

= Epaminondas =

Epaminondas ( / ˈpæmɪnɒndəs / ; Greek : Ἐπαμεινώνδας , Epameinondas ; d . 362 BC ) , was a Theban general and statesman of the 4th century BC who transformed the Ancient Greek city @-@ state of Thebes , leading it out of Spartan subjugation into a preeminent position in Greek politics . In the process he broke Spartan military power with his victory at Leuctra and liberated the Messenian helots , a group of Peloponnesian Greeks who had been enslaved under Spartan rule for some 230 years , having been defeated in the Messenian War ending in 600 BC . Epaminondas reshaped the political map of Greece , fragmented old alliances , created new ones , and supervised the construction of entire cities . He was militarily influential as well , inventing and implementing several major battlefield tactics .

The Roman orator Cicero called him " the first man of Greece " , and Montaigne judged him one of the three " worthiest and most excellent men " that had ever lived , but Epaminondas has fallen into relative obscurity in modern times . The changes Epaminondas wrought on the Greek political order did not long outlive him , as the cycle of shifting hegemonies and alliances continued unabated . A mere twenty @-@ seven years after his death , a recalcitrant Thebes was obliterated by Alexander the Great . Thus Epaminondas ? who had been praised in his time as an idealist and liberator ? is today largely remembered for a decade ( 371 BC to 362 BC ) of campaigning that sapped the strength of the great land powers of Greece and paved the way for the Macedonian conquest .

= = Historical sources = =

The life of Epaminondas is very poorly attested in the ancient sources , especially compared to some of his near contemporaries ( e.g. Philip II of Macedon , Pelopidas ) . One principal reason for this is the loss of Plutarch 's biography of him . Epaminondas was one of approximately 50 ancient figures given an extensive biography by Plutarch in his *Parallel Lives* , in which he is paired with the Roman statesman Scipio Africanus ; however , both these " Lives " are now lost . Plutarch was writing over 400 years after Epaminondas 's death and is therefore very much a secondary source , but he often explicitly names his sources , which allows some degree of verification of his statements .

Some details of Epaminondas 's life can be found in Plutarch 's " Lives " of Pelopidas and Agesilaus II , who were contemporaries . There is also a surviving ( and possibly abridged ) biography of Epaminondas by the Roman author Cornelius Nepos from the first century BC , in the absence of Plutarch 's , that becomes a major source for Epaminondas 's life .

The period of Greek history from 411 ? 362 BC is primarily attested by the historian Xenophon , who evidently saw his work as continuation of Thucydides 's *History of the Peloponnesian War* . Xenophon , who idolized Sparta and its king , Agesilaus , avoids mentioning Epaminondas wherever possible and does not even note his presence at the Battle of Leuctra . Epaminondas 's role in the conflicts of the 4th century is also described by Diodorus Siculus , in his *Bibliotheca historica* . Diodorus was writing in the 1st century BC , and is also very much a secondary source , though useful for corroborating details found elsewhere .

= = Early life = =

Epaminondas was born into the Theban aristocracy in the late 5th century BC ; estimates for the year of his birth vary widely . Cornelius Nepos claims that his father , Polymnis , had been left impoverished by his ancestors . He was educated in his childhood by Lysis of Tarentum , one of the last major Pythagorean philosophers . Epaminondas evidently excelled as a student , and was devoted to Lysis . Nepos also tells us that the young Epaminondas worked hard to increase his physical prowess , and specifically his agility , since " he thought that strength suited the purposes of wrestlers , but that agility conduced to excellence in war . " He also trained in running and wrestling , but most of all , he undertook " martial exercises " ( presumably training with weapons ) .

Epaminondas evidently began serving as a soldier after adolescence ; Plutarch refers to an incident

involving Epaminondas that occurred during a battle at Mantinea . Though not explicitly stated , this was probably the Spartan attack on Mantinea in 385 BC , as described by Xenophon ; Plutarch tells us that Epaminondas was there as part of a Theban force aiding the Spartans , so this battle fits the description . Epaminondas was certainly not old enough to have served at the First Battle of Mantinea which was in 418 BC .

It was at this battle , regardless of exactly when and where this occurred , that a defining moment of Epaminondas 's early life would happen . Epaminondas saved the life of his fellow Theban Pelopidas ;

Pelopidas , after receiving seven wounds in front , sank down upon a great heap of friends and enemies who lay dead together ; but Epaminondas , although he thought him lifeless , stood forth to defend his body and his arms , and fought desperately , single @-@ handed against many , determined to die rather than leave Pelopidas lying there . And now he too was in a sorry plight , having been wounded in the breast with a spear and in the arm with a sword , when Agesipolis the Spartan king came to his aid from the other wing , and when all hope was lost , saved them both .

