled their subject peoples inconsiderately and severely, and consequently many of those who belonged to the Spartan sphere of influence fell away to the Athenians. [3] The first to respond to the plea to secede were the peoples of Chios and Byzantium; they were followed by the peoples of Rhodes and Mytilene and certain others of the islanders; and as the movement steadily gathered force throughout Greece, many cities attached themselves to the Athenians. Diodoros 15.28.1-3

The allies and Athens

- The Second Athenian League was a successor to the 5th century Athenian empire.
- However, this time the original agreements of the league were drafted so that Athens would not be able to exhibit the rabid imperialism of the 5th century.

The Liberation of the Kadmeia

- Having first slain in their own houses those who favoured the Lacedaemonian cause, whom they surprised while still asleep, they next rallied the citizens to the cause of freedom and obtained the co-operation of all the Thebans. When the populace had quickly assembled under arms, at daybreak they attempted to assault the Cadmeia. [3] The Lacedaemonians who formed the garrison of the citadel, numbering with their allies not less than fifteen hundred, sent men to Sparta to announce the insurrection of the Thebans and to urge them to send help as soon as possible. Favoured by their position, they slew many of the attackers and wounded severely no small number. Diodoros 15.25

Thebes on the rise

- Throughout the 370s, the Spartans continued to invade Boiotia.
- The Thebans on the other hand started creating a professional army able to withstand and defeat the Spartans.



The march to Leuktra

- The Lacedaemonian assembly, however, upon hearing these words, came to the conclusion that he was talking nonsense; for at this moment, as it seems, Fate was leading them on; and they sent orders to Cleombrotus not to disband his army, but to lead it at once against the Thebans if they did not leave the cities independent. When, therefore, he learned that, so far from leaving the cities independent, the Thebans were not even disbanding their army, in order that they might marshal themselves against him, under these circumstances he undertook to lead his troops into Boeotia. Now Cleombrotus did not enter Boeotia from Phocis at the point where the Thebans expected him to enter and where they were keeping guard at a narrow pass; but proceeding by way of Thisbae along a mountainous and unexpected route, he arrived at Creusis, captured its wall, and took twelve triremes belonging to the Thebans. [4] After accomplishing this exploit and marching up from the sea-coast, he encamped at Leuctra, in the territory of Thespieae. Xenophon *Hellenika* 6.4.3-5

Defeat for Sparta

- Now when Cleombrotus began to lead his army against the enemy, in the first place, before the troops under him so much as perceived that he was advancing, the horsemen had already joined battle and those of the Lacedaemonians had speedily been worsted; then in their flight they had fallen foul of their own hoplites, and, besides, the companies of the Thebans were now charging upon them. Nevertheless, the fact that Cleombrotus and his men were at first victorious in the battle may be known from this clear indication: they would not have been able to take him up and carry him off still living, had not those who were fighting in front of him been holding the advantage at that time. [14] But when Deinon, the polemarch, Sphodrias, one of the king's tent-companions, and Cleonymus, ⁷ the son of Sphodrias, had been killed, then the royal bodyguard, the so-called aides of the polemarch, and the others fell back under the pressure of the Theban mass, while those who were on the left wing of the Lacedaemonians, when they saw that the right wing was being pushed back, gave way. Yet despite the fact that many had fallen and that they were defeated, after they had crossed the trench which chanced to be in front of their camp they grounded their arms at the spot from which they had set forth. The camp, to be sure, was not on ground which was altogether level, but rather on the slope of a hill. After the disaster some of the Lacedaemonians, thinking it unendurable, said that they ought to prevent the enemy from setting up their trophy and to try to recover the bodies of the dead, not by means of a truce, but by fighting. [15] The polemarchs, however, seeing that of the whole number of the Lacedaemonians almost a thousand had been killed; seeing, further, that among the Spartiatae themselves, of whom there were some seven hundred there, about four hundred had fallen; and perceiving that the allies were one and all without heart for fighting, while some of them were not even displeased at what had taken place, gathered together the most important personages and deliberated about what they should do. And as all thought it best to recover the bodies of the dead by a truce, they finally sent a herald to ask for a truce. After this, then, the Thebans set up a

The Theban revenge

- Now Epameinondas, whose nature it was to aim at great enterprises and to crave everlasting fame, counselled the Arcadians and his other allies to resettle Messene, which for many years had remained stripped of its inhabitants by the Lacedaemonians, for it occupied a position well suited for operations against Sparta. When they all concurred, he sought out the remnants of the Messenians, and registering as citizens any others who so wished he founded Messene again, making it a populous city. Among them he divided the land, and reconstructing its buildings restored a notable Greek city and gained the widespread approbation of all men.
Diodoros 15.66.1

The Spartan Decline

- The battle of Leuktra was the end of Spartan imperial ambition.
- After Leuktra, Sparta becomes a third-rate power in the Greek world.



Why did Sparta decline?

- There are many potential reasons why Sparta declined so quickly between the seizure of the Kadmeia and Leuktra.
- It had population problems, since the inheritance system was such that if a citizen fell under a certain property threshold, he lost his citizenship.
- For more than 2 centuries, Sparta had the only professional army in the Greek world, which gave it an advantage over any other polis. The Theban Sacred Band showed that any other polis could also build a professional army.

The Loss of Messenia

- Sparta was politically and economically dependent upon the helots.
- The helots were an un-free, serf-like population that were the main source of income for the Spartan polis and the Spartan citizens.
- Most of the helots were Messenians.
- With the liberation of Messenia, Sparta lost its economic basis and could no longer field a large army.

Thebes as imperial power

- Thebes was now ascendant in the Greek world.
- However, unlike Athens and Sparta, it did not have the ideological clout to expect loyalty from its allies.



Questions?



Follow-Up Reading

- P. Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History* (London, 2002), pp. 263-72.