

Prologue
Power politics in fourth-century Greece
 (by Hans Beck)

On the next day the ambassadors reported the terms on which the Lacedaemonians were prepared to make peace. Theramenes acted as their spokesman, and he urged [his fellow Athenians] that it was best to obey the Lacedaemonians and to tear down the city walls. While some spoke in opposition to him, the greater number supported him, and so it was voted to accept the peace. After this Lysander sailed into the Piraeus, the exiles returned, and the Peloponnesians began with great enthusiasm to demolish the walls to the music of flute-girls, thinking that that day was the beginning of freedom for Greece.

Xenophon's famous account of the end of the Peloponnesian War (432/1–404) is puzzling, and his underlying message difficult to discern. But the laconic style of his depiction may very well provide a telling clue as to what he wanted to portray. The scene is nothing if not bizarre. Picture hundreds of men eagerly hammering on Athens' great walls, driven by the beat of the music performed by cheering females and, more importantly, a firm belief that their efforts are for an ultimate good: the freedom of Greece.¹

In retrospect, Xenophon may have wondered how naive they must have been. At the time of his writing, in the later part of the 360s and the 350s, it had become clear that their hopes for freedom – and peace – were utterly shattered. Rather than spreading both, the Spartans not only replaced Athens as the villain but also decidedly played the hard game of power politics. In an uncontrolled competition to maximize power and resources as well as their influence on other cities in order to communicate their pursuits,² the Spartans clung to that principle even in rigid terms. Sparta's interest, as king Agesilaus famously put it, set the benchmark for action and became the universal cause for justifying that action.³ What followed was a

¹ Xen. *Hell.* 2, 2, 22–23. Buckler 2003, pp. 1–3.

² See the conceptual approach toward power politics in Eckstein 2003, pp. 757–759, who pays much homage to the renaissance of contemporary (neo-)realism. Standard definitions of power politics include Taylor 1978 and Waltz 1979. A more critical line is offered by Kegley 1995 and Crane 1998.

³ Xen. *Hell.* 5, 2, 32.

growing interstate anarchy: forced to provide for its own security, Greece adopted a power-maximizing attitude that became the dominant feature of state action. Alliances, multilateral obligations, and peace treaties were mostly regarded as means to increase power as much as possible rather than to enforce a stable interstate equilibrium. This ruthless self-seeking, combined with the desire for self-aggrandizement in a fiercely competitive environment, led to another feature that became characteristic of Greek interstate affairs. War, or the threat of war, was always present, and every state was prepared to pursue its own interests through violence. It is not by chance that Thucydides, whose narrative on the Peloponnesian War provides the first in-depth analysis of the fundamental propositions of such a condition of interstate relations and the kind of state action it encourages, is often regarded as the incontestable forerunner of international systems theory and its realist branch in particular.⁴

In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, the road to a new system-wide war was paved. Animosities between Thebes and Sparta, victorious but fragile allies before 404, soon led to a major and profound realignment. In an unexpected move, the Thebans reversed their hostile policy toward Athens and entered into a bilateral agreement (*symmachia*) with their former enemies in 395. The Corinthians, longtime Spartan allies, soon followed suit.⁵ But the common ground for the new alliances was precarious. Beyond a shared determination to challenge Sparta's demand for leadership (*hēgemonia*) in Greece, there were few if any mutually desired goals. Instead, each party aspired to maximize the means of achieving its traditional objectives: Thebes to strive for hegemony in central Greece, the Corinthians to win greater influence on the Peloponnese, and Athens to restore its maritime power.

The following decades witnessed attempts by Sparta, Athens, and Thebes to gain the *hēgemonia* in Greece. Spartan odds were favored by a Common Peace treaty, and Persian money, at the end of the Corinthian War (395–386). Even though the treaty did not formally acknowledge the Spartans as guardian (*prostatēs*) of the peace, it *de facto* reinforced their

⁴ See, e.g., M. W. Doyle 1991; Crane 1998. The brilliant analysis of Eckstein 2003 flirts heavily with Thucydidean realism yet relinquishes Thucydides as the author of a monolithically systems-theory explanation of the Peloponnesian War. Instead, Eckstein detects a group of complementary variables in Thucydides' explanation of the war and of the distribution of power across the Greek state system, including human agency and a series of contingent events such as specific decisions made in Athens and Sparta.