Plutarch says that this incident firmly cemented their friendship , and Pelopidas would be Epaminondas 's partner in politics for the next twenty years .

Epaminondas was considered the greatest warrior @-@ statesmen of ancient Thebes by many , including the Roman historian Diodorus Siculus . Diodorus does not have anything to say about the sexual orientation of Epaminondas or the Sacred Band , nor does he say anything about the following account , again from Plutarch ( Amatorius 17 ) . According to Plutarch 's dramatic dialogue , Epaminondas had two male lovers : Asopichus and Caphisodorus , the latter died with him at Mantinea in battle . They were buried together , something usually reserved for a husband and wife in Greek society .

= = Political and military career = =

= = = Background = = =

Epaminondas lived at a particularly turbulent point in Greek history . Following the end of the Peloponnesian War in 404 BC , Sparta had embarked upon an aggressively unilateralist policy towards the rest of Greece and quickly alienated many of its former allies . Thebes , meanwhile , had greatly increased its own power during the war and sought to gain control of the other cities of Boeotia ( the region of ancient Greece northwest of Attica ) . This policy , along with other disputes , brought Thebes into conflict with Sparta . By 395 BC , Thebes , alongside Athens , Corinth , and Argos , found itself arrayed against Sparta ( a former ally ) in the Corinthian War . That war , which dragged on inconclusively for eight years , saw several bloody Theban defeats at Spartan hands . By the time of its conclusion , Thebes had been forced to check its expansionist ambitions and return to its old alliance with Sparta .

In 382 BC , however , the Spartan commander Phoebidas committed an act that would ultimately turn Thebes against Sparta for good and pave the way for Epaminondas 's rise to power . Passing through Boeotia on campaign , Phoebidas took advantage of civil strife within Thebes to secure entrance to the city for his troops . Once inside , he seized the Cadmeia ( the Theban acropolis ) , and forced the anti @-@ Spartan party to flee the city . Epaminondas , although associated with that faction , was allowed to remain ; since " his philosophy made him to be looked down upon as a recluse , and his poverty as impotent " . The Spartans installed a puppet government in Thebes , and garrisoned the Cadmeia to ensure the behaviour of the Thebans .

= = = Early career = = =

= = = = 378 BC ? Theban coup = = = =

In the years following the Spartan takeover , the exiled Thebans regrouped in Athens and , at the instigation of Pelopidas , prepared to liberate their city . Meanwhile , in Thebes , Epaminondas began preparing the young men of the city to fight the Spartans . In the winter of 379 BC , a small group of the exiles , led by Pelopidas , infiltrated the city . They then assassinated the leaders of the pro @-@ Spartan government , and supported by Epaminondas and Gorgidas , who led a group of young men , and a force of Athenian hoplites , they surrounded the Spartans on the Cadmeia . The following day , Epaminondas and Gorgidas brought Pelopidas and his men before the Theban assembly and exhorted the Thebans to fight for their freedom ; the assembly responded by acclaiming Pelopidas and his men as liberators . The Cadmeia was surrounded , and the Spartans attacked ; Pelopidas realised that they must be expelled before an army came from Sparta to relieve them . The Spartan garrison eventually surrendered on the condition that they were allowed to march away unharmed . The narrow margin of the conspirators ' success is demonstrated by the fact that the Spartan garrison met a Spartan force on the way to rescue them as they marched back to Sparta . Plutarch portrays the Theban coup as an immensely significant event :

... the subsequent change in the political situation made this exploit the more glorious . For the war which broke down the pretensions of Sparta and put an end to her supremacy by land and sea , began from that night , in which people , not by surprising any fort or castle or citadel , but by coming into a private house with eleven others , loosed and broke in pieces , if the truth may be expressed in a metaphor , the fetters of the Lacedaemonian supremacy , which were thought indissoluble and not to be broken .

= = = = 378 ? 371 BC ? Aftermath = = = =

When news of the uprising at Thebes reached Sparta , an army under Cleombrotus I had been dispatched to subdue the city , but turned back without engaging the Thebans . Another army under Agesilaus II was then dispatched to attack the Thebans . However , the Thebans refused to meet the Spartan army in battle , instead building a trench and stockade outside Thebes , which they occupied , preventing the Spartans advancing on the city . The Spartans ravaged the countryside but eventually departed , leaving Thebes independent . This victory so heartened the Thebans that they undertook operations against other neighboring cities as well . In short order the Thebans were able to reconstitute their old Boeotian confederacy in a new , democratic form . The cities of Boeotia united as a federation with an executive body composed of seven generals , or Boeotarchs , elected from seven districts throughout Boeotia . This political fusion was so successful that henceforth the names Theban and Boeotian were used interchangeably in a nod to the newfound solidarity of the region .

