

THE THEBAN SUPREMACY IN FOURTH-CENTURY LITERATURE

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THE VICTORY of the Thebans over the Spartans at Leuctra in 371 must have been almost as sensational as the Athenian victory at Marathon, or that won by the allies at Salamis. Cicero said that the victorious general at Leuctra, Epaminondas, was on the lips of "all the Greeks but the Epicureans,"¹ but if that was so in Cicero's day it had not always been true. As far as we can judge today, Epaminondas (like his great colleague Pelopidas) was either ignored or neglected by most writers in the fourth century. Indeed, as I shall show, the opinions we find in the literature from the middle of the fourth century differ strikingly from those of later generations.

In the *Plataicus*, the *Archidamus*, and the *Philip* Isocrates finds occasion to broach the subject of Theban power. In the *Plataicus*, written before the battle of Leuctra (if our date for it is correct²), there is nothing but hatred for Thebes. The *Archidamus* usually avoids detailed reference to Boeotia in spite of the fact that the dramatic setting for the speech is the Theban supremacy of ca. 366. The Thebans are briefly dismissed as incapable of coping with their good fortune won at Leuctra.³ Twenty years later, in the letter to Philip, Isocrates again accuses them of being incapable of handling their advantage gained at Leuctra, and characterizes them as squabblers,

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¹*Fin.* 2. 21 (67); see also *Or.* 2. 341, *Inv.* 1. 33 (55), *Tusc.* 1. 46 (110), *Tusc.* 1. 49 (116).

²The *Plataicus* assumes the existence of the strong, aggressive Thebes of the late 370's, but knows nothing of the victory at Leuctra. Its date then would in all likelihood fall between 375 and 371. The date usually given (Munscher, "Isokrates," *RE* 9 [1916] 2198; Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* [New York 1966] 586) is 373. This is based on the assumption that the speech would have been delivered very shortly after the Theban destruction of Plataea in ca. 373; cf. F. Blass, *Die Attische Beredsamkeit* (Hildesheim 1962) 265-266; Ed. Meyer, *Geschichte des Altertums* 5 (Stuttgart 1958) 390, n. 1. There is a full discussion of the dating problem in W. Jaeger, *Demosthenes* (New York 1963) 199-203, who argues for 373. For criticisms of this proposal see G. Mathieu, *Isocrate* 2 (Paris 1938) 68-71. G. L. Cawkwell, "Notes on the Peace of 375/4," *Historia* 12 (1963) 84-95, presents a series of historical arguments in support of a date 373/372 for the destruction of Plataea. He assumes that "the *Plataicus* is to be regarded as a speech written soon after the seizure of Plataea" (85).

³*Isoc.* 6.60-61 (*Archidamus*).

overreaching meddlers, and inept in their handling of the Sacred War.⁴ This simple listing of events may be suggestive. There is no hint that Isocrates saw any break in Theban fortunes between 371 and the mid-340's. Later generations were to see an abrupt change in 362 with the stalemate at Mantinea.⁵ Isocrates' twice affirmed view that Thebes was overextending herself during her supremacy is echoed by Demosthenes,⁶ and Antisthenes said much the same thing in a slightly different way.⁷ Demosthenes also believed that the period of Theban power lasted from the time of Leuctra right through the Sacred War until at least the year 341.⁸ This idea is very difficult for us to accept if we expose ourselves only to post-fourth-century sources.⁹

Xenophon should be congratulated for seeing the significance of the stalemate at Mantinea in 362 (he made it the end of an era, as did other historians of this period after him,¹⁰ though we may wonder if his view would have changed had he lived longer). However, while it may come as no great surprise for us to learn that the fourth-century orators ignored Pelopidas and Epaminondas,¹¹ Xenophon's exclusion of these generals from the greater part of his *Hellenica* is most unexpected, especially in view of the praise he accords them when he does devote a few pages to one or two of their later exploits. For example, he describes Thebes' emancipation from Sparta, showing unusual interest in Theban internal affairs,¹² but the

⁴Isoc. 5. 50, 53-55 (Philip). For the date see F. Blass, *op. cit.* 314.

⁵Some study has already been done on Isocrates' view of the Theban hegemony. See A. D. Momigliano, "L'Egemonia tebana in Eforo e in Senofonte," *Atene e Roma* 37 (1935) 113-114. (This article is also to be found in his *Terzo Contributo* [Rome 1966] 347-365.)

⁶*De Cor.* 18.

⁷Plut. *Lyc.* 30. 6.

⁸*Third Philippic* 23.

⁹Some of the more important sources are: Nep. *Epam.*, *Pelop.*; Plut. *Pel.*, *Mor.* 192c-194c; Dio Chrys. 22. 2-3; Paus. 4. 26. 3-32. 6; 8. 8. 10-12. 1; 9. 12. 6-15. 6; Diod. 15. 50-89.

¹⁰Apparently the Boeotian historians Anaxis and Dionysodorus also stopped at 362 (*FGrH* 2. 68). Anaximenes ended his *Hellenica* at 362 (*FGrH* 2. 72, T 14), and covered later periods in other works. Ephorus must also have interrupted his account of Theban history here (he at least separated the Sacred War from the episode of the Theban Supremacy, apparently regarding it as quite a different story); see G. L. Barber, *The Historian Ephorus* (Cambridge 1935) 35, 171. Callisthenes was not much different. His *Hellenica* ended in 357, just before the start of the Sacred War (*FGrH* 2. 124, T 27). Of the treatment afforded Theban history by Zoilus of Amphipolis (*FGrH* 2. 71) nothing is known. The same must be said of Duris of Samos (*FGrH* 2. 76).

¹¹Epaminondas is mentioned only twice by a fourth-century orator, and Pelopidas but once. The first occasion for Epaminondas is 343 (Aeschines, *On the Embassy* 105); he is not mentioned again until ca. 324 (Dinarchus, *Against Demosthenes* 72-73), where both Pelopidas and Epaminondas are named.

¹²Xen. *Hell.* 5. 4. 1-19.

interest is momentary, and the action is never again seen from a Theban angle until near the end of his *Hellenica*, when Pelopidas and Epaminondas are at last named by him. He assumes the greatness of these two men without ever describing their most brilliant achievements. Pelopidas is lauded only for his diplomatic successes in the court of the Great King in 368/367, then he disappears from the *Hellenica* as mysteriously as he had entered,¹³ although many other outstanding feats are attributed to him by later sources. Similarly, most of the career of Epaminondas is ignored until suddenly he is praised for his fine generalship at Mantinea, his last moment of glory before his death.¹⁴

For the mid-fourth century, then, we may sum up the prevailing Athenian views on the Theban supremacy in the following way. There was virtually no interest in the great leaders, Pelopidas and Epaminondas. With the exception of Xenophon, no one saw the battle of Mantinea and the death of Epaminondas in 362 as a great turning point in Theban fortunes.¹⁵ Although the word *hybris* is not used to describe the actions of

¹³Xen. *Hell.* 7. 1. 33–40.

¹⁴Xen. *Hell.* 7. 5. 4–end (in only one other paragraph in the *Hellenica* do we find any mention at all of Epaminondas: 7. 1. 41–43). Xenophon's unpredictability in the *Hellenica*, particularly in his treatment of Thebes, has not escaped notice. K. J. Beloch, *Griechische Geschichte* 3. 1 (Berlin and Leipzig 1922) 401, doubts whether Xenophon intended his *Hellenica* to be published in its existing form. Momigliano, *art. cit.* 109–110, regards the conflicting tendencies of the work as the personal reaction of the historian to the turbulence and uncertainty of contemporary Hellenic affairs. On Xenophon's treatment of Epaminondas Max Treu ("Xenophon von Athen," *RE* 2. 9 [1967] 1697–1698) curtly remarks that at least Xenophon did justice to Epaminondas' military importance. The basic idea of Xenophon's ideal commander is developed by H. R. Breitenbach, *Historiographische Anschauungsformen Xenophons* (Freiburg 1950) 47–104, who argued that Xenophon saw Epaminondas as an ideal commander (89–91)—a view criticised by H. D. Westlake, "Individuals in Xenophon, *Hellenica*," *BRL* 49 (1966) 246–269. H. Montgomery, *Gedanke und Tat* (Stockholm 1965) 110–114, follows Breitenbach. The view of E. Delebecque, *Essai sur la vie de Xénophon* (Paris 1957) 441, is similar to that of Treu and Breitenbach. Delebecque feels that Xenophon was interested in Epaminondas' manoeuvrings at Mantinea because he saw in them the practical application of his ideals as expressed in *De Equitandi Ratione*.