⁵ Rhodes–Osborne, no. 6; cf. *SdA* 11, nos. 224–225. Funke 1980, pp. 71–73; Cartledge 1987, pp. 289–293.

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leadership.⁶ Entrusted with the implementation of what the Common Peace treaty declared to be the core principle of every Greek state on the mainland and over most parts of the Aegean, the Spartans undertook the promotion of the local autonomy (*autonomia*) of the Greek states. Yet, in many cases, the apology for autonomy was hardly more than a pretext for Lacedaemonian interventionism. By the early 370s Sparta had overstepped the mark. Ongoing breaches of the autonomy clause provided the publicly alleged reason for a revival of Athens' naval league, which grew quickly to become a major rival in the strife for hegemony. Counterintuitively, when the Spartans were defeated, it was not by Athens, but by the Thebans on the battlefield of Leuctra (371). The Peloponnesians' response was prompt. Disaffected with Spartan dominance, which spanned more than two hundred years, many regions revolted. Before the kings were able to assess the full extent of the situation, the uprising had grown into a chaotic, uncontrollable upheaval. The Peloponnesian League, the once proud flagship of Spartan might, collapsed. The emergence of new local powers in Arcadia and Messenia complicated Peloponnesian affairs, which were inexorably driven by shifting alliances, local power struggles, and civil war.⁷

Xenophon witnessed those revolts while living on an estate in Scillus in the western Peloponnese.⁸ From there it was roughly 60 kilometers to Mantinea in eastern Arcadia, which in 362 was host to another battle for hegemony. Again, Xenophon's remarks are telling and, in many ways, resemble his narrative of the end of the Peloponnesian War. Once again Xenophon alludes to a certain gap between common expectations and actual achievements. Since virtually all Greeks had assembled on the battlefield, they were hoping, as Xenophon has it, that the victorious would establish an unchallenged hegemony, but, like so often before, "there was even more confusion and disorder in Greece afterwards."⁹

Order did finally come, but not from where Xenophon and his generation had hoped. In Macedon, Philip II was enthroned in 360. Unlike many of his predecessors, Philip managed to overcome both rival claims and foreign invasions. The secret of his success was a thorough reorganization of Macedonian politics that enhanced the power of the monarchy and profoundly reformed the military. Philip's new army, centred on the great Macedonian phalanx and equipped with pikes (*sarisae*) that allowed for a

⁶ See chapter 4. ⁷ Cartledge 1987, pp. 382–392; Buckler 2003, pp. 296–350.

⁸ Diog. Laert. 2, 52–53; see also Xen. *Anab.* 5, 3, 7–13; Paus. 5, 6, 5–6; Anderson 1974, pp. 165–166; Tuplin 2004b; Badian 2004, pp. 41–44.

⁹ Xen. *Hell.* 7, 5, 26–27.

new and deadly tactic on the battlefield, soon became unmatched. With this superior military force in place, Philip was able gradually to expand the Macedonian sphere of interest to the south. In 346 he forced the Athenians into a peace treaty that is known as the Peace of Philocrates. He also became president of the Amphictyonic Council in Delphi, a position that traditionally was one of prestige with solemn religious overtones, but its political opportunity came within the realm of religious conduct toward Apollo's sanctuary. Only a few years later, the *hēgemonia* to which Sparta, Athens, and Thebes aspired became a reality. Philip's troops crushed a Hellenic alliance mainly of Athenians and Thebans on the battlefield of Chaeronea in 338. The battle itself proved to be a difficult victory, but the outcome was as clear as Xenophon would have hoped. Philip, master of the battlefield and leader of the amphictyony, convened a congress at Corinth to found a new league that formed a Common Peace and appointed Philip *hēgemōn* of the league's forces.¹⁰ Again, a feeling of freedom and liberty spread throughout Greece. This time, however, this spirit was conveyed by a monarch who had just "liberated" the Greeks by making them his subjects.

A SHORT CENTURY

The period from the end of the Peloponnesian War to the death of Philip only two years after Chaeronea prominently figures as "the fourth century." As for any other centennial epoch, for example, the long third century (AD) or the even longer nineteenth century, this designation is both conventional and conceptual. On the conventional level, it indicates the period's rough definition according to the chronology. In this regard, the fourth century is rather brief, even if the Age of Alexander from 335 to 323 were to be included, falling short of the hundred years or the time-span of three generations. The designation's conceptual dimension is likewise problematic. On that level, the terminology implies a specific historical profile that distinguishes the period from its chronological surroundings. But that profile is highly controversial. Sandwiched between the "Classical" fifth century and Hellenism, the era has invited various readings and interpretations. Until recently the fourth century was considered hardly more than an appendix to the fifth century. If anything, fourth-century politics were thought to have added to the confusion that

¹⁰ *IG* 11²236 = Rhodes–Osborne, no. 76 = *SdA* 111, no. 403.

ultimately paved the way for Hellenic unity under the rule of Macedon.¹¹ The period was branded as one of failure and decline. The former allegation accused the Greeks of failing to bring about “national” unity that would have averted monarchy, the latter of a steady decrepitude of the *polis* as economic, social, and political core of Greek affairs.

This view was particularly prominent in, yet far from being confined to, nineteenth-century German scholarship and its strong Hegelian tradition, according to which history follows a grand scheme of coherent categories and events. It prevailed even without the overtones of German unification, which so often accompanied the scholarship of the day. It goes without saying that the repercussions of history’s *Weltgeist* were stronger in some academic cultures than in others. While some have praised Philip as a savior who delivered the Greek world from its endemic evils – political fragmentation and interstate rivalry – and finally brought about the national unity the Hellenes, others have lamented the price of that unity.¹²

Today’s scholarship is not free from contemporary ideologies. In fact, the rising prominence of this epoch in scholarly publications might in part be attributed to a changing environment of foreign affairs, which has shifted from a bipolar structure of international relations to unilateral hegemony and globalization, including its inherent forces of multipolarism and regional dynamism. One need not subscribe to unleashed externalism to grasp that the conceptual content of current scholarly trends is likely to be prefigured by these contexts. The editors of the *Cambridge Ancient History*’s volume VI, which in its second edition (1994) is entitled “The Fourth Century BC,” make this abundantly clear. While the corresponding volume in the first edition (1927) was called “Macedon, 401–301 BC,” a title that reflected the then common belief that the overriding theme of the period was the unification of Greece, the new series bears a decidedly plain designation. The revised title reflects the editors’ belief that the period is “interesting in itself [and] not simply illustrative of the political and other weaknesses of the Greek city states.”¹³

¹¹ In the excellent analysis of Ma 2000 the period figures as “the ‘long fourth century’” (p. 353), which is designed to pinpoint the thesis of perpetuated local rivalry and warfare. The point is well taken, but the superstructure of Greek interstate relations changed too dramatically in the course of the 330s to argue for continuity on the macro level. A good discussion of past perceptions of the fourth century as well as some concise remarks on *Wissenschaftsgeschichte* are offered by Tritle 1997, pp. 1–7.

¹² The first edition of *CAH* VI (first published in 1927) was bleak on this. It declared the rise of Philip to be the “coffin of the corpse” (p. 508). A more positive approach was that of Ehrenberg 1965, mainly on the grounds of the Greeks’ overcoming fragmentation and disunity.

¹³ *CAH* VI², p. xvii.