Seeking to crush the Thebans , the Spartans would invade Boeotia three times over the next few years ( 378 , 377 , ? possibly Leuctra ) . At first the Thebans feared facing the Spartans head on , but the conflict gave them much practice and training , and they " had their spirits roused and their bodies thoroughly inured to hardships , and gained experience and courage from their constant struggles " . Although Sparta remained the dominant land power in Greece , the Boeotians had demonstrated that they , too , were a martial threat and a politically cohesive power . At the same time , Pelopidas , an advocate of an aggressive policy against Sparta , had established himself as a major political leader in Thebes .

Epaminondas 's role in the years to 371 BC is difficult to piece together . Certainly , he served with the Theban armies in the defence of Boeotia in the 370s , and , by 371 BC , he had become a Boeotarch . It seems safe to assume , given their close friendship , and their close collaboration after 371 BC , that Epaminondas and Pelopidas also collaborated closely on Theban policy in the period 378 ? 371 BC .

= = = = Peace conference of 371 BC = = = =

The years following the Theban coup had seen desultory fighting between Sparta and Thebes , with Athens also drawn into the conflict . A feeble attempt at a common peace had been made in 375 BC

, but desultory fighting between Athens and Sparta had resumed by 373 BC ( at the latest ) . By 371 BC , Athens and Sparta were again war @-@ weary , and in 371 BC a conference was held at Sparta to discuss another attempt at a common peace .

Epaminondas was serving as a Boeotarch for 371 BC , and led the Boeotian delegation to the peace conference . Peace terms were agreed at the outset of the conference , and the Thebans presumably signed the treaty in their own name alone . However , on the following day , Epaminondas caused a drastic break with Sparta when he insisted on signing not for the Thebans alone , but for all the Boeotians . Agesilaus refused to allow the change of the Theban envoys ' signature , insisting that the cities of Boeotia should be independent ; Epaminondas countered that if this were to be the case , the cities of Laconia should be as well . Irate , Agesilaus struck the Thebans from the document . The delegation returned to Thebes , and both sides mobilized for war .

= = = Battle of Leuctra ( 371 BC ) = = =

Immediately following the failure of the peace talks , orders were sent out from Sparta to the Spartan king Cleombrotus , who was at the head of an army in Phocis , commanding him to march directly to Boeotia . Skirting north to avoid mountain passes where the Boeotians were prepared to ambush him , Cleombrotus entered Boeotian territory from an unexpected direction and quickly seized a fort and captured 10 or 12 triremes . Then marching towards Thebes , he camped at Leuctra , in the territory of Thespieae . Here , the Boeotian army came to meet him . The Spartan army contained some 10 @, @ 000 hoplites , 700 of whom were the elite warriors known as Spartiates . The Boeotians opposite them numbered about 6 @, @ 000 , but were bolstered by a cavalry superior to that of the Peloponnesians .

Epaminondas was given charge of the Boeotian army , with the other six Boeotarchs in an advisory capacity . Pelopidas , meanwhile , was captain of the Sacred Band , the elite Theban troops . Before the battle , there was evidently much debate amongst the Boeotarchs about whether to fight or not . As a consistent advocate of an aggressive policy , Epaminondas wished to fight , and supported by Pelopidas , he managed to swing the vote in favour of battle . During the course of the battle , Epaminondas was to display a grasp of tactics hitherto unseen in Greek warfare .

The phalanx formation used by Greek armies had a distinct tendency to veer to the right during battle , " because fear makes each man do his best to shelter his unarmed side with the shield of the man next him on the right " . Traditionally , a phalanx therefore lined up for battle with the elite troops on the right flank to counter this tendency . Thus , in the Spartan phalanx at Leuctra , Cleombrotus and the elite ' Spartiates ' were on the right , while the less experienced Peloponnesian allies were on the left . However , needing to counter the Spartans ' numerical advantage , Epaminondas implemented two tactical innovations . Firstly , he took the best troops in the army , and arranged them 50 ranks deep ( as opposed to the normal 8 ? 12 ranks ) on the left wing , opposite Cleombrotus and the Spartans , with Pelopidas and the Sacred Band on the extreme left flank . Secondly , recognizing , that he could not have matched the width of the Peloponnesian phalanx ( even before the deepening the left flank ) , he abandoned all attempts to do so . Instead , placing the weaker troops on the right flank , he " instructed them to avoid battle and withdraw gradually during the enemy 's attack " . The tactic of the deep phalanx had been anticipated by Pagondas , another Theban general , who used a 25 man deep formation at the Battle of Delium . However , the reversing of the position of the elite troops , and an oblique line of attack were innovations ; it seems that Epaminondas was therefore responsible for the military tactic of refusing one 's flank .