¹⁵The conflict at Mantinea itself was not ignored by the Athenians at the time. They had Euphranor do a painting of one aspect of their contribution to the allied cause, and Gryllus, the son of Xenophon who died at Mantinea, became the subject of many encomia (D.L. 2. 55 = *Aristotelis Fragmenta Selecta*, ed. W. D. Ross [Oxford 1968] 7. 1). Pausanias (8. 11. 6) said that Gryllus slew Epaminondas, and that there was a painting of the battle by Euphranor in the Stoa Basileios at Athens, showing both Gryllus and Epaminondas. Nevertheless, in spite of Diogenes Laertius (2. 53 = Ephorus F85), it is clear that Gryllus died in a cavalry skirmish some time before the great battle, and Epaminondas was not present on that occasion (Xen. *Hell.* 7. 5. 14–17). If Euphranor did include Epaminondas in the painting, then he was not being historical. Two other descriptions of the picture do not imply that the Theban general was included (Plut. *Mor.* 346b–346e, Plin. *HN* 35. 129). Quite possibly Pausanias has been the victim of

Thebes after Leuctra, the idea that she was over-extending herself during her supremacy was a commonplace. This is, of course, a tacit criticism of the vigorous policies established by Epaminondas and Pelopidas. In view of the fact that the laudatory tradition appears late on the scene, these fourth-century reactions raise two important questions. Do the later laudatory traditions concerning Pelopidas and Epaminondas have a solid basis in fact; or should we adopt the more reserved position of Isocrates, Demosthenes, and Antisthenes? Did Thebes continue to be a major power after Epaminondas' death in 362?

Fortunately, we do possess some inscriptional proof of the prestige being won by the Theban heroes in central Greece while they were being ignored in Athens. The reaction of certain Thebans to the glory won by Epaminondas at the battle of Leuctra was captured in stone shortly after the event. The inscription survives.¹⁶ During the Sacred War, in the 350's and 340's, the Phocians plundered Delphi to raise money for mercenaries to fight against Thebes. Barbaric as their actions may seem, we can at least be thankful that they did not try to obliterate the great name of the Theban Pelopidas. From Delphi, we have an inscribed base of a statue of him done probably in his lifetime by Lysippus, and dedicated by some Thessalians, quite possibly in gratitude for his campaigns on their behalf against Alexander of Pherae.¹⁷ We must conclude, then, that very shortly after the actual events there existed glowing stories of Pelopidas and Epaminondas (whether literary or oral) waiting to enter Athenian literary traditions from central Greece. As to the importance of Thebes after Mantinea, we must not forget that Thebes dominated Boeotia and Boeotia dominated the Delphic amphictyony until the conclusion of the Sacred War;¹⁸ then for another eight years the Thebans seem to have retained some prestige until the disaster at Chaeronea in 338.

Can we determine at approximately what time the Attic writers "discovered" Thebes as the city once covered in glory and *genetrix* of two great heroes? By the mid-320's Dinarchus, a Corinthian metic at Athens, was able to speak glowingly of the Theban hegemony and name the leaders responsible:

what one might call "tourist-guide sensationalism." In later generations, any great picture of any fourth-century military action at Mantinea would not be respectable unless the tourists could be shown which was Epaminondas. As for the encomia mentioned by Aristotle, since Gryllus did not meet Epaminondas, it would not be reasonable for us to infer that the Theban general would necessarily have figured very largely in them.

¹⁶M. N. Tod, ed., *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions 2* (Oxford 1948) 92, inscr. 130 = *IG* 7. 2462.

