immediate neighbours such as Mantinea, but to go north again: in 383 she attacked Olynthus, in the Chalcidice. But en route for the north the Spartan commander Phoebidas was invited into Thebes by a pro-Spartan faction, and seized the Theban citadel, the Cadmeia. This blatant aggression was viewed by the pious Xenophon, for all his Spartan sympathies, as a piece of divinely sent madness, and certainly it created a mood of violent antipathy to Sparta in the Greek world at large, so that when some Theban exiles liberated their city in 379 they were able to call in help from Athens. Capitalizing on the anti-Spartan atmosphere, and perhaps fearful of Spartan reprisals for their part in the recent events at Thebes, the Athenians now (378) gathered together an alliance, the second Athenian Naval Confederacy, with Thebes as the most noteworthy ally. As we have already remarked, the new alliance was careful to abjure the most hated of the fifth-century imperial practices (tribute, garrisons, cleruchies); even so there was no immediate rush to join. Only when the new confederacy showed its effectiveness in practice by a naval defeat of Sparta off Naxos in the Aegean (376) did adherents flock in. Athens' new position was recognized in a renewal of the King's Peace in 375. The Athenian eagle had taken wing again, though it was altogether a less plump and formidable bird. Despite the promises of 377 (above, p. 152), the energetic naval campaigning of the decade had to be paid for, and by 373 we hear for the first time of financial 'contributions' — the old fifth-century tribute under another name. And in the same year there is evidence of the first Athenian garrison, on the island of Cephallenia off the west of Greece.

Not only did Athens begin thus early to break her negative pledges; more important, the ideological justification of the new league — originally, a democratic freedom-fight against Sparta, with Athens and Thebes as joint leaders — was called into question by Thebes' own behaviour in the 370s. Soon after the liberation of the Cadmeia Thebes reclaimed her position within Boeotia, reviving the Boeotian League under Theban leadership. The recalcitrants among the smaller Boeotian cities were bullied and some even destroyed. At next-door Athens all this was watched with alarm. When at the battle of Leuctra in 371 the Thebans confronted Sparta and — to the amazement of Greek opinion, accustomed for generations to the idea of Spartan invincibility—defeated her, Athens received the herald who announced the Theban victory with arctic incivility, and henceforth moved closer to Sparta diplomatically, a shift which dismayed the other allies of Athens. The decade of Theban hegemony had begun.

Leuctra was a defeat for Sparta, but its most important consequence for her was the Theban refoundation of Messenia as an independent state after many centuries of helotage (369). Sparta now, deprived of the economic means to pursue the old ἀγορὰ on which her supremacy had rested, and which required the leisure which only massive dependent labour could bring, sank to second-class rank among the Greek powers.

This allowed Thebes and Athens to pursue their rivalry in the vacuum created by Sparta's disappearance. In Thessaly a third power whom we have already met, Jason of Pherae, destroyed the walls of Heraclea to prevent any enemy coming that way again. That was the end of Sparta's central-Greek ambitions. But Jason was assassinated, and Thessaly became once again, as the 360s opened, a passive object of the covetousness of others. Thessaly and Macedon, the latter at this time tormented by dynastic disputes, are the first main theatre of Theban activity in the 360s: it was the Theban Pelopidas who led this diplomatic and military penetration into Macedon and Thessaly. Here Theban interests clashed with Athenian, for one result of Leuctra was to reawaken serious hope at Athens for the recovery of Amphipolis and the Chersonese. All that either side was able to achieve in the north, however, was to prevent the other being successful without qualification, thus making easier the eventual task of Philip II of Macedon. Thebes did however gain one positive advantage; control via Thessalian votes of an outright majority on the Delphic amphictyony.

The second main area of Theban activity was the Peloponnese,
where Epaminondas, the victor of Leuctra, followed the re-foundation of Messenia with the creation of a new federal Arcadian state with a capital Megalopolis, the ‘Great City’. Such foundations, like the export of federalism to Aetolia and the creation of a new Boeotian federation (distinct from the Boeotian League—which continued in being—and modelled on the Second Athenian Confederacy), represent Thebes’ main legacy to Hellenistic Greece.

The third and final area of Theban expansion was by sea in the Aegean. Here again the enemy was Athens, who in 363 had overstepped herself in the eyes of her allies by sending a settlement to Samos, thus breaching another confederacy pledge. The breach was moral rather than formal since, first, Samos was not a confederacy member, and, second, the Athenian action was provoked by a Persian garrison, in violation of the King’s Peace, which had granted Asia (but not offshore islands like Samos) to Persia. The violation was flagrant, and Athens was entitled, in view of the strategic strength of Samos, to react as she did. But her action, the installation of the settlement, was deeply and (as pro-Samian inscriptions show) widely resented. This resentment enabled Thebes to seduce some of Athens’ most valuable allies out of the confederacy, notably Byzantium on the Hellespontine corn-route (also, temporarily, Rhodes). Epaminondas is in this respect the forerunner of Mausolus, the Persian satrap who further exploited allied grievances against Athens in the 350s, taking Rhodes and other places finally out of the Athenian camp in the Social War. This satrapal infiltration of the islands, which took an oligarchic form, starts as early as the 360s in some places (notably Cos). It did much to settle the ‘class struggle’ in the Aegean world between oligarch and democrat, tilting the balance against the democrats; but we should remember that it was Athenian selfishness—the pursuit of private goals like Amphipolis—which led democrats such as the Rhodians to prefer even Mausolus to their fellow democrats at Athens.