The fighting at Leuctra opened with a clash between the cavalry , in which the Thebans were victorious over the inferior Spartan cavalry , driving them back into the ranks of the infantry , and thereby disrupting the phalanx . The battle then became general , with the strengthened Theban left flank marching to attack at double speed , while the right flank retreated . After intense fighting , the Spartan right flank began to give way under the impetus of the mass of Thebans , and Cleombrotus was killed . Although the Spartans held on for long enough to rescue the body of the king , their line

was soon broken by the sheer force of the Theban assault . The Peloponnesian allies on the left wing , seeing the Spartans put to flight , also broke and ran , and the entire army retreated in disarray . One thousand Peloponnesians were killed , while the Boeotians lost only 300 men . Most importantly , since it constituted a significant proportion of the entire Spartan manpower , 400 of the 700 Spartiates present were killed , a loss that posed a serious threat to Sparta 's future war-making abilities . When , after the battle , the Spartans asked if they and the Peloponnesians could collect the dead , Epaminondas suspected that the Spartans would try to cover up the scale of their losses . He therefore allowed the Peloponnesians to remove their dead first , so that those remaining would be shown to be Spartiates , and emphasise the scale of the Theban victory .

The victory at Leuctra shook the foundations of the Spartan dominance of Greece to the core . Since the number of Spartiates was always relatively small , Sparta had relied on her allies in order to field substantial armies . However , with the defeat at Leuctra , the Peloponnesian allies were less inclined to bow to Spartan demands . Furthermore , with the loss of men at Leuctra and other battles , the Spartans were not in a strong position to reassert their dominance over their erstwhile allies .

= = = Theban hegemony = = =

In the immediate aftermath of Leuctra , the Thebans considered following up their victory by taking their vengeance on Sparta ; they also invited Athens to join them in doing so . However , their Thessalian allies under Jason of Pherae dissuaded them from shattering what remained of the Spartan army . Instead , Epaminondas occupied himself with consolidating the Boeotian confederacy , compelling the previously Spartan-aligned polis of Orchomenus to join the league .

The following year the Thebans invaded the Peloponnese , aiming to break Spartan power for good . It is not clear exactly when the Thebans started to think not just of ending the Spartan hegemony , but of replacing it with one of their own , but it is clear that eventually this became their aim . Hans Beck asserts that , unlike Sparta in the Peloponnesian League and Athens in the Delian League , Thebes made no effort either to create an empire or to bind its allies in any sort of permanent and stable organization . Indeed , after Leuctra Thebes devoted its attention to diplomatic efforts in Central Greece rather than schemes of domination further afield . By late 370 Thebes ' network of alliances in central Greece made her secure in the area ? as she had not been before Leuctra ? and offered scope for further expansion of Theban influence .

= = = First Invasion of the Peloponnese ( 370 BC ) = = =

When , in the immediate aftermath of Leuctra , the Thebans had sent a herald to Athens with news of their victory , the messenger was met with stony silence . The Athenians then decided to take advantage of the Spartan discomfiture , holding a conference in Athens , in which the peace terms proposed earlier in 371 BC were ratified by all cities ( except Elis ) ; and this time , the treaty explicitly made the Peloponnesian cities , formerly under Spartan dominance , independent . Taking advantage of this , the Mantineans decided to unify their settlements into a single city , and to fortify it ; a decision which greatly angered Agesilaus . Furthermore , Tegea , supported by Mantinea , instigated the formation of an Arcadian alliance . This led to the Spartans declaring war on Mantinea , whereupon the majority of Arcadian cities grouped together to oppose the Spartans ( thus forming the confederation that the Spartans were trying to prevent ) , and requested assistance from the Thebans . The Theban force arrived late in 370 BC , and it was led by Epaminondas and Pelopidas , both at this time Boeotarchs . As they journeyed into Arcadia , the Thebans were joined by armed contingents from many of Sparta 's former allies , swelling their forces to some 50 ? 70 , 000 men . In Arcadia Epaminondas encouraged the Arcadians to form their proposed league , and to build the new city of Megalopolis ( as a center of power opposed to Sparta ) .

Epaminondas , supported by Pelopidas and the Arcadians , then persuaded the other Boeotarchs to invade Laconia itself . Moving south , they crossed the Evrotas River , the frontier of Sparta , which no hostile army had breached in memory . The Spartans , unwilling to engage the massive

army in battle , simply defended their city , which the Thebans did not attempt to capture . The Thebans and their allies ravaged Laconia , down to the port of Gythium , freeing some of the Lacedaemonian perioeci from their allegiance to Sparta . Epaminondas briefly returned to Arcadia , before marching south again , this time to Messenia , a region which the Spartans had conquered some 200 years before . Epaminondas freed the helots of Messenia , and rebuilt the ancient city of Messene on Mount Ithome , with fortifications that were among the strongest in Greece . He then issued a call to Messenian exiles all over Greece to return and rebuild their homeland . The loss of Messenia was particularly damaging to the Spartans , since the territory comprised one @-@ third of Sparta 's territory and contained half of their helot population . The helots ' labor allowed the Spartans to become a " full @-@ time " army .

