CHAPTER IV:

THEBAN HEGEMONY, 371-359

SYMPOSIUM, REPUBLIC, AND PHAEDRUS

Set at a sumptuous banquet given by Agathon to his friends Socrates, Phaedrus, Pausanias, Eryximachus, and Aristophanes, with Alcibiades arriving late, to celebrate his first victory in the dramatic contest in 416, not 415 (Athenaeus, V, 217a), the Symposium is the most dramatic and difficult dialogue as to its attitudes on pederasty. Dover tried to minimize the praise Plato gave to Eros, the god of love between males, but Licht, a more sensitive and profound if earlier commentator, argued that Plato lavished praise on pederastic love:

this most beautiful writing of Plato, which is so rich in coloring and so stimulatingly illustrated and profoundly treated from so many different standpoints, assumes the form of a hymn of Eros unique in the literature of the world.

After the food had been taken away and drinking began, Phaedrus, for whom the dialogue was named in which he asked advice from Socrates about how to choose a lover, proposed to discuss Eros' importance and power:

Since then Eros is acknowledged to be the oldest god, we owe to him the greatest blessings. For I cannot say what greater benefit can fall to the lot of a young man than a virtuous lover and to the lover than a beloved youth. For what those who intend to live a noble life ought to regard as their whole life, this neither kinship nor wealth nor honours nor anything else can afford us so well as love. And what is this? I mean modesty in regard to shameful things, in good things ambition; for without these it is impossible for any city or private individual to perform great and noble deeds. Therefore I assert that a man who loves, if he is found doing or suffering anything disgraceful at anyone's hands,
without defending himself through cowardice, would not be so pained if he were seen by his father or his companions or anyone as he would were it by his favorite. Similarly, we see that a young man who is loved is specially ashamed when his lover sees him committing an offense. If then there were any means whereby a state or army could be formed of lovers and favorites, they would administer affairs better than all others, provided they abstain from all disgraceful deeds and compete with one another in honest rivalry. And such men together with others like them, though few in number, so to speak would conquer the world. For the man who loves would be ashamed to abandon his post or throw aside his arms in the presence of anyone, and would often prefer to die in his place. For no one is so base as to leave his beloved in the lurch and not to help him when in danger, for Eros himself inspires him with valor, so that he behaves like a man of the greatest courage. For, as Homer says, this courage is breathed into the souls of some of the heroes by the god, but this love of itself inspires it in those who love (Symposium, 178c).

The first speaker Pausanias, now rather than Euripides the lover of the still beautiful if no longer adolescent Agathon (although portrayed as about eighteen here, the same as in Protagoras), did not exclude or condemn physical love if moral considerations of bettering the eromenos prevailed over lust in the relationship. He contrasted heavenly ("Uranian") with earthly love ("Pandemian") which is not entirely coterminous with heterosexual love, although the heavenly love can only be homosexual. If pederasty is not merely physical but includes intellectual friendship, it becomes heavenly. Pausanias clearly placed heterosexual love beneath a properly directed and regulated pederastic love. The superior, spiritual love, which outlasts youthful charms, can accompany without displacing physical love, at least at the beginning, when physical attraction seems essential to inspire the relationship.

The physician Eryximachus saw Eros fructifying the universe and reconciling opposites, such as heat and cold and wet and dry, to produce harmony in a body as well as throughout the universe. The good and bad Love that Pausanias had described Eryximachus rather contrasts as love and strife in an almost Empedoclean manner. Rather than condemning the vulgar Eros, however, he contrasted it with the heavenly. One should partake of it, as a physician would recommend about food, "cautiously, so as to enjoy
its pleasure without excess."\(^{33}\)

With an ingenious myth, the comedian Aristophanes defined love as the search of the one half of the primeval whole man divided into two parts, having four arms and legs, by a god for its other half, jealous of such a creature. Most ironically, Aristophanes, the mocker of effeminates, argued that homosexuality was natural to those beings formed from those two male halves of a whole seeking to be rejoined by Eros, who were superior to those formed from females seeking their other half (which made lesbianism therefore natural) and to the third, which was formed from a being half male and half female, the only type who could reproduce. It was thus natural for the virile beings derived from an entirely male original to wish to sleep together embracing (191d-e).

A brief dialogue between Socrates and Agathon tends to the conclusion that desire or love is relative. One must long for somebody or something which one lacks. Therefore, one in love desiring beauty or goodness cannot himself be beautiful and good. At the climax, Socrates defined love as the drive for immortality that fructifies women's wombs with the seed for children and virtue and wisdom for the souls of boys and youths. Socrates' definition of Eros reaches the loftiest ideal. Sensuality and spirituality harmonize. "The really good teacher must also be a good lover of boys, that is, teacher and pupil must do their best by mutual love and common effort to reach the greatest perfection possible."\(^{34}\)

To facilitate the exchange of ideas, Socrates, who worried that pederasty might lead to coarseness, recommended boys aged 17 or 18 to the younger ones normally courted. Quoting Diotima, the female love expert from Mantinea, who argued that only reproduction gave immortality, he argued that love inseminated a boy's soul to beget true virtue, which the lover and beloved can cherish as a heterosexual couple would cherish a child. True love, the procreator of virtue, depositing sperm in the soul of the beloved, desired permanent possession of the good, not of a body that is only temporarily beautiful. Agreeing that love must improve the soul of the beloved by spiritual contact, Socrates became in effect the erastes of souls of his eromenoi, rather than of their bodies. Thus Eros inspiring erastes and eromenos engendered an immortal good in the soul of the beloved which is not yet freed from the body.\(^{35}\)

Eros then represents love of beauty. The question 'And what advantage will possession of beauty give anyone?' is easier to answer if we substitute 'goodness,' for we agreed that to possess what is good is to be happy, and that is a final answer. It is senseless to ask why
anyone wants to be happy.\textsuperscript{36}

Arriving late inebriated, Alcibiades took over the conversation. Using terms employed by erastai, Alcibiades spoke unabashedly of the night "before our expedition went to Poteidea" in 432, when as a teenager he induced Socrates to share his room and couch with him. Exhibiting an almost incredible sophrosyne (self-control), old, ugly Socrates rejected the beautiful youth's bold importuning (Symposium, 214-222). Socrates thus ironically became in this scene an eromenos whom Alcibiades tried to seduce--a reversal of roles that could have occurred but rarely in real life.

Even the ancients argued whether the order of the speeches of the Symposium had any significance. No agreement has yet been reached.\textsuperscript{37} It seems to me, as it has to many others, that the last speech, that of Alcibiades, is ironic but perhaps, as Halperