CHAPTER SEVEN

THE BOIOTIAN WAR (378–371 BC)

A. THEBES AND THE DEFENSE OF BOIOTIA (378–375 BC)

Faced with a war of greater proportions than they had originally anticipated, the Spartans prepared for it first by refining their military organization. They now transformed the levy used before the Olynthian campaign into a formal system of muster and deployment. In place of the earlier conscription of 10,000 for that expedition, the Spartans divided themselves and their allies into ten territorial groups, each expected to produce a certain quota of infantry and cavalry. The allies again possessed the opportunity to fill their ranks by hiring mercenaries. The evidence strongly points to each of these divisions being at least nominally equal in numbers. The Lakedaimonians formed the first unit, which at full muster stood 6000 strong. The Arkadians constituted the second and third units, which provided at least 5000 troops. The Eleians composed the fourth with 3000 troops, but the strength of the Achaian fifth is unknown. The sixth, filled by the Corinthians and Megarians, stood at least 3000 strong. The seventh unit, one of the strongest, included the Sikyonians, who could field 1500 combatants, the Phleiasians 5000, and the people of the Akte 3000. The Akarnanians made up the eighth unit, their numbers also irrecoverable. Equally uncertain is the strength of the ninth, composed of the Phokians and Lokrians, the possibility of whose sending 3000 is at least made plausible on the analogy of the Euboians. The Olynthians and the Chalkidians of Thrace, who counted some 3400 in 382, formed the tenth. Since five certainly and three others probably of the ten units could marshal 3000 men, that was probably the official strength of each unit, which combined units formed the entire pool of 30,000 foot and horse. In practice, however, the Spartans seem to have preferred to call up armies of 10,000 infantry and 1000 cavalry, which could be manageably commanded and feasibly supplied. This reform spread the burden of military service rather equitably among the allies without necessarily demanding that the full levy of them be summoned for each campaign. The
Spartans supposedly began to treat their allies with greater consideration, but that seems the result of Kleombrotos’ influence rather than Agesilaos’.

In 378 the Spartans had determined the direction and had largely put into place the means of pursuing their strategy for the Boiotian campaign. They already held Plataia at the northern foot of Mt. Kithairon and Thespiai not far removed from Thebes. They may also already have installed a garrison at Orchomenos, as they had during the Corinthian War, and certainly by 377 they held Tanagra with a force. In them they installed tyrannical governments such as that in Thebes between 382 and 378, which Spartan garrisons upheld. The flight of democrats to Thebes made their task the easier. So, the conflict between Sparta and Thebes now included the element of tyranny against democracy. To many in Boiotia the Spartans came more as invaders than as liberators from the Thebans. That withal, even though the Spartans had almost effortlessly hemmed Thebes within its plains, they had still failed totally to blockade it. The routes south from Thebes through Eleutherai, Panakton, and Phyle still linked it with Attika, and Spartan occupation of Thespiai could only hinder, but not close, communications with Haliartos and Chaironeia. The roads to Anthedon and Larymna remained open, which allowed access to the Aegean. For all that, Thebes found its situation precarious, and its need to maintain direct contact with Athens became essential. Sparta enjoyed nearly all of the military advantages. The Spartans determined to crush Thebes by direct attack, which meant either victory in the field or successful siege. Theban determination and military prowess, together with substantial Athenian aid, would daunt both options.

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