When the 360s ended, feeling against Athens was running strong inside her own confederacy, Thebes was generally un-loved, and Sparta broken. So when Philip II, whom a contemporary historian described with justification as ‘the greatest man Europe had ever produced’, succeeded to a debilitated Macedonian kingdom in 359, he was fortunate above all in the weakness of the states who should have been making it their business to confront him; otherwise that personal greatness would have remained merely potential. We can add that the Syracusan tyranny had ended after the second generation, true in this respect as in others to the pattern of the old archaic tyrannies of the Greek mainland; and that mid-fourth-century Sicily, anarchic and economically battered, was in no position to intervene against the new king in Macedon. A Corinthian called Timoleon was to restore and revive Sicily in the 340s, but it was not till the Hellenistic age had begun that a Sicilian ruler would again play a part in world politics. The problems of Athens, Sparta, and Thebes got worse in the course of the 350s: Athens’ confederacy, as we have seen, was torn apart in the Social War of 357–355; Sparta’s efforts to recover Messenia were futile, but consumed all her energies; Thebes picked a quarrel with neighbouring Phocis in the early 350s and induced her stooges on the Delphic amphictyony to declare Sacred War on Phocis. But the Phocians seized the Delphic temple treasures, hired mercenaries, and made such a good showing against Thebes that the war was ended in 346 only by Philip’s intervention. The importance of the Sacred War, in thus bringing Philip into the heart of Greece, can hardly be exaggerated. But, to return to the 350s, Philip had been taking advantage of the disunity and the private preoccupations of the Greek states to seize a string of northern places, including Amphipolis, and to acquire control of Thessaly with all its assets. Olynthus succumbed in 348, unaided by Athens, despite the oratory of her great patriot Demosthenes, who in the late 350s had been slow to identify Philip (rather than Persia or Sparta) as Athens’ real enemy, but rarely faltered after 349. By 346 Athens’ military struggle against Philip had achieved so little that formal diplomacy was substituted, the so-called Peace of Philocrates, whose most important single
clause from Athens’ point of view was her acquiescence in the loss of Amphipolis. From Philip’s point of view it may have mattered more that he had not only a peace but an alliance with Athens, since there is reason to think that he was already contemplating the war against Persia which his son Alexander the Great carried through: for that purpose he would need Athens’ navy or at least her neutrality. The peace of 346 was, however, impermanent, and it is a question whether it was Philip or the endlessly provocative Demosthenes who wished that it should be so. Philip used the later 340s to strengthen his hold over Thessaly and Thrace, and to install (or perhaps merely encourage) his partisans elsewhere, for instance on Euboea. By Demosthenes the interval was spent rallying Greek opinion against ‘the barbarian’, as he unjustly and inaccurately called the Macedonian (the near-Greekness of whose culture is now revealed in a clearer light by such archaeological finds as the painted frescoes at Vergina, uncovered in 1977). That Demosthenes’ propagandist and political efforts almost succeeded is shown by the closeness of Philip’s final victory on the field at Chaeronea (338). The result of Chaeronea was diplomacy of a new kind: a settlement (the ‘League of Corinth’, which had little to do with classical ideas of federalism), with a king as its centre, and relying for its maintenance on the goodwill of the possessing classes whom it entrenched in power. They were never, either under Macedon or Rome, to lose that position of power; the classical class struggle had been decided: democracy and Athens had lost, as a result of Athens’ own folly. Imperialism had after all proved incompatible with democracy.

Further Reading

The ancient sources for the period from the Persian to the Peloponnesian wars were collected in G. F. Hill, Sources for Greek History 478–431 B.C. (revised edn. Oxford, 1951 by R. Meiggs and A. Andrewes). The indexes are specially useful because they set out the ancient references under geographical and chronological headings. The fifth-century part of Fornara (above, p. 45) translates many of the items, literary and epigraphic, in Hill. The later part of the period is covered by P. Harding, From the end of the Peloponnesian War to the battle of Ipsus (Cambridge, 1985). There are good revised Penguin translations of Thucydides (revised by M. I. Finley) and Xenophon (revised by G. I. Cawkwell), The Persian Expedition and A History of My Times.

There are two recent histories of classical Greece: J. K. Davies, Democracy and Classical Greece (London, 1978), the subject-matter of which is broader than the title implies: this is a stimulating general history of the period; S. Hornblower, The Greek World, 479–323 B.C. (London, 1983), which gives fuller bibliographies than is possible in the present work.


On the Peloponnesian War, A. W. Gomme’s Historical Commentary on Thucydides, completed after Gomme’s death by A. Andrewes and K. J. Dover (Oxford, 5 vols. 1945–80) is fundamental. G. E. M. de Ste Croix, The Origins of the Peloponnesian War (London, 1972, paperback, 1982) is rich in discussions which go beyond the scope of the title; he returns to some relevant themes of classical Greek history in ch. 5 of his Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World (London, 1981, paperback, 1982). On the final phase of the war, D. M. Lewis, Sparta and Persia (1977) chs. 4 and 5 are crucial.

The fourth century has been worked on in more in articles than books until recently; but T. T. B. Ryder’s Koine Eiree (Oxford, 1965) is useful on the complicated diplomatic history (especially relations with Persia) in the period.

Philip II has been well served recently in monographs; the best is probably G. L. Cawkwell, *Philip of Macedon* (Faber, 1978); more detailed discussion of modern views in G. T. Griffith's contribution to N. G. L. Hammond and G. T. Griffith, *History of Macedonia ii* (Oxford, 1979).

Finally, a book which contains contributions of importance on several themes covered in this chapter: P. Garnsey and C. Whittaker, (edd.), *Imperialism in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, 1978); see especially Andrewes on Sparta, Finley on the fifth-century Athenian Empire (this is reprinted in his *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*; London, 1981; Pelican edn., 1983), and Griffith on the second Athenian League.

excerpted from:

*The Oxford History of Greece and the Hellenistic World* ed. by J. Boardman, J. Griffin, and O. Murray

Oxford University Press, 1986

copyright 1986, 1988