Today, scholarly confidence in the reign of the *Weltgeist* has vanished. Verdicts such as the failure to unite or more general assumptions of decline, decrepitude, or degeneracy have lost their validity in conceptualizations of interstate behaviour, or simply in descriptions of the vexed problem of multilateral rivalries and shifting balances of power in a conflict-prone environment. This is also true for the long-held view that Greek politics underwent a severe crisis after the end of the Peloponnesian War, a view that in many ways served as underlying premise both for scholars who emphasized the transitional character of the period and for those who raised the specter of decline.¹⁴

The crisis paradigm has been revisited over the past twenty years. This new critical assessment offers a valuable point of departure for any further investigation. While earlier scholarship diagnosed a crisis of the city-state's economic development as well as its incapacity to adapt to new military demands, more recent scholarship has identified those criteria as hardly sufficient to understand the underlying changes of fourth-century politics. An elaborate attempt has been made to demonstrate that the Greek city-state would have been unable to survive even without the rise of Macedon, since the *polis* had reached an "evolutionary dead-end."¹⁵ This end was not marked by an inability to effect change in the form of social organization or by processes of cumulative rationalization. Rather, the continuous competition for economic, political, and coercive power, along with strong ideological constraints that prevented the concentration of any of these powers in the hands of an entity other than the citizenry of the *polis* itself, limited the city-state's chances for development and, ultimately, survival. The *real* fourth-century crisis, then, was not so much the outcome of *polis* government as such – for Athens, this thesis has been rejected a long time ago.¹⁶ Instead, the more refined crisis paradigm focuses on the incapability of the *polis* to respond to the needs of the day, especially for what concerns the management of foreign relations and the stabilization of interstate affairs. This view, albeit valid to a point, tends to downplay the actual efforts made after the end of the Peloponnesian War to develop political concepts of interstate security, particularly in the fields of peace making

¹⁴ The crisis paradigm was particularly prominent in 1960s and 1970s scholarship. Its protagonists included scholars from various different intellectual backgrounds such as Hermann Bengtson, Claude Mossé, and Elisabeth Weiskopf.

¹⁵ Runciman 1990; see also Lewis, in *CAH* vi², pp. 589–491, and Davies 1995, who presents a refined concept of crisis.

¹⁶ Most notably by Hansen 1991; see also Harding 1995; Welwei 1999, whose narrative sets the fifth and the fourth centuries *en par*.

and *polis* integration. Before the crisis-paradigm can be re-evaluated, these concepts will need to be examined.

INTERSTATE EQUILIBRIUM AND ITS OBSTACLES: BIPOLARITY,
 HEGEMONY, MULTIPLICITY

When the Aegean had become a Hellenic Sea in the decades that followed the Persian Wars, no attempts were made to systematize Greek interstate relations. Greece consisted of hundreds of independent city-states that shared a common material and political culture, religious beliefs, and a strong feeling of ethnic kinship that would separate the Greeks from the “barbarian” world. The allocation of power between *poleis* was determined by access to resources rather than visionary approaches or political attempts.¹⁷ Athens and Sparta outranked the other states by far in natural resources and commanded joint forces of large-scale fighting alliances. Both acquired a distinct civic image that underscored their superiority and secured the recognition of their fellow Hellenes. Second, a handful of states – Thebes, Corinth, Argos, as well as the leading *poleis* in Asia Minor – established themselves as regional powers.¹⁸ Although significantly smaller, they were in a position to alter the power relation between Athens and Sparta at any time. Those regional powers were followed by countless city-states, many of them with an average of only approximately six hundred citizens, many others merely rural settlements gathering around an urban centre. Despite the large differences in terms of population, resources, and political organization – an average *polis* would be governed by an assembly, a council, and a military executive – all of the polities were recognized as independent political units with a right to pursue their internal affairs and to conduct individual foreign policies.¹⁹

Interstate contacts between *poleis* were frequent. Cities had close relations with their neighbours, sometimes even friendly contacts, and engaged in economic exchange. At the same time, they partook in permanent fighting alliances, belonged to tribal federations or federal states, interacted during religious festivals, and had ceremonial ties. Some may

¹⁷ E.g. Isocrates’ visions on Athenian foreign policy as heralded in *On the Peace* (355) and *Areopagiticus* (358 or 355) never translated into politics, nor did his concept of Panhellenism. Turning to eminent figures such as Dionysius, Jason’s sons, Euagoras and ultimately Philip, Isocrates’ letters anticipate the hegemony of a single ruler. Yet, when this was finally brought about, it was due to the new power constellation (and not to Philip’s receiving letters from Isocrates).