Epaminondas ' campaign of 370 / 369 has been described as an example of " the grand strategy of indirect approach " , which was aimed at severing " the economic roots of her [ Sparta 's ] military supremacy . " In mere months , Epaminondas had created two new enemy states that opposed Sparta , shaken the foundations of Sparta 's economy , and all but devastated Sparta 's prestige . This accomplished , he led his army back home , victorious .

= = = = Trial = = = =

In order to accomplish all that he wished in the Peloponnesus , Epaminondas had persuaded his fellow Boeotarchs to remain in the field for several months after their term of office had expired . Upon his return home , Epaminondas was therefore greeted not with a hero 's welcome but with a trial arranged by his political enemies . According to Cornelius Nepos , in his defense Epaminondas merely requested that , if he be executed , the inscription regarding the verdict read :

Epaminondas was punished by the Thebans with death , because he obliged them to overthrow the Lacedaemonians at Leuctra , whom , before he was general , none of the Boeotians durst look upon in the field , and because he not only , by one battle , rescued Thebes from destruction , but also secured liberty for all Greece , and brought the power of both people to such a condition , that the Thebans attacked Sparta , and the Lacedaemonians were content if they could save their lives ; nor did he cease to prosecute the war , till , after settling Messene , he shut up Sparta with a close siege .

The jury broke into laughter , the charges were dropped , and Epaminondas was re @-@ elected as Boeotarch for the next year .

= = = = Second invasion of the Peloponnesus ( 369 BC ) = = = =

In 369 BC the Argives , Eleans and the Arcadians , eager to continue their war against Sparta , recalled the Thebans to their support . Epaminondas , at the height of his prestige , again commanded an allied invasion force . Arriving at the Isthmus of Corinth , the Thebans found it heavily guarded by the Spartans and Athenians ( along with the Corinthians , Megarans and Pellenians ) . Epaminondas decided to attack the weakest spot , guarded by the Lacedaemonians ; in a dawn attack he forced his way through the Spartan position , and joined his Peloponnesian allies . The Thebans thus won an easy victory and crossed the Isthmus . Diodorus stresses that this was " a feat no whit inferior to his former mighty deeds " .

However , the rest of the expedition achieved little : Sicyon and Pellene became allied to Thebes , and the countryside of Troezen and Epidaurus was ravaged , but the cities could not be taken . After an abortive attack on Corinth and the arrival of a task force sent by Dionysius of Syracuse to aid Sparta , the Thebans decided to march home .

= = = = Thessaly ( 368 BC ) = = = =

When Epaminondas returned to Thebes , he continued to be dogged by his political enemies who prosecuted him for the second time . They actually succeeded in excluding him from the office of Boeotarch for the year 368 BC . This was the only time from the Battle of Leuctra until his death that

he did not serve as Boeotarch . In 368 , the Theban army marched into Thessaly to rescue Pelopidas and Ismenias , who had been imprisoned by Alexander of Pherae while serving as ambassadors . The Theban force not only failed to overcome Alexander and his allies , but got into serious difficulties , when it tried to withdraw ; Epaminondas , serving as a private soldier , succeeded in extricating it . In early 367 , Epaminondas led a second Theban expedition to free Pelopidas , and Ismenias . He finally outmaneuvered the Thessalians , and secured the release of the two Theban ambassadors without a fight .

= = = Third invasion of the Peloponnesus ( 367 BC ) = = =

In the spring of 367 BC , Epaminondas again invaded the Peloponnesus . This time an Argive army captured part of the Isthmus on Epaminondas 's request , allowing the Theban army to enter the Peloponnesus unhindered . On this occasion , Epaminondas marched to Achaia , seeking to secure their allegiance to Thebes . No army dared to challenge him in the field , and the Achaean oligarchies therefore acquiesced to the request that they be allied to Thebes . Epaminondas ' acceptance of the Achaean oligarchies roused protests by both the Arcadians and his political rivals , and his settlement was thus shortly reversed : democracies were set up , and the oligarchs exiled . These democratic governments were short @-@ lived , since the pro @-@ Spartan aristocrats from all the cities banded together and attacked each city in turn , re @-@ establishing the oligarchies . According to G.L. Cawkwell , " the sequel perhaps showed the good sense of Epaminondas . When these exiles recovered the cities , they ' no longer took a middle course ' . " In the light of their treatment by Thebes , they abandoned their previously neutral stance , and thereafter " fought zealously in support of the Lacedaemonians " .

