

Athens/Sparta bipolarity in Xenophon's *Hellenika*

La bipolaridad Atenas/Esparta en las *Helénicas* de Jenofonte

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Abstract

The article traces the reflections found in the *Hellenika* on the theme of Athens/Sparta bipolarity, with the intention of illustrating Xenophon's interest in this international arrangement of the Greek world and of emphasizing its repercussions in Xenophon's historiographical project.

Keywords: Xenophon's *Hellenika*, Greece, Fourth-century BC, balance of power.

Resumen

El artículo rastrea las reflexiones encontradas en las *Helénicas* sobre el tema de la bipolaridad Atenas/Esparta, con la intención de ilustrar el interés de Jenofonte por esta disposición internacional del mundo griego y de subrayar sus repercusiones en el proyecto historiográfico de Jenofonte.

Palabras-clave: *Helénicas* de Jenofonte, Grecia, siglo IV a.C., balance de poder.

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Bipolarity, that is, the division of spheres of influence between Sparta and Athens on the basis of the nature of the two powers, one land-based and the other sea-oriented, had been the criterion by which in the course of the Pentecontaetia the Greek world had sought to secure a stable international balance. The adoption of this criterion, which began in 478 (not without some resistance in those who continued to aspire to a full hegemony for their city), was successful, despite some moments of crisis. The most significant was the diplomatic incident that led Athens, at the time of the Third Messenian War, to abandon its alliance with Sparta in order to conclude one with Argives and Thessalians (Thuc. 1.102)². Argives and Thessalians were continental Greeks, and therefore Athens should have kept away from them. But after several years of creeping conflict, in 447/6 the so-called Peace of Thirty Years reintroduced the bipolar perspective: that it worked for a few years is shown by the refusal of the Corinthians, though great enemies of Athens, to support intervention on behalf of rebellious Samos in 441, on the argument that each had a right to punish its own allies (Thuc. 1.40.5)³.

Such a perspective was supported in Athens by Kimon, in Sparta by Hetoimaridas⁴. It was not shared, in Athens, by the democrats, oriented toward opposition to Sparta, such as Themistocles; in Sparta, by those who did not intend to support the idea of a Sparta abandoning the struggle for hegemony, such as the regent Pausanias⁵. The division of spheres of influence was, however, an overall successful choice. This is precisely why the model remained very relevant, even when the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War, the unique hegemony of Sparta and the rise of the so-called “third forces” such as Argos, Corinth and Thebes made it anachronistic⁶.

Among those who strove to reenact the bipolar model, believing it still relevant, were politicians, such as Kallistratos of Aphidna⁷, and intellectuals, such as Xenophon. There is a red thread running through the *Hellenika* that testifies to Xenophon’s great interest in this solution of international politics: he was so convinced he could reactualize it, that he did not grasp new perspectives as the role of Thebes, Argos, and Corinth, which no longer allowed for the imagination of a bipolar Greece.

² See Hornblower 1991: 158-160.

³ See Hornblower 1991: 83-84.

⁴ On Kimon see Zaccarini 2017; on Hetoimaridas, Vattuone 2008: 131-152.

⁵ On the politics of Pausanias and Themistocles, see Sordi, 2002 = 1976: 341-360. On Pausanias, see Nafissi, 2004: 53-90. On Themistocles, see Piccirilli 1987; Piccirilli 1996.

⁶ On the concept of “third forces”, see Sordi 2002 = 1991.

⁷ On Kallistratos, see Hochschulz 2007, with previous bibliography.

1.

The speech of the Theban ambassadors in 395 (Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.8-15), intended to gain Athens' adherence to the anti-Spartan alliance that was being formed in view of the Corinthian War, emphasizes a full opposition between Athens and Sparta⁸. The Thebans flash to the Athenians the recovery of hegemony from an anti-Spartan perspective:

We all know, Athenians, that you would like to recover the empire (*arche*) you once possessed. (*Hell.* 3.5.10)⁹.

The enterprise might succeed, say the Thebans, if the Athenians came to the aid of the Greeks suffering injustice by the Spartans (*adikoumenoi*, *Hell.* 3.5.10 and 14). Even, the Thebans foreshadow for Athens a hegemony encompassing not only the maritime sector, but also the Peloponnesian and even Persia:

Is it not clear that if you returned to the leadership of the cities openly suffering injustice, you would become more powerful than ever before? Why, when you ruled, your hegemony extended only to the maritime cities, whereas now it would include everyone: us, the Peloponnesians, those who were already subject to you in the past, and even the King with his immense power (*Hell.* 5.5.14).

This is clearly not a proposal for a return to bipolarity, quite the contrary: such a solution would have ruled out Thebes, and hatred for Sparta was too deeply rooted in the Thebans (or rather in the faction in power in 395, i.e. that of Ismenias¹⁰, which was pro-Athenian) to allow them to imagine a Greece divided between Athens and Sparta. It is likely that Xenophon considered this as opportunistic as other contents of the Thebans' speech. It is enough to prove it that there is a certain irony in the justification that Xenophon puts in the mouth of the Theban ambassador, at the opening of the speech (*Hell.* 3.5.8), regarding Thebes' behavior toward the Athenians defeated in 404: he splits the responsibilities of the Thebans, who refused to intervene alongside the Spartans on behalf of the Thirty Tyrants, from those of the individual Theban delegate in the Peloponnesian League's *synedrion*, who called for the destruction of Athens; the argument is very similar to that which Thucydides (3.62.3-4) attributes to the Theban orators who in the "Platæan debate" justify

⁸ On speeches in Xenophon, see Pontier 2001; Baragwanath 2017. On Theban ambassadors' speech, see V. Gray 1989: 107-112; Krentz (ed.) 1995: 198-200; Tuci 2019: 35, 38, 40 -44, 48.

⁹ Cf. 3.5.2, a corrupt passage in which Xenophon seems to attribute to the Athenians the desire to recover the *arche*: see Krentz (ed.) 1995: 98 and 199.

¹⁰ On Ismenias' party, see Bearzot 2008: 206-213. On the testimony offered by the *Hellenika Oxyrhynchia* on the internal situation in Thebes in the early fourth century, see the recent annotated edition of Occhipinti 2022.

themselves to the Spartans about Thebes' medism¹¹. However, the recovery of naval hegemony by Athens was a necessary precondition for imagining a possible bipolar balance: the subject is well found, and Xenophon could not ignore it.

2.

The first episode of rapprochement between Athens and Sparta of which Xenophon informs us is the peace of 375 (Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.1). It was, for Xenophon, a bilateral (and not a "common") peace¹²: Athens, concerned about the growth of Thebes' power and financial problems, wished to end the war, and sent an embassy to Sparta and concluded peace¹³.

The treaty, which Nepos (*Tim.* 2.2), unlike Xenophon, traces back to a Spartan, not an Athenian, initiative, according to the biographer ratified Athenian hegemony over the sea:

The Spartans ceased the continual contention and of their own volition granted the Athenians the primacy of maritime empire (*imperii maritimi principatum*) and established peace on the condition that the Athenians were masters of the sea.

Therefore, specifically, Sparta recognized the existence of the Second Naval League founded in 377, and set the stage for a return to the criterion of the division of spheres of influence. This division is expressly referred to by Diodorus (15.38.4):

The Spartans and the Athenians, constantly fighting for hegemony, yielded one to the other, one being deemed worthy of commanding the other on land, the other on the sea (οἱ μὲν τῆς κατὰ γῆν, οἱ δὲ τῆς κατὰ θάλατταν ἀρχῆς ἄξιοι κρινόμενοι)¹⁴.

Due to the recognition of Athens' role that it entailed, peace was celebrated with the erection of the Altar of Peace and the statue of Eirene in the *agora*, made by Kephisodotos (Isocr. *Antid.* 109-110; Philoc. *FGrHist* 328 F151; Nep. *Tim.* 2.2)¹⁵.

According to Diodoros (15.38.1-2) the peace of 375 was instead the first renewal of the common peace of 387/6. The initiative is traced back to

¹¹ As noted by Krentz (ed.) 1995: 198-199.

¹² On Xenophon's testimony on the peace of 375/4, see Sordi 2022 = 1951: 324-326.

¹³ See Momigliano 1966 = 1936; Jehne 1994: 57-64.

¹⁴ See Stylianou 1998: 328.

¹⁵ See Monaco 2008. For the debate on commissioning see Bianco 2007: 24; Marginesu 2016: 45-52.

King Artaxerxes, who intended to wage war against Egypt and counted on the availability of Greek mercenaries once the Greeks were free from internal wars. He therefore sent ambassadors to Greece to invite the cities to conclude a common peace (*koine eirene*). Diodoros then underlines the enthusiastic reception of the proposal by the Greeks (*ἄσμένως*), the terms of the agreement, the speeches of Kallistratos and Epaminondas, and the exclusion of the Thebans from the peace; in 15.39 he adds a series of remarks on the valor of the Thebans, their aspiration for hegemony, and the ability of their leaders, among whom Pelopidas, Gorgidas, and Epaminondas are mentioned; the latter's personal qualities, in particular, are warmly praised (followed by the mention of the resounding victory at Leuktra against Kleombrotos' army). The attidographer Philochoros also refers to King's initiative (Philoc. *FGrHist* 328 F151: δύναιτο δ' ἄν και ἑτέρας ἀπὸ βασιλέως εἰρήνης, ἦν ἄσμένως προσήκοντο οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι), we find here the same adverb *ἄσμένως* used by Diodorus to signal the enthusiasm, not so much of the Greeks as of the Athenians¹⁶. The piece of information regarding the King's involvement seems to be confirmed by the fact that the following year Artaxerxes actually began the war against Egypt (Diod. 15.41), assuming that Diodoros' distribution of facts is correct.

But something, in fact, does not add up in Diodoros' account: the mention of a speech by Kallistratos, the exclusion of the Thebans from the peace, and the praise of the Boeotians refer to the peace of 371, the outcome of a congress held in Sparta, to which we shall return. The fact that Diodoros (15.50.4) recounts the events of 375 and 371 in very similar terms, including lexically as well as in terms of overall framing, raises the doubt that we are dealing with one of the usual Diodoros' duplicates and that there is therefore confusion, with regard to some details, between the peace of 375 and the peace of 371¹⁷. Diodoros himself seems to realize of problem constituted by the perfect overlapping of the two accounts: in 15.39.3 he refers to the later treatment and seems to regard the account of 15.38-39 as a kind of anticipation, while in 15.50.4 seems to regard the peace of 371 as a repetition of the previous one ("seeing the Greeks in turmoil *again*"; "according to the agreements *already* made"; "remaining excluded from the agreements *as before*"). This could underline Diodoros' awareness of the anomaly constituted by the entirely similar presentation of the two diplomatic phases.

Xenophon's silence would lead one to place the King's initiative among these confusions: the presence of this piece of information in Philochoros could trace the confusion back to Diodoros' source (Ephoros?)¹⁸? However, the question remains open.

¹⁶ See the commentary on the fragment by Jones 2016.

¹⁷ Lauffer 1959. Stylianou 1998: 321-326, think rather of a clumsy synthesis of Ephoros account.

¹⁸ On the involvement of the King in 375/4, admitted by Sordi 1951: 320-321. On Ephoros and his relation to Diodoros, see Parmeggiani 2011: 349-394.

The agreement quickly foundered because of Timotheos' intervention in Zakynthos in favor of the democrats (Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.2ff.; Diod. 15.45.2)¹⁹.

The complex affair of the peace of 375 brings up the issue of responsibility for the initiative (attributed to Athens by Xenophon, to Sparta by Nepos, to the King of Persia by Diodoros); the issue of the division of spheres of influence emerges clearly from Diodoros and Nepos (although in partially different form)²⁰, but is not as evident in Xenophon, although a trace of this issue is found in the consideration of the agreement as a bilateral peace and in the emphasis on Athens' anti-Theban sentiments²¹. These sentiments appear to be shared by Athens and Sparta in Diodoros' account (15.38.4), which closes mentioning their intolerance toward Thebes as a "third force"²²:

As a result, they [Athens and Sparta] resented the claim of hegemony by a third contender, and sought to detach the Boeotian cities from the Theban confederation.

3.

In the summer of 371 a congress was held in Sparta to negotiate general peace²³. There is no doubt that this was a common peace: Diodoros (15.50-51) speaks insistently of *koine eirene*.

The King's initiative, recalled by Diodoros (15.50.4), has not convinced all interpreters²⁴. However, it should be noted that Kallistratos, in his speech (Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.12), says that at the time of the congress of 371 Antalkidas was in Persia dealing with the King. The royal initiative also seems confirmed by Dionysios of Halicarnassos (*Lys.* 12), who places under the archon Alkisthenes (372/1) a peace sworn by the Athenians, the Spartans and the King.