¹⁸ See Gehrke 1986 for a classification of Greek city-states according to their economies and resources.

¹⁹ A recent directory of *poleis*, Hansen and Nielsen 2005, lists 1,035 (!) entries of city-states and hundreds of settlements that do not qualify as autonomous *poleis* according to the editors’ definition.

have also been members of the Council of the Amphictyony at Delphi. Furthermore, many of the smaller *poleis* maintained bonds with a mother-city (*metropolis*) that had acted as their (factual or fictitious) founder, which in turn implied a set of mutual obligations and dependencies that shaped their relations.²⁰

Such an interstate environment is highly susceptible to conflict and disorder. The multiplicity of sovereign polities in a relatively small area with limited economic resources favored an anarchical structure. With little recognition by way of interstate law, city-states had to establish relations with each other largely on their own terms. Throughout the fifth century, the anarchical potential of conflict and disarray was contained and, in fact, absorbed by a much larger process of power transformation. Thucydides' analysis of Greek affairs on the eve of the Peloponnesian War is the *locus classicus* to describe this process. Thucydides believed that the war would be "a great war," an anticipation based on the observation that "the preparations of both the combatants were in every way in the last state of perfection . . . and the rest of the Hellenes taking sides in the quarrel, those who delayed doing so at once having it done in contemplation" (1, 1). In analytical terms, interstate affairs were gradually transformed into a bipolar power scheme that grew to a system-wide scale. Consequently, while the multiplicity of autonomous polities continued to exist, the dynamic potential of this arrangement was channeled into bipolarity.²¹

The Peloponnesian War eliminated that superstructure. With the Athenian Empire dismantled, the autonomy of Athens' allies restored, and the Athenian fleet destroyed, only one of Thucydides' combatants survived for the time being. It fell to the Spartans to develop and promote a political concept that may provide a more stable foreign environment, by means of either hegemony or a more innovative approach that could reach beyond the mere exercise of power. While hegemony went beyond their military and economic resources,²² the latter seems to have been unthinkable at the Eurotas. At the height of Xenophon's discourse on hegemony

²⁰ The current debate on new approaches towards the so-called Great Colonization, initiated by Malkin 1987, also includes a from-scratch evaluation of the relation between *metropolis* and *apoikia*. The most recent contribution to this is Bernstein 2004, whose emphasis rests on religious motifs for sending out colonies and perpetuating ties between mother-city and colony.

²¹ See the volume of Strauss and Lebow 1991, and, in the midst of the Cold War, Fliess 1966.

²² Although Laconia was remarkably self-sufficient in useful rocks and minerals as well as agricultural potential, the lack of transregional trade curbed the advantages of large-scale profit making; Cartledge 1979, pp. 180–182, is still most valuable; see also n. 33 below on *oligantropia*. On the military front, allied contributions were systematized only briefly before the disintegration of the Peloponnesian League. The inscription on contributions to the Spartan war fund (probably dating

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and *autonomia* in *Hellenica* 5–6, a Spartan by the name of Prothous is introduced into the narrative of the peace conference of 371 (before Leuctra). Sparta's authorities were determined to steer foreign policy in the way they had done in the past, whereas Prothous argues for a revised policy. He suggests that the assembly demobilize Spartan troops and send embassies to the Greek cities asking for voluntary contributions to the temple of Apollo in Delphi; and if some infringement of *autonomia* appeared to occur, to summon those who wished to react and attack the guilty state. Apparently this was not meant to be ironic. Instead, Prothous was making an effort to apply a refined definition of *autonomia* as well as to establish some sort of protocol that would justify foreign action. If this were achieved, the Spartans would gain new political ground and overcome the political isolation into which they had been driven. In the event, they would direct or maybe even enforce a multipolar redistribution of power which, in turn, would acknowledge their position as *hēgemōn*. It is telling that the Spartan assembly, dominated by Agesilaus, “thought that Prothous was talking rubbish” and mobilized the army against Thebes.²³ Similar decisions were hammered out by the Spartan assembly before on foreign relations in the Peloponnese, in central Greece, and in the north. Hence, Sparta's foreign policy not only strengthened the anarchical inclination of Greek affairs but also provoked widespread disaffection and resistance. Interstate security rapidly decreased under the Spartan hegemony, and foreign affairs on the whole became less predictable.