= = = Resistance to Thebes = = =

In 366 / 365 BC an attempt was made to make a common peace , with the Persian King Artaxerxes II as arbiter and guarantor . Thebes organized a conference to have the terms of the peace accepted , but their diplomatic initiative failed : the negotiations could not resolve the hostility between Thebes and other states that resented its influence ( such as the Arcadian leader Lycomedes who challenged the right of the Thebans to hold the congress in Thebes ) ; the peace was never fully accepted , and fighting soon resumed .

Throughout the decade after the Battle of Leuctra , numerous former allies of Thebes defected to the Spartan alliance or even to alliances with other hostile states . By the middle of the next decade , even some Arcadians ( whose league Epaminondas had helped establish in 369 BC ) had turned against them . At the same time , however , Epaminondas managed through a series of diplomatic efforts to dismantle the Peloponnesian league : the remaining members of the league finally abandoned Sparta ( in 365 Corinth , Epidaurus , and Phlius made peace with Thebes and Argos ) , and Messenia remained independent and firmly loyal to Thebes .

Boeotian armies campaigned across Greece as opponents rose up on all sides ; Epaminondas even led his state in a challenge to Athens at sea . The Theban demos voted him a fleet of a hundred triremes to win over the Rhodes , Chios , and Byzantium . The fleet finally sailed in 364 , but modern scholars believe that Epaminondas achieved no lasting gains for Thebes on this voyage . In that same year , Pelopidas was killed while campaigning against Alexander of Pherae in Thessaly . His loss deprived Epaminondas of his greatest Theban political ally .

= = = Fourth invasion of the Peloponnesus ( 362 BC ) = = =

In the face of this increasing opposition to Theban dominance , Epaminondas launched his final expedition into the Peloponnese in 362 BC . The immediate goal of the expedition was to subdue Mantinea , which had been opposing Theban influence in the region . Epaminondas brought an army drawn from Boeotia , Thessaly and Euboea . He was joined by Tegea , which was the center of local opposition to Mantinea , Argos , Messenia , and some of the Arcadians . Mantinea , on the

other hand , had requested assistance from Sparta , Athens , Achaea and the rest of Arcadia , so that almost all of Greece was represented on one side or the other .

This time the mere presence of the Theban army was not enough to cow the opposition . Since time was passing and the Mantinean alliance showed no signs of capsizing , Epaminondas decided that he would have to break the stalemate . Hearing that a large Lacedaemonian force was marching to Mantinea , and that Sparta was practically undefended , he planned an audacious night @-@ time march on Sparta itself . However , the Spartan king Archidamus was alerted to this move by an informant , probably a Cretan runner , and Epaminondas arrived to find the city well @-@ defended . Although he did attack the city , he seems to have drawn off relatively quickly on discovering that he had not , after all , surprised the Spartans . Furthermore , the Lacedaemonian and Mantinean troops which had been stationed at Mantinea had marched to Sparta during the course of the day , and dissuaded Epaminondas from attacking again . Now hoping that his adversaries had left Mantinea defenseless in their haste to protect Sparta , Epaminondas counter marched his troops back to his base at Tegea , and then dispatched his cavalry to Mantinea . However , a clash outside the walls of Mantinea with Athenian cavalry foiled this strategy as well . Realising that the time allotted for the campaign was drawing to a close , and reasoning that if he departed without defeating the enemies of Tegea , Theban influence in the Peloponnesus would be destroyed , he decided to stake everything on a pitched battle .

What followed on the plain in front of Mantinea was the largest hoplite battle in Greek history . Epaminondas had the larger army , 30 @,@ 000 strong infantry and 3 @,@ 000 cavalry , whilst his opponents numbered 20 @,@ 000 infantry and 2 @,@ 000 cavalry . Xenophon says that , having decided to fight , Epaminondas arranged the army into battle order , and then marched it in a column parallel to the Mantinean lines , so that it appeared that the army was marching elsewhere , and would not fight that day . Having reached a certain point in the march , he then had the army down arms , so it appeared they getting ready to camp . Xenophon suggests that " by so doing he caused among most of the enemy a relaxation of their mental readiness for fighting , and likewise a relaxation of their readiness as regards their array for battle " . The whole column , which had been marching right @-@ to @-@ left past the front of the Mantinean army then ' right @-@ faced ' , so that they were now in a battle line , facing the Mantineans . Epaminondas , who had been at the head of the column ( now the left wing ) , brought some companies of infantry from the extreme right wing , behind the battle line , to reinforce the left wing . By this , he recreated the strengthened left @-@ wing that the Thebes had fielded at Leuctra ( this time probably made up by all the Boeotians , and not just the Thebans as at Leuctra ) . On the wings he placed strong forces of cavalry strengthened by light @-@ infantry .