Xenophon's account devotes some space to these negotiations, bringing out especially the role of Athens. The city, by breaking away from Thebes, was on its way to rapprochement with Sparta, as desired by moderate circles and Xenophon himself; moreover, it was preparing to replace its former rival as guarantor of peace and, therefore, as potential hegemon of Greece²⁵. Xenophon

¹⁹ Bianco 2007: 23-29.

²⁰ Although Lauffer 1959: 336 ff. considers the issue of the division of spheres of influence still inactial at this time.

²¹ See Riedinger 1991: 152-154; for Xenophon's overall attitude toward Thebes, see pp. 172-190. See also Sordi 1951: 303 ff.; Riedinger 1989: 5-8. For Xenophon's sources on Thebes Riedinger 1993: 523-533.

²² The converging interests of Sparta and Athens in this regard are underscored by Mosley 1972: 312-318.

²³ See Jehne 1994: 65-74; Bearzot 2004: 93-107.

²⁴ See Ryder 1965: 126-130. *Contra* Stylianou 1998: 382-384.

²⁵ On Xenophon's position on this issue see Sordi 1951: 316-320; Gray 1989: 123-131; Riedinger 1991: 197-206; Tuplin 1993: 101-110; Dillery 1995: 241-249.

focuses on the debate among the Athenian ambassadors, reporting the opposing speeches of Autokles, a member of the pro-Theban democratic faction led by Aristophon²⁶, and Kallistratos (*Hell.* 6.3.1 ff.), to which must be added that of Kallias, of lesser political interest because of its generically conciliatory, panhellenic, and pacifist tones²⁷.

Autokles' speech²⁸, which is very harsh toward the Spartans, accuses them of being in patent contradiction on the issue of autonomy:

You always say, 'Cities must be autonomous,' but you are the greatest obstacle to autonomy, because you require your allied cities first and foremost to follow you on whatever expedition you lead them on. Well, how do you reconcile this with autonomy? You make enemies without even consulting your allies, whom you then claim to lead against them. Thus these whom you call autonomous are often forced to march against cities with which they are on excellent terms (*Hell.* 6.3.7).

Autokles reiterates the validity of the anti-Spartan and pro-Theban policy followed by Athens in recent years.

Instead, Kallistratos delivers a speech urging both Athens and Sparta to self-criticism toward their imperialistic tendencies and the exercise of restraint, and concludes in favor of a return to the division of spheres of influence:

All the cities are either on your side or ours; in every city, some side with Sparta and others with Athens. If, therefore, we become friends, on whose side should we expect danger? By land who would be able to harm us, if you are our friends? And by sea who would be able to harm you, if we are in your favor? (*Hell.* 6.3.14).

By asserting that Sparta and Athens must become friends in order to return "to be greater in Greece than in the past" (*Hell.* 6.3.17), Kallistratos re-proposes the idea of Kimon, who had identified in the division of power spheres a guarantee of sufficient prosperity for the two cities that constituted a point of reference for continental and conservative Greece on the one hand and maritime and democratic Greece on the other²⁹.

Xenophon thus focuses his account exclusively on the relationship between Sparta and Athens, which is what interests him most. But other issues were also discussed at the congress: in particular, the *status* of the Boeotian cities. Sources other than Xenophon, such as Diodoros (15.38.3: as mentioned above, the passage refers to the peace of 375 but also contains aspects referable

²⁶ On Aristophon see. Whitehead 1986.

²⁷ See Mosley 1962: 41-46; Ryder 1963; Gray 1989: 123-131; Schepens 2001.

²⁸ On Autokles' speech see Gray 1989: 123-131; Riedinger 1991: 149-152.

²⁹ On Kallistratos' speech, see Gray 1989: 123-131.

to 371) and Plutarch (*Ages.* 27.4 – 28.1-2), inform us of a bitter clash between Agesilaos and Epaminondas on the issue of autonomy³⁰. Both accounts come from a tradition alternative to Xenophon, more interested in Thebes, probably to be identified with Kallisthenes of Olynthos: his *Hellenika* were characterized by a consistent anti-Spartan tendency and antipathy for Agesilaos, use of Boeotian sources and had a significant interest in the federal states and were used both by Ephoros, Diodoros' source, and by Theopompos, quoted along with Kallisthenes by Plutarch³¹.