¹⁷Jean Bousquet, "Inscriptions de Delphes," *BCH* 87 (1963) 207-208.

¹⁸Beloch, *loc. cit.* 246.

Look at Thebes. There was a city; there was a great one. What rulers and generals fell to her lot? All the elders present, from whom I have heard the story, would agree with me: once Pelopidas used to lead the Sacred Band and Epaminondas used to be general and the others with them, then it was that Thebes won at Leuctra, then did they invade Laconia, though it was considered inviolate, in those days they did many fair deeds, founding Messene after four hundred years, giving Arcadia autonomy. They were glorious in the eyes of all men.¹⁹

Here, for the first time, is a full statement of the later tradition. The heroic vein in which Pelopidas is described as leading the Sacred Band, and Epaminondas as winning at Leuctra and changing the map of the Peloponnese, is totally foreign to Xenophon, Isocrates, and the other orators, but characteristic of the later writers. Implied in the importance of Epaminondas is the usual, later assumption that Mantinea brought about the end of Thebes' glory (ὅτε ... Ἐπαμινώνδας ἐστρατήγει ...). For Dinarchus Thebes' greatness belonged to the time of Pelopidas and Epaminondas; which means that it ended in 362 at Mantinea, for Pelopidas had died in 364, and Epaminondas could "general" no more after that battle. All the achievements singled out by the orator—the resettlement of Messene, the freeing of Arcadia, the invasion of Laconia—belong to the period between 371 and 362. Dinarchus came from Corinth, where men would have had better chances to see Epaminondas in action than many Athenians. Perhaps, then, his ideas were influenced more by his own Corinthian friends and relatives than from conversations with Athenian citizens. Nevertheless, the very fact that Dinarchus felt he could argue as he did suggests that Athenian opinions on Thebes had warmed considerably. Many Athenians were now ready, it would seem, to accept the laudatory view of Thebes and her leaders during the 370's and 360's.

We must seek the reasons for this *volte-face* in Athenian views. First, however, before we can understand the change, we must try to understand the reasons for the apparent indifference of the earlier writers. Our most important clue comes from a remark in Demosthenes. In 354 Greece was seized with anti-Persian fever, and Demosthenes tried to treat the disease in his speech "On the Symmories." Inevitably, the Thebans, who had medized in 480, and had negotiated a new alliance with the Medes under Pelopidas in 368, had to be discussed as potential allies of the Great King in his expected return engagement with Hellas. Demosthenes surprises the assembly by doubting whether Thebes would betray the Greek cause in the event of a second Persian invasion, but he finds it necessary to preface his remarks with the words: "On account of the general hatred of them (the Thebans) you would not gladly listen to a single good word about them,

¹⁹Dinarchus, *Against Demosthenes* 72–73. There is a sketch of the Theban supremacy in Demades, *On the Twelve Years* 13, which also takes the laudatory position, but the date of this speech is not certainly known and it is probably not authentic (see Lesky, *op. cit.* 612).

even if it were true.”²⁰ The orator does not wish to have his speech interrupted by an uproar from the *demos*. Naturally, then, he will avoid so distasteful a subject as Thebes; and where the topic cannot be avoided it must be introduced gingerly, as we see Demosthenes doing above. Delicacy is the more necessary in this case, of course, because Demosthenes is actually going to suggest that Thebes would support the Greek cause. We need not look far to find the reasons for the Athenian dislike of the Thebans. If the Athenians had forgotten their grievances against Thebes in the Peloponnesian War,²¹ and even if their suspicions of potential medizing were no more than short-lived fancies, more recent and real grounds of complaint would include the detaching of Euboea from the Second Athenian Confederacy in 370 (it had only recently been won back), the destruction of Plataea by Thebes ca. 373, and the loss of Oropus to the Boeotians in 366. Isocrates probably reacted to these recent events in much the same way as any other Athenian. He, too, could not forget the medizing of the Thebans in the Persian War, because his own panhellenic propaganda would not let him.²² Xenophon’s lengthy silence has been partially explained above (n. 14), but these proposals overlook the importance of Agesilaus to the historian. It is rare that successful individuals receive Xenophon’s undivided attention for long, especially if they were unfortunate enough to achieve their success while Agesilaus was at the height of his powers.