Epaminondas then gave the order to advance , catching the enemy off guard , and causing a furious scramble in the Mantinean camp to prepare for battle . The battle unfolded as Epaminondas had planned . The cavalry forces on the wings drove back the Athenian and Mantinean cavalry opposite them . Diodorus says that the Athenian cavalry on the Mantinean right wing , although not inferior in quality , could not withstand the missiles from the light @-@ troops that Epaminondas had placed among the Theban cavalry . Meanwhile , the Theban infantry advanced . Xenophon evocatively describes Epaminondas 's thinking : " [ he ] led forward his army prow on , like a trireme , believing that if he could strike and cut through anywhere , he would destroy the entire army of his adversaries . " As at Leuctra , the weakened right wing was ordered to hold back and avoid fighting . In the clash of infantry , the issue briefly hung in the balance , but then the Theban left @-@ wing broke through the Spartan line , and the entire enemy phalanx was put to flight . However , at the height of the battle , Epaminondas was mortally wounded by a Spartan , and died shortly thereafter . Following his death , the Thebes and allies made no effort to pursue the fleeing enemy ; a testament to Epaminondas 's centrality to the war effort .

Xenophon , who ends his history with the battle of Mantinea , says of the battle 's results :

When these things had taken place , the opposite of what all men believed would happen was brought to pass . For since well @-@ nigh all the people of Greece had come together and formed themselves in opposing lines , there was no one who did not suppose that if a battle were fought , those who proved victorious would be the rulers and those who were defeated would be their



subjects ; but the deity so ordered it that both parties set up a trophy as though victorious and neither tried to hinder those who set them up , that both gave back the dead under a truce as though victorious , and both received back their dead under a truce as though defeated , and that while each party claimed to be victorious , neither was found to be any better off , as regards either additional territory , or city , or sway , than before the battle took place ; but there was even more confusion and disorder in Greece after the battle than before .

= = Death = =

While pressing forward with the troops at Mantinea , Epaminondas was hit in the chest by a spear ( or , in some accounts , a sword or large knife ) . Cornelius Nepos suggests the Spartans were deliberately aiming at Epaminondas in the hope of killing him , and thereby demoralizing the Thebans . The enemy who struck the killing blow was variously identified as Anticrates , Machaerion , or Gryllus , son of Xenophon .

The spear broke , leaving the iron point in his body , and Epaminondas collapsed . The Thebans around him fought desperately to stop the Spartans taking possession of his body . When he was carried back to camp still living , he asked which side was victorious . When he was told that the Boeotians had won , he said " It is time to die . " Diodorus suggests that one of his friends exclaimed " You die childless , Epaminondas " and then burst into tears . To this Epaminondas is supposed to have replied " No , by Zeus , on the contrary I leave behind two daughters , Leuctra and Mantinea , my victories . " Cornelius Nepos , whose story is otherwise similar has the last words of Epaminondas as " I have lived long enough ; for I die unconquered . " When the spear point was withdrawn , Epaminondas quickly expired . In accordance with Greek custom , he was buried on the battlefield .

= = Assessments = =

= = = Character = = =

In matters of character , Epaminondas was above reproach in the eyes of the ancient historians who recorded his deeds . Contemporaries praised him for disdaining material wealth , sharing what he had with his friends , and refusing bribes . One of the last heirs of the Pythagorean tradition , he appears to have lived a simple and ascetic lifestyle even when his leadership had raised him to a position at the head of all Greece . Cornelius Nepos notes his incorruptibility , describing his rejection of a Persian ambassador who came to him with a bribe . These aspects of his character contributed greatly to his renown after his death .

Epaminondas never married and as such was subject to criticism from countrymen who believed he was duty @-@ bound to provide the country with the benefit of sons as great as himself . In response , Epaminondas said that his victory at Leuctra was a daughter destined to live forever . He is known , however , to have had several young male lovers , a standard pedagogic practice in ancient Greece , and one that Thebes in particular was famous for ; Plutarch records that the Theban lawgivers instituted the practice " to temper the manners and characters of the youth . " An anecdote told by Cornelius Nepos indicates that Epaminondas was intimate with a young man by the name of Micythus . Plutarch also mentions two of his beloveds ( eromenoi ) : Asopichus , who fought together with him at the battle of Leuctra , where he greatly distinguished himself ; and Caphisodorus , who fell with Epaminondas at Mantinea and was buried by his side .