In fact, the Thebans tried to take advantage of the Panhellenic congress to insistently demand recognition of the legitimacy of the Boeotian *koinon* as far as it pertained to respect for autonomy; but they met with firm resistance from Agesilaos. At the time of the ratification of the treaty the contrast latent between Sparta and Thebes since 386 (*Xen. Hell.* 5.1.32-33) exploded in all its gravity (*Hell.* 6.3.18-20). The Spartans swore for themselves and their allies; the Athenians, consistently with Aristotle's decree, swore only for themselves, leaving the allies to do so separately. The Thebans asked to sign as Boeotians, thus representing the entire Boeotian League. Agesilaos refused and the Thebans remained excluded from the common peace³².

Xenophon's account gives the impression of being somewhat reticent and is mainly concerned with emphasizing the fairness of the Athenians. As far as the Thebans are concerned, the historian merely reports the consequence of the clash with Agesilaos, namely the exclusion from the peace, but gives no details about the content of the debate between Agesilaos and the Thebans, represented on this occasion by Epaminondas³³. This is well understood in light of the fact that Xenophon focuses the entire debate, from the Athenian perspective, on overcoming the contrasts between Sparta and Athens and discussing the parties' faults in the context of the problem of poleic imperialism, obscuring other aspects³⁴.

It is perhaps worth briefly recovering from alternative sources some aspect of the 371 debate. Diodoros (15.38.3) recalls the "marvelous" speech given by Epaminondas on behalf of the Thebans³⁵; this speech returns in Plutarch (*Ages.*

³⁰ For the different approach of Xenophon and Diodoros on the period 375-371 see Gray 1980; Fauber 1999; Parker 2001.

³¹ See Prandi 1985: 69 ff. (for Kallisthenes' bias), 127 ff. (for the reception); see also pp. 36-37 (on *FGrHist* 124 F17), 40 ff. (on FF 11-18), for interest in Boeotian traditions; 37 ff. (on F 9), 50-51 (on F 26), 59-60 (on F 51), for hostility towards Sparta and Agesilaos. For traces of the tradition dating back to Kallisthenes in Diodoros and Plutarch, *Life of Pelopidas* (in which he is cited at 17.4) and *Life of Agesilaos* (in which he is cited at 34.4), see Westlake 1939; Fuscagni, 1975; Sordi 2002 = 1986; Sordi 2002 = 1995; Georgiadou 1996; Georgiadou 1997: 15-28.

³² See Beck: 1997: 99 and 240-244.

³³ On Xenophon's lack of interest for Epaminondas, see Westlake, 1969 = 1966: 213 ff.; Westlake 1975.

³⁴ See Cartledge 1987: 379-380; Hamilton 1991: 199-202; Jehne 1994: 72; Zahrnt 2000.

³⁵ On Epaminondas' speech see Keen, 1996, versus Hansen 1995; Hansen 1995; Tuci 2019: 36

27.4 – 28.1-2), in the context of negotiations for an unspecified general peace that provides the cue for a clash between Epaminondas and Agesilaos over their mutual demand for non-interference in the issue of the autonomy of Boeotia and Laconia³⁶. Plutarch's piece of information would fit with the negotiations of 375/4 (the battle of Tegira, as recorded in Diod. 15.37.1-2 predates those negotiations) as well as those of 371. In favor of the latter date goes the fact that the mutual request for non-interference returns in Diodorus (15.51.4) under 371, not in the context of the peace talks, but in that of an embassy sent by the Spartans to Thebes just before Leuttra.

Diodoros and Plutarch, in contrast to Xenophon, ignore the Athenian side, focusing their account on the debate that opposed Agesilaos to Epaminondas. The latter actually asked for recognition of the federal character of the Boeotian state, which allowed for a different interpretation of the principle of autonomy and empowered Thebes to stand as the legitimate representative of the federal government: in Plutarch, however, it is said that he spoke “for the *koinon* of the Greeks” (*Ages.* 27.4), with panhellenic intonation, posing a problem that concerned everyone. Epaminondas provoked Sparta on the issue of the autonomy of the cities of the perioeci in Laconia, showing that the contradictions on the issue of autonomy were first and foremost Spartan³⁷. But Sparta appeared well determined to deny the requested recognition; Athens, interested in agreement with Sparta, aligned itself; the Thebans departed disappointed, in a serious position of isolation.

