

Subdivisions of the Boeotian Confederacy after 379 B.C.

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THE GREEK STATES of considerable size, both bigger cities and federal *ethnos* states, needed a rational structure to administer their territories and populations. Reasonable divisions of citizen body and/or land were necessary for military, taxation, and governmental purposes. Often the division into *phylai* or districts was expressed in nearly arithmetic formulae, and states were so proud of their division schemes that their association with certain numbers could rise to become the national emblem.¹ For Greek federal states it is even postulated that the main milestone in passing from the primordial tribal state to the developed federal state was the introduction of proportional district division.²

In Greek states the number of districts could hardly be accidental, and we may safely assume that it served to reflect military potential above all. The same should be expected for the most successful Greek league of the fourth century B.C., the Boeotian League of Pelopidas and Epaminondas.³

¹ For how indispensable was the existence of internal structure for the development of the polis see O. Murray, "Cities of Reason," in *Greek City from Homer to Alexander* (Oxford 1990) 1–25, esp. 12–15. Proverbial connotations of political divisions within the polis are attested for Corinth (*Suda* π 225 πάντα ὀκτώ, "all things in eights"); for local traditions concerning numbers of civic subdivisions of Greek states see N. F. Jones, *Public Organization in Ancient Greece* (Philadelphia 1987).

² T. Corsten, *Vom Stamm zum Bund. Gründung und territoriale Organisation griechischer Bundesstaaten* (Munich 1999) 241.

³ Indeed, in the absence of positive evidence for the fourth century, one

The fifth-century Boeotian League, portrayed in a long constitutional digression of the Oxyrhynchus historian (19.1–4), consisted of eleven districts, each providing one boeotarch, sixty councilors, one thousand infantry, and one hundred cavalry. In the course of that League’s history, the Thebans, who initially had two boeotarchs, took over two additional districts, which previously had belonged to Plataea and a few minor settlements linked with Plataea by *sympoliteia*. The Oxyrhynchus historian juxtaposes the past relation of Plataea and its neighbours with their later subjection to Thebes through *synteleia*.⁴

The verb συντελεῖν and the noun συντέλεια recur often in the ancient authors when referring to the structure of the Boeotian League, in both contemporary orators (Isocr. *Plat.* 14.8 and 9) and later historians (Diod. 15.38.3–4, 15.50.4 Θηβαῖοι γὰρ μόνοι, τὴν Βοιωτίαν ὑπὸ μίαν ἄγοντες συντέλειαν “the Thebans only, who rule Boeotia under one syntely,” 15.70.2). It has been quite plausibly argued that the league of Pelopidas and Epaminondas was just one *synteleia* centred on Thebes, and that the district division into *synteleiai* known from the Oxyrhynchus historian had been abolished.⁵

expert on Boeotian history postulated that after 379 the Thebans wanted new districts to emulate the old fifth-century ones: P. Roesch, *Thespiens et la confédération béotienne* (Paris 1965) 44.

⁴ *Hell. Oxy.* 19.3: κ[αὶ τὰ μὲν] ἴδια διετέλουν οὕτω διοικούμενοι, τὸ δὲ τῶ[ν Βοιωτῶν τοῦτον ἦν τὸν τρόπον συντεταγμένον. [καθ’ ἕν]δεκα μέρη διήρητο πάντες οἱ τὴν χώραν οἰκοῦν[τες,] καὶ τούτων ἕκαστον ἓνα παρείχετο βοιωτάρχον [οὕτω·] Θηβαῖοι μὲν τέτταρα<ς> συνεβάλλοντο, δύο μὲν ὑπὲ[ρ τῆς] πόλεως, δύο δὲ ὑπὲρ Πλαταιέων καὶ Σκόλου καὶ Ἐρ[υ]θρῶ[ν] καὶ Σκαφῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων χωρίων τῶν πρότερον μὲν ἐκείνοις συμπολιτευομένων, τότε δὲ συντελούντων εἰς τὰς Θήβας, δύο δὲ παρείχοντο βοιωτάρχας Ὀρχομένιοι καὶ Ὑσιαῖοι, δύο δὲ Θεσπιεῖς σὺν Εὐτρήσει καὶ Θίσβαις, ἓνα δὲ Ταναγραῖοι, καὶ πάλιν ἕτερον Ἀλιάρτιοι καὶ Λεβαδεῖς καὶ Κορωνεῖς, ὃν ἔπεμπε κατὰ μέρος ἕκαστη τῶν πόλεων, τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον ἐβάδιζεν ἐξ Ἀκραφνίου καὶ Κοπῶν καὶ Χαίρωνείας.

