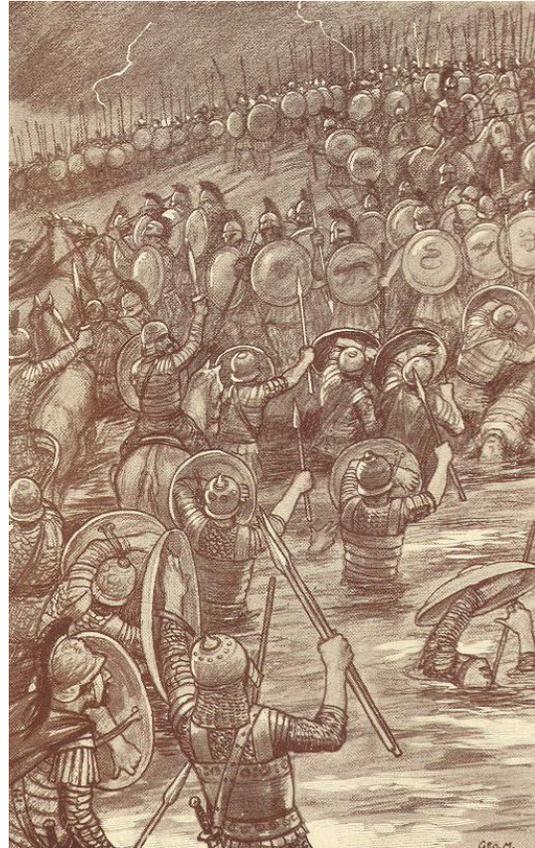


THE DECLINE OF GREECE—404 TO 338 B.C.

AFTERMATH OF PELOPONNESIAN WAR — BATTLE OF CHAERONEA

After Athens's defeat at the end of the Peloponnesian War, Sparta became the undisputed first power among the Greek city-states. The Spartan general Lysander had Athens's walls pulled down and appointed thirty loyal Spartans to run the city. These leaders, the "thirty tyrants," put many of their political opponents including Socrates to death. Plato, Socrates's student, witnessed these oppressions, and they greatly influenced his later writings.

The period immediately following the Peloponnesian war is called the "Spartan Hegemony," because, although Sparta did not collect tribute, it allowed only governments which were friendly to Sparta to exist throughout Greece. The major figure of this time was Agesilaus, a brave and noble Spartan king who came near to freeing all the Greek colonies in Asia Minor before he was recalled to deal with a political crisis at home. While Agesilaus was fighting Persians in the east, the Spartan government had fallen into trouble. The riches and spoils from the successful wars had corrupted the leadership of Sparta as well as the general population; besides destructive intrigue and infighting there were wars with Corinth and Thebes. These problems, combined with a significantly reduced population, led to the disaster in 371 B.C. at the *Battle of Leuctra*. Only 33 years after they prevailed in the Peloponnesian War, the Spartans suffered a humiliating defeat against Thebes. This was the first major land battle that the Spartans had lost to another Greek state in five hundred years, and they never recovered their mystique. The spoils of victory had done more to damage Sparta in a single generation than any enemy had been able to do in half a millennium.



Timoleon holding the ford of the Crimesus

Thebes's rise to being a dominant power in Greece was unprecedented. Although it was always a large and prosperous city, it had never had particularly talented military leaders until Epaminondas and Pelopidas became Theban generals. Under their leadership, Thebes achieved military predominance over most of Greece for the first time, putting a check on Sparta's influence. The battle of Leuctra revealed Epaminondas as a first-rate military genius, and his subsequent diplomatic victories also showed his talent as a statesman. The period of Theban influence, however, did not long survive the death of Epaminondas at the *Battle of Mantinea*. Sparta was humiliated, Thebes was leaderless, and no great power arose to provide dominant

leadership to Greece. The Athens's fortunes did eventually improve, but it never recovered its former predominance and was not prepared to resist the Macedonian threat when it did arise.

Macedonia was a semi-barbaric country north of Greece that the Greek city-states had never considered fully civilized. Philip of Macedonia, however, had spent his youth as a hostage in Thebes under the great Epaminondas. There he had learnt the best of Greek military strategies and became a great admirer of Greek culture. He ascended to the Macedonian throne in 359 and spent the early part of his reign reforming the Macedonian military, expanding his power, and promoting Greek culture. His first military dealings with Greece involved the Sacred War during which he generously defended the interests of the Oracle at Delphi against a band of marauding Phocians. Once this foothold was made, he used statesmanship and diplomacy to gain ascendancy over many weaker Greek allies until Athens and Thebes, at the behest of the Athenian orator Demosthenes finally recognized the threat. When Philip finally met their combined forces in 338 at the *Battle of Chaeronea*, however, the Greeks were soundly thrashed and fell under the Macedonian yoke. Since Philip admired the Greeks, he granted them many freedoms, but little power. Greek culture and philosophy continued to thrive in Athens for many years afterward, but the political autonomy of mainland Greece was gone forever.