As Diodoros expressly attests, Athens and Sparta appear to have agreed to recoil from Thebes' ambitions (15.38.4). This agreement constitutes the prerequisite for the rapprochement between the two powers, to which Xenophon looks with much interest, to the point of almost completely obnubilating the “Theban question,” one of the fundamental issues discussed at the congress of 371.

4.

Agesilaos believed that the time had come to crush Theban ambitions³⁸. However, the mobilization against Thebes ended with the defeat at Leuktra, which ended Spartan hegemony.

and 46-47.

³⁶ See Shipley 1997: 310-315.

³⁷ See also Nep. *Epam.* 6.4 and Paus. 9.13.21. Epaminondas' effective speech *coram frequentissimo conventu* in Nep. *Epam.* 6.4 clearly corresponds to that delivered “wonderfully” ἐν τῷ κοινῷ συνεδρίῳ by the Theban in Diod. 15.38.3: the *synedrion* is thus the one assembled in Sparta for peace, not the *synedrion* of the Second Athenian League, as well as some have believed (see Stylianou 1998: 326-328).

³⁸ See Hamilton 1994.

The Spartan defeat put Athens in a privileged position: the diplomatic initiative and the opportunity to make themselves guarantors of peace remained in the hands of the Athenians.

The peace congress of 371/70, following Leuktra, was in fact held in Athens. Our only source is Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.5.1-2): the Athenians replaced the Spartans as guarantors of peace and proposed as a guiding principle autonomy, according to the criteria laid down in the King's peace and Aristotle's decree (not paying tribute, not receiving garrisons and governors, governing themselves freely, having jurisdictional autonomy, retaining the guarantee of property rights).

This principle, already subjected to the approval of Athens' allies, was now being proposed to all Greece as a criterion for international coexistence, free of any ambiguity. Except for the Eleians, fearful of having to leave the cities of the perioeci autonomous, all Greeks adhered to the common peace in the form worked out by Athens³⁹.

Even Sparta had to recognize the autonomy of her allies, swearing only for herself: the Peloponnesian League thus effectively ceased to exist.

There is no trace of Persian initiatives, although the Athenians speak of peace "sent by the King": this is perhaps just a way of pointing out that it was a renewal of the King's peace of 387/6.

The subsequent war between Sparta and the Arcadians, both of whom were signatories to the agreement, put Athens in trouble. Immediately after the conclusion of the peace, in fact, the whole Peloponnesos went into turmoil: Mantinaea, considering itself now autonomous, reconstituted its territorial integrity by a synoecism, gave itself a democratic government and promoted the unification of Arcadia, attacking Tegea, with the agreement of the local democratic party, and Orchomenos; it obtained the support of the Eleians and Argives, reconstituting the democratic anti-Spartan coalition already formed in 470 and 421-418 (*Hell.* 6.5.3ff.)⁴⁰.

The Athenians, bolstered by the prestige derived from the peace of Athens, which made them guarantors of the new Greek political order, would have had an excellent opportunity to replace Sparta as the hegemon of Greece; but the illusory project of a double hegemony, which had come back into vogue in these years, thwarted this opportunity. The very serious consequences of the battle of Leuktra for Sparta were probably not apparent to contemporaries, and Athens did not realize that the initiation of Sparta's process of decline emptied the idea of bipolar equilibrium of meaning.

³⁹ See Sordi 2002 = 1951; Jehne 1994: 74-79.

⁴⁰ On this synoecism Moggi 1976, nr. 40; Hodkinson and Hodkinson 1981. On Arcadian federalism in this period see Roy 2000.

When the Spartans attacked Mantinea, on the pretext that it had violated the autonomy of Tegea, the city turned precisely to the Athenians, recognizing their role in protecting the newly concluded peace; but they, disagreeing in their assessment of the legal situation and reluctant to reopen the conflict with Sparta, refused to help; the Arcadians then turned to the Thebans.

In 370/69, when the Thebans had already invaded the Peloponnese, the Athenians resolved to send the *strategos* Iphicrates to help Sparta. The decision was made after an assembly debate about which Xenophon (*Hell.* 6.5.33-48) informs us in detail and in which the Spartans and their allies insisted on the desirability of an Athens/Sparta axis as an anti-Theban function, along the lines proposed by Kallistratos at the Sparta congress of 371 and probably reiterated by himself here ([Dem.] *In Neaer.* 26-27).