⁵ S. C. Bakhuizen, “Thebes and Boeotia in the Fourth Century B.C.,” *Phoenix* 48 (1994) 307–330; H. Beck, *Polis und Koinon. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Struktur der griechischen Bundesstaaten im 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Stuttgart

On the other hand, the Thebans insisted upon naming their state the Boeotian (League). For Xenophon, who never alludes to the *synteleia* of the Thebans,⁶ the most important Thebes-related issue is a recurrent dispute over the right names for the Thebans/Boeotians.⁷ Finally, it is unlikely that *synteleia* was an official name of any kind for the Boeotian League: it is never attested in this sense in inscriptions, and in the context of interstate politics the word itself had rather unpleasant connotations.⁸

There is some uncertainty about how many boeotarchs were elected after the uprising of 379 B.C., as the earliest undoubtedly full lists are in two proxeny decrees of the Confederacy in the 360s (*IG VII* 2407, 2408, both naming seven boeotarchs).⁹ We

1997) 208–210, and “Thebes, the Boiotian League, and the ‘Rise of Federalism’ in Fourth Century Greece,” in P. A. Bernardini (ed.), *Presenza e funzione della città di Tebe nella cultura greca* (Pisa/Rome 2000) 331–344.

⁶ Still, Xenophon knows the word *συντελεῖν*, meaning “to belong to (a corporate body)”: *Hell.* 7.4.13, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο οὐ πολλῶ ὕστερον καταλαμβάνουσιν οἱ Ἡλεῖοι Λασιῶνα, τὸ μὲν παλαιὸν ἑαυτῶν ὄντα, ἐν δὲ τῷ παρόντι συντελοῦντα εἰς τὸ Ἀρκαδικόν, “not long after this the Eleans seized Lasion, which in ancient times had been theirs, but at present belonged to the Arcadian League.

⁷ *Hell.* 5.1.32, οἱ δὲ Θηβαῖοι ἠξίουσιν ὑπὲρ πάντων Βοιωτῶν ὀμνύναι, “the Thebans claimed the right to take the oath in the name of all the Boeotians”; 6.3.19, ἀπογραψάμενοι δ’ ἐν ταῖς ὁμομοκίαις πόλεσι καὶ οἱ Θηβαῖοι, προσελθόντες πάλιν τῇ ὕστεραίᾳ οἱ πρέσβεις αὐτῶν ἐκέλευον μεταγράψαι ἀντὶ Θηβαίων Βοιωτοῦς ὁμομοκότας, “the Thebans also signed their names among the cities which had sworn, but on the following day their ambassadors came in again and demanded that the writing be changed to read that ‘the Boeotians’ instead of ‘the Thebans’ had sworn.”

⁸ H. Beck and P. Funke, “An Introduction to Federalism in Greek Antiquity,” in *Federalism in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge 2015) 15; J. Rzepka, *Greek Federal Terminology* (Gdansk 2017) 55–59.