After the fall of Olynthus in 348, Athens’ brief flirtation with Philip of Macedon was virtually over. Thebes, however, was to remain allied with Macedonia until 339, when the Thebans suddenly deserted Philip and joined the Hellenic alliance. The gallant performance of the Thebans at Chaeronea,²³ and the destruction of their city by Alexander in 335, will have done much for their reputation. After 335 the Athenians could look upon them not as potential enemies but rather as destroyed friends. In the mid-320’s Dinarchus could afford to be generous.

Other factors may either have contributed to, or be symptomatic of, this change in the views of many Athenians late in the fourth century. There were historical works on Thebes appearing at this time. We do not know exactly when Ephorus published his *Histories*, but it is usually thought to have been ca. 335–330.²⁴ Among the last books of this work there was a full account of the Theban supremacy.²⁵ According to a statement in Eusebius, Ephorus plagiarized from Daimachus, Callisthenes, and

²⁰14. 33–34.

²¹See, e.g., Thuc. 4. 133 (the treatment of Athens’ ally, Thespieae), 3. 68 (the massacre of the Plataeans).

²²Isoc. 14 (Plataicus) 26–30.

²³Plut. *Pel.* 18. 5.

²⁴Barber, *op. cit.* 11–13.

²⁵Ephorus FF 85, 119, 213–216, T 20 (with comment).

Anaximenes.²⁶ About Daimachus we know little or nothing. Jacoby's suggestion that he could have been the author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* fails to convince.²⁷ Anaximenes at least dealt with the battle of Mantinea and Epaminondas' death in his *Hellenica*. He probably had more to say about the Theban supremacy, but he must have been brief, for his was a study of all of ancient history down to 362 in only twelve books.²⁸ Callisthenes' *Hellenica* would have been more detailed. He devoted ten books to the thirty years between 387 and 357, and it is known that some important events in the epoch of Theban supremacy were fully described by him from a Boeotian angle.²⁹ Again we do not know the exact date for the publication of his *Hellenica*, but it was probably ca. 335, or perhaps earlier.³⁰ Ephorus himself devoted at least three books, and possibly as many as five, to the period of Theban power.³¹ And since Ephorus used Callisthenes, it is quite possible that he got his Boeotian point of view from him.³² It would seem, then, that of the historians the most important, and possibly the most influential on opinions concerning Thebes in the late fourth century, will have been Ephorus and Callisthenes.

It has been suggested that the Peripatetics took an interest in Epaminondas.³³ What effect did the Peripatos have on the development of the Theban traditions?³⁴ One brief but complimentary allusion to the Theban leadership can be found in Aristotle.³⁵ Among the fragments of the Peripatetics I find no mention of Pelopidas, but there are a few brief references to Epaminondas. Aristoxenus tells us that Orthagoras and Olympiodorus taught the great Theban to play the *aulos*, and that Lysis was his instructor in Pythagorean philosophy.³⁶ The first item quite probably comes from a treatise on music, and the second from a study of Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans. If that is so, it must be admitted that we have no good evi-

²⁶Ephorus T 17.

²⁷FGh *ad loc.*; see I. A. F. Bruce, *An Historical Commentary on the 'Hellenica Oxyrhynchia'* (Cambridge 1967) 25, n. 5.

²⁸Anaximenes 72 T 14 = D. S. 15.89.3. There is no reason to assume that Anaximenes would have written books of inordinate length.

²⁹Callisthenes T 27, FF 8, 9, 11, 18, 22, 23, 24, 26.

³⁰L. Pearson, *The Lost Histories of Alexander the Great* (APA Monographs 20 [1960]) 29-33.

³¹Barber, *op. cit.* 35-38.

³²See above, nn. 25, 26.

³³H. D. Westlake, "The Sources of Plutarch's Pelopidas," *CQ* 33 (1939) 10-11.