= = = Military record = = =

Extant biographies of Epaminondas universally describe him as one of the most talented generals ever produced by the Greek city @-@ states . Even Xenophon , who fails to note his presence at Leuctra , says of his Mantinean campaign : " Now I for my part could not say that his campaign

proved fortunate ; yet of all possible deeds of forethought and daring the man seems to me to have left not one undone . " Diodorus is effusive in his praise for Epaminondas 's military record :

" For it seems to me that he surpassed his contemporaries ... in skill and experience in the art of war . For among the generation of Epaminondas were famous men : Pelopidas the Theban , Timotheus and Conon , also Chabrias and Iphicrates ... Agesilaus the Spartan , who belonged to a slightly older generation . Still earlier than these , in the times of the Medes and Persians , there were Solon , Themistocles , Miltiades , and Cimon , Myronides , and Pericles and certain others in Athens , and in Sicily Gelon , son of Deinomenes , and still others . All the same , if you should compare the qualities of these with the generalship and reputation of Epaminondas , you would find the qualities possessed by Epaminondas far superior " .

As a tactician , Epaminondas stands above every other general in Greek history ( unless the Macedonian kings Philip II and Alexander the Great are included ) , although modern historians have questioned his larger strategic vision . According to Richard A. Gabriel , his tactics " marked the beginning of the end of traditional Greek methods of war " . His innovative strategy at Leuctra allowed him to defeat the vaunted Spartan phalanx with a smaller force , and his decision to refuse his right flank was the first recorded instance of such a tactic . Many of the tactical innovations that Epaminondas implemented would also be used by Philip of Macedon , who in his youth spent time as a hostage in Thebes and may have learned directly from Epaminondas himself .

= = = Legacy = = =

In some ways Epaminondas dramatically altered the face of Greece during the 10 years in which he was the central figure of Greek politics . By the time of his death , Sparta had been humbled , Messenia freed , and the Peloponnese completely reorganized . In another respect , however , he left behind a Greece no different than that which he had found ; the bitter divides and animosities that had poisoned international relations in Greece for over a century remained as deep as or deeper than they had been before Leuctra . The brutal internecine warfare that had characterized the years from 432 BC onwards continued unabated until all the states involved were subjugated by Macedon .

At Mantinea , Thebes had faced down the combined forces of the greatest states of Greece , but the victory brought it no spoils . With Epaminondas removed from the scene , the Thebans returned to their more traditional defensive policy , and within a few years , Athens had replaced them at the pinnacle of the Greek political system . No Greek state ever again reduced Boeotia to the subjection it had known during the Spartan hegemony , but Theban influence faded quickly in the rest of Greece . Finally , at Chaeronea in 338 BC , the combined forces of Thebes and Athens , driven into each other 's arms for a desperate last stand against Philip of Macedon , were crushingly defeated , and Theban independence was put to an end . Three years later , heartened by a false rumor that Alexander the Great had been assassinated , the Thebans revolted ; Alexander squashed the revolt , then destroyed the city , slaughtering or enslaving all its citizens . A mere 27 years after the death of the man who had made it preeminent throughout Greece , Thebes was wiped from the face of the Earth , its 1 @, @ 000 @-@ year history ended in the space of a few days .

Epaminondas , therefore , is remembered both as a liberator and a destroyer . He was celebrated throughout the ancient Greek and Roman worlds as one of the greatest men of history . Cicero eulogized him as " the first man , in my judgement , of Greece , " and Pausanias records an honorary poem from his tomb :

By my counsels was Sparta shorn of her glory ,  
And holy Messene received at last her children .  
By the arms of Thebes was Megalopolis encircled with walls ,  
And all Greece won independence and freedom .

Epaminondas 's actions were certainly welcomed by the Messenians and others whom he assisted in his campaigns against the Spartans . Those same Spartans , however , had been at the center of resistance to the Persian invasions of the 5th century BC , and their absence was sorely felt at Chaeronea ; the endless warfare in which Epaminondas played a central role weakened the cities of

Greece until they could no longer hold their own against their neighbors to the north . As Epaminondas campaigned to secure freedom for the Boeotians and others throughout Greece , he brought closer the day when all of Greece would be subjugated by an invader . Victor Davis Hanson has suggested that Epaminondas may have planned for a united Greece composed of regional democratic federations , but even if this assertion is correct , no such plan was ever implemented . Simon Hornblower asserts that Thebes ' great legacy to fourth century and Hellenistic Greece was federalism , " a kind of alternative to imperialism , a way of achieving unity without force " , which " embodies a representative principle " .

For all his noble qualities , Epaminondas was unable to transcend the Greek city @-@ state system , with its endemic rivalry and warfare , and thus left Greece more war @-@ ravaged but no less divided than he found it . Hornblower asserts that " it is a sign of Epaminondas ' political failure , even before the battle of Mantinea , that his Peloponnesian allies fought to reject Sparta rather than because of the positive attractions of Thebes " . On the other hand , Cawkwell concludes that " Epaminondas must be judged not in relation to these inevitable limitations of Boeotian power . To have established the power of Boeotia and ended the Spartan domination of the Peloponnese was the most and the best that a Boeotian could have done . "

= = = Ancient sources = = =

= = = Modern sources = = =