⁹ Diod. 15.52.1 suggests that there were seven boeotarchs (Epaminondas as *strategos* and six advisory boeotarchs) before Leuctra in 371. It is most probable that officially Epaminondas did not play a special role in the league’s staff, cf. P. J. Stylianou, *A Historical Commentary on Diodorus Siculus Book XV* (Oxford 1998) 389, and he might be the seventh boeotarch, not the general

do not know how, by whom, and from whom the boeotarchs of the fourth-century Confederacy were appointed. It seems likely, however, that they were elected from all the Boeotians during the autumn meetings at Thebes, and that the executive power of the Confederacy was entirely or almost entirely in Theban hands.¹⁰ Here one has to take into consideration remarks of Hans Beck, that there was no place for districts after 379, since there were no suitable district capitals, as older regional centres had been reduced almost to nonentities (Thespieae, Tanagra, Orchomenus) or destroyed (Plataea) by the Thebans.¹¹

Still, there had to be a division of the league for military purposes, enabling officials (the boeotarchs) to conscript armies divided into thousand-strong *taxeis*¹² and to regulate financial

(or the general was at that time the most important of the board of the boeotarchs, cf. Diod. 15.53.3 and Nepos *Pel.* 4.2). On the organization and prerogatives of the board of boeotarchs see J. Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony, 371–362 B.C.* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1980) 24–31 (holding that the original number of boeotarchs in 379 was four, and that there were four Theban representatives and three non-Theban officials in a later period); Roesch, *Études béotiennes* 287–290.

¹⁰ For the districts see esp. Corsten, *Vom Stamm zum Bund* 34–38.

¹¹ Beck, *Polis und Koinon* 102–104 (esp. n.112 for earlier scholars rejecting the existence of districts in the league of Pelopidas and Epaminondas). Cf. now H. Beck and A. Ganter, “Boiotia and the Boiotian League,” in *Federalism in Greek Antiquity* 148–149.

¹² For units of 1000 infantry per district in leagues see J. Rzepka, *The Aetolian Elite Warriors and Fifth-Century Roots of the Hellenistic Confederacy* (Warsaw 2009) 20–31. One should note too some problems with the composition of the Boeotian forces before Leuctra. Diodorus 15.52.2 says that Epaminondas conscripted “all Thebans of military age and the other Boeotians who were willing and qualified ... numbering in all not more than six thousand” (transl. C. L. Sherman). It is disputable whether that number was all soldiers or the infantry alone (cf. Stylianou, *Commentary* 389–390). Frontinus *Strat.* 4.2.6 has 4000 Thebans alone (including 400 cavalry), but this is clearly a manipulation of army numbers by the victorious side in order to impress the Greek public (a core small army beating a larger opponent). What seems clear from Diodorus is a partial failure of the pan-Boeotian conscription.

questions. Any somewhat large territorial state in Greek antiquity needed internal division of this kind.

Here I would like to come back to the number of boeotarchs we know from 360s onwards and the number of conspiritors who overthrew the pro-Spartan regime in 379, according to Xenophon: in both cases it was seven, and this corresponds to the vision of Thebes “of seven gates” in the Greek collective imagination, as well as to the seven defenders and attackers of the city in the epic Theban cycle.¹³

One has to agree with Beck that viewing some cities as candidates for capitals of districts cannot work in the circumstances of the league after 379 (except for Thebes itself). Yet it is difficult to build anything on a passage of Dio Chrysostom (45.13) comparing Epaminondas and Theseus, as having synoecized Boeotia into Thebes and Attica into Athens.¹⁴ Theseus, of course, was commonly believed to have unified Attica around Athens and its acropolis. But he also was believed to be responsible for turning the original cities of Attica into the trittyes (thus, districts of new greater Athens), and generally for introducing democratic institutions in Athens.

The post-379 Boeotian League as reconstructed by Backhuisen and Beck would be unique, a Greek state without internal subdivisions. It would be unique in Boeotian history as well, for the Boeotians probably had districts in Archaic times,¹⁵ certainly relied upon eleven districts in the fifth century, and upon seven districts in the late fourth century and the early Hellenistic age.¹⁶ In this latter phase, then, even the number of boeotarchs remained unchanged at seven, as in the league of Epaminondas and Pelopidas. Apparently, after the destruction of Thebes, the

¹³ J. Rzepka, “Plutarch on the Theban Uprising of 379 B.C. and the *Boiotarchoi* of the Boeotian Confederacy under the Principate,” *Historia* 59 (2010) 115–118.