During the assembly many doubts emerged about the good faith of the Spartans and the legitimacy of the Spartan attack on Mantinea⁴¹; but the people, persuaded by the speeches of the Spartan ambassadors (who recalled the occasions of mutual aid between Sparta and Athens), Kliteles of Corinth (who insisted on compliance with the covenants enshrined in the peace of Athens) and Prokles of Phlius (who insisted on the greater danger of the Thebans than the Spartans as opponents of Athens' hegemonic ambitions)⁴², agreed to rescue the Spartans. This decision deprived the Second Athenian League, born in anti-Spartan function, of its significance and removed legitimacy from Athens' hegemonic aspirations; it was actually the Thebans, whose leaders had shown an understanding of the new scenarios that were emerging, who were the new, if ephemeral, hegemon of Greece.

The reference to bipolarity emerges clearly from a passage that relates some of the contents of the Spartan ambassadors' speech (*Hell.* 6.5.34):

they also recalled ... when, with the consent of Sparta, the maritime hegemony of Athens and its right to be depository of the common treasure was recognized by the Greeks, while to them with the consent of Athens the terrestrial hegemony was unanimously recognized by all the Greeks.

The appeal to the experience of the division of spheres of influence was crucial in isolating Thebes at a time when it came to pose a deadly danger to Sparta. Xenophon was certainly in tune with the arguments put on the table by the Spartan ambassadors and by Prokles, which corresponded perfectly to his vision of Greek international equilibrium.

⁴¹ See Roy 1971: 571.

⁴² On these negotiations see Bearzot 2005. On the arguments put forth by the Spartan ambassadors, see Bearzot, 2004-2005. On Prokles, an exponent of the Phliasian oligarchy linked to Agesilaos, see Daverio Rocchi 2004; Fontana 2014: 241-244. Prokles' first speech is commented on by Gray 1989: 112-118.

5.

In 369 a Spartan embassy arrived in Athens to negotiate the conclusion of a proper alliance (*Xen.* VII, 1, 1-14). Among others again Prokles of Phlius intervened, insisting on the different and complementary vocations of Athens, a naval power, and Sparta, a land power. He argued that the division of hegemony between Athens and Sparta was determined by nature (*physis*) and fate (*tyche*), by divine rather than human will: Athens by its seafaring vocation and tradition, Sparta by its superiority in the continental sector. Prokles openly recommends the division of command by sea and land between Sparta and Athens on the basis of a number of geopolitical, military, and historical considerations. In the case of Athens, geographical location and availability of ports, familiarity with seafaring techniques, possession of a fleet, and tradition of victories at sea, make the control of the sea a necessity for Athens, since city's salvation depends on it; for Sparta, military superiority by land, ability to mobilize allies, and food autonomy, make control of the continental area a real necessity for it. Neither city must therefore cede its hegemonic sector to the other. Convinced by these arguments, the Athenians transformed the agreement into an alliance. We are faced, with Prokles' speech, with the clearest expression within the *Hellenika* of the validity of the division of spheres of influence⁴³.

Our review has made it clear that Xenophon wishes for a rapprochement between Athens and Sparta and that he follows closely, in historical events, everything that leads in this direction: for example, making it the focus of the congress of 371, which had also discussed other problems, and censuring on many occasions the role of the Thebans. His interest in the bipolar balance greatly conditions the work, leading to accentuations and omissions (the founding of the Second Athenian League, created in an anti-Spartan function, is not recalled; Theban hegemony is in fact unrecognizable in Xenophon's *Hellenika*)⁴⁴. This view, after all, reflects Xenophon's character as a "loyal Athenian"⁴⁵. But the consistency with which Xenophon highlights everything that seems to delineate a path toward a new bipolar equilibrium is not enough to erase the utterly anachronistic character of this vision: it had a glorious history behind it but did not take into account the changing Greek political landscape and the growing role of third forces. On the contrary, Xenophon

⁴³ On Prokles' second speech see Gray 1989: 118-121.

⁴⁴ See Momigliano 1966 = 1935.

⁴⁵ See Tuplin 2017: 358).

pays attention to federal states and their development in the fourth-century BC: his position, somewhat delayed as far as the world of the *poleis* is concerned, can nevertheless grasp the developments that were taking place in the federal context⁴⁶.

⁴⁶ See Bearzot 2015.

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