The Common Peace (*koinē eirēnē*) of 386 was designed to resolve the structural deficits of the state system. Sparta's hegemony had to some extent suffered in the Corinthian War, but on the whole remained intact. A joint alliance of Athens, Thebes, Corinth, and Argos was unable to inflict lasting damage to the forces of the Peloponnesian League. After the battle of Abydos (387) the Athenian fleet had, once again, been vanquished, bringing nine years of fierce fighting to an end. That same year the victorious Spartan general Antalcidas reached an agreement with Tiribazus, the Persian satrap of Sardis, that laid the foundation for a peace treaty under Persian sponsorship. The following year the Spartans assembled the belligerents in Sparta and read out to them a decree that had been dictated by the Great King Artaxerxes. Xenophon presents an epitome of the text:

to 427) famously includes a variety of coinages and the gift of raisins: Meiggs–Lewis, no. 67, with the new fragments in W. T. Loomis, *The Spartan War Fund: IG v.1.1 and a New Fragment*, Stuttgart, 1992, p. 74.

²³ Xen. *Hell.* 6, 4, 2–3; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 28 on Agesilaus' role. Jehne 1994, pp. 273–276; Beck 2001a, pp. 368–369; Bearzot 2004, pp. 109–118.

King Artaxerxes thinks it just that the cities in Asia be his and, of the islands, Clazomenae and Cyprus; the other Greek cities, both great and small, should be left autonomous except for Lemnus, Imbrush, and Scyrus, which should belong to Athens, as in the past. Whichever side refuses the peace, against these I shall wage war with those who agree, both by land and by sea and with ships and money.²⁴

The *koinē eirēnē* of 386 has received much scholarly attention, but only recently historians elucidated its impact on Greek interstate relations. In revisiting the Peace, two closely interrelated provisions are striking. The first is the clause that entailed autonomy for the Greek cities (with the exception of the Greeks in Asia, Sparta's necessary sacrifice to the King). The call for *autonomia* was hardly a new concept; indeed, it can be traced back to the era of the Peloponnesian War.²⁵ In earlier stipulations, however, *autonomia* had been guaranteed by bilateral partners who mutually assured the independence of the other party. With the King's Peace *autonomia* became an obligatory formula that was extended to all Greek cities, great and small. It became the "life principle"²⁶ of Greek statehood. That the demand for autonomy was transformed into a political norm that applied to the Greek state in general leads to the second key provision. Unlike earlier peace treaties, which tended to be bilateral agreements between belligerents who were working toward putting a formal end to warfare, the Peace of 386 stipulated conditions that were thought to be binding for all Greek states, regardless of whether or not they had participated in the Corinthian War or whether or not they had sent delegates to Sparta to hear, and vote for, the King's verdict.

Taken literally, the King's Peace envisioned an unprecedented arrangement of the Greek state system. Its underlying implication, if set in motion, was to endorse fully the principle of interstate multiplicity by articulating and legitimizing the demands of independent city-states. Permanent exposure to the dangers of war meant that the *poleis* needed security and protection. The King's Peace, in theory, provided both. Protection was granted by the *prostatēs* who pledged to wage war on any aggressor "with those who agree, both by land and by sea and with ships and money."²⁷ The reference to financial aid guaranteed the Great King's support to those who fought against the violators of the peace. As shown by the Peloponnesian and the Corinthian Wars, Persian money provided a

²⁴ Xen. *Hell.* 5, 1, 31; cf. Diod. Sic. 14, 110, 3. Jehne 1994, pp. 31–47; Buckler 2003, pp. 167–180. See also chapter 4 below.

²⁵ *IG* 1³127 = Meiggs–Lewis, no. 94: Athenian decree for Samos (from 405/4), lines 15–16: The Samians shall "use their own laws and be autonomous."

²⁶ According to Jehne 1994, p. 44: "Lebensprinzip." ²⁷ See above, n. 24.