¹⁴ Beck, in *Presenza e funzione* 333.

¹⁵ P. Siewert, “Die Drittgliederung der elf boiotischen Militärdistrikte im Vergleich mit der kleisthenischen Trittyenordnung Attikas,” in *La Béotie antique* (Paris 1985) 297–300.

¹⁶ Beck and Ganter, in *Federalism in Greek Antiquity* 153.

constitution had been altered, but the administrative needs (command of the army, etc.) remained similar.

I would argue, therefore, that there was both a need and a place for civic subdivisions in the Boeotian League after 379. A novelty of the internal organisation was its concentration on the city of Thebes (*pace* H. Beck), which gave some justification to hostile charges that the Thebans had reduced the remaining Boeotians to one *synteleia*. As Epaminondas was praised as Boeotia's Theseus, his districts must have contributed more to unifying Boeotia than to preserving the country's diversity. Thus, the districts of Epaminondas were far less natural than previously. They were not traditional political or geographical entities, but mere recruitment and taxation units¹⁷ arranged in a very sophisticated way.¹⁸ While a link of the seven districts and the seven gates of the city of Thebes of Greek tradition seems likely, the structure (borders, continuity of territory, etc.) of such districts is more of an enigma. They might simply have been territorially non-continuous, arbitrarily arranged combinations of various parts of Boeotia (thus resembling Cleisthenic *phylai*)¹⁹

¹⁷ An obvious analogy to the proposed districts concentrated on Thebes are Athenian trittyes of Cleisthenes, equally unhistorical entities designed to mix Athenians from distant parts of Attica politically and for military purposes (e.g. minimizing the impact of war casualties on neighbourhoods of the country).

¹⁸ A degree of sophistication and mathematical reasoning behind that division would fit well into the picture of Epaminondas the Pythagorean, on which see P. Vidal-Naquet, "Epaminondas the Pythagorean, or the Tactical Problem of Right and Left," in *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World* (Baltimore 1986) 61–82.

¹⁹ Admittedly, Cleisthenic *phylai* were not centered on Athens to that degree. Still, one can argue that in ancient Greece any new division of a state's territory demanded an explanation on the symbolic level, i.e. on the level of myth. At Athens *phylai* were linked to Attic heroes. In Boeotia, the Cadmea's seven gates were recognizable symbols, known by name to the Thebans and the fellow-Boeotians, as well as to other Greeks through Aeschylus and Euripides (with obvious alterations in exact names recurring here and there): see D. W. Berman, *Myth, Literature, and the Creation of the*

or they might have extended from the city walls through the environs of Thebes to the frontiers of Boeotia, like pie-slices (thus more geometrical and Pythagorean in nature).

In spite of uncertainty about the scope and shape of districts, the new division into seven as it happens, or perhaps quite deliberately, mirrored the Boeotian military strength better than the old structure, especially if we consider that it was based on a new type of citizen soldier, known under the generic term *epilektoi* (in all Greek states fourth-century armies of *epilektoi* were considerably less numerous than earlier full levies, which dominated fifth-century battlefields).²⁰ In the new division the exterritorial nature of Cadmea as the acropolis of all Boeotia was underscored by placing there the Sacred Band, an old elite unit with new tasks and new legends. The citizens of the remaining Boeotian cities, incorporated into the new subdivisions regardless their traditional boundaries and deprived of units of their own in the army, might feel well ἀπόλιδες.²¹

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Topography of Thebes (Cambridge 2015) 77–91, 151–152, 162.

²⁰ V. Alonso and K. Freitag, “Prolegomena zur Erforschung der Bedeutung der Eliteeinheiten im archaischen und klassischen Griechenland,” *Gerión* 19 (2001) 199–219; Rzepka, *The Aetolian Elite Warriors* 23.

²¹ As the Thespians complained in Athens in 371, underscoring that they had to wage wars of the Thebans: Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.1. Cf. Roesch, *Thespies* 45.

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