³⁴For a study of the Peripatos and its contribution to literature see Ed. Zeller, *Aristotle and the Earlier Peripatetics* (New York 1962). The fragments are collected and given a commentary by F. Wehrli, *Die Schule des Aristoteles* (Basel 1945-1959); for its contribution to biography see D. R. Stuart, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (New York 1928).

³⁵Arist. *Rh.* 1398b.

³⁶Wehrli, F96 = Ath. 4.184d; F38 = Iambl. *V.P.* 205.

dence that the Peripatos paid any more than passing attention to Epaminondas in the fourth century, for he seems only to have been used as an *exemplum* in support of two rather academic theses. In the third century Hieronymus of Rhodes attributed the formation of the Sacred Band to Epaminondas,³⁷ and Clearchus repeated a little scandal about him.³⁸ This is clear evidence that an interest was at last being taken in the man, his character, and his contribution to history; but we must not forget that the histories of Ephorus and Callisthenes, Aristotle's nephew, had been in circulation for some years before Hieronymus and Clearchus were writing.

When we study the period of Theban supremacy, then, we must recognize that we are dealing with a literary tradition that probably has its roots in the favourable atmosphere of the 330's and 320's in Greece. This means that we must be prepared to accept the possibility that many facts will have been presented in an excessively favourable light. It is very dangerous to assume that any material that we have on Thebes in her time of supremacy is purely contemporary. Ephorus and Callisthenes had lived through this period, it is true, but when they came to write about it, what did they use, if anything, to refresh their memories? The assumption that they might have had writings of Anaxis and Dionysodorus on which to draw³⁹ is groundless. If they used Anaximenes, they must have made substantial additions to his version, and we do not know what they would have found in Daimachus. P, the author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, probably did not cover the Theban supremacy.⁴⁰ There is, therefore, but slim hope of our ever being able to improve our understanding of the early Theban traditions without a more complete knowledge of the contents of Ephorus' and Callisthenes' histories than is presently available. However, the following observations can be made. When dealing with the Theban hegemony all writers in the mid-fourth century had adopted a Spartan or Athenian point of view. After the publication of Ephorus' *Histories* and Callisthenes' *Hellenica* a Boeotian point of view emerged and quickly triumphed. In the earlier view the period of Theban power extended from the battle of Leuctra until around the end of the Sacred War, but the later writers excluded from it the years of the Sacred War, apparently regarding the latter as an unrelated episode. This means that the later writers must have seen a sudden change in Theban fortunes some time before 357. Most probably this would have been the stalemate at Mantinea in 362, coupled with the death of Epaminondas only two years after the loss of Pelopidas in

³⁷Wehrli, F34 = Ath. 13.602a.

³⁸Wehrli, F31 = Ath. 13.590c.

³⁹There is simply not enough evidence to establish a date for their work. So we cannot seriously treat them as Callisthenes' possible sources, as does F. Carrata Thomes, *Egemonia Beotica e potenza marittima nella politica di Epaminonida* (Turin 1952) 11, n. 25.

⁴⁰I. A. F. Bruce, *op. cit.* 4-5.

364. A corollary suggests itself immediately. We noted that the laudatory tradition of Epaminondas, and the lesser one concerning Pelopidas, could be traced back to about the time of the appearance of Callisthenes' *Hellenica* and Ephorus' *Histories*, but no earlier. So, in view of the probability that the two historians saw a reversal in Theban fortunes after Pelopidas and Epaminondas had died, it appears likely that they explained Thebes' success in terms of the brilliance of these generals—a very abrupt change from the attitude of earlier writers, who scarcely mention them. It therefore becomes probable that the received traditions surrounding Epaminondas and Pelopidas were founded by the efforts of Callisthenes and Ephorus some time after the events had transpired.⁴¹

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⁴¹This conclusion is not new, but the method of arriving at it is. See Ed. Schwartz, "Kallisthenes Hellenika," *Hermes* 35 (1900) 107–108, *Griechische Geschichtsschreiber* (Leipzig 1959) 13 = "Ephoros," *RE* 6 (1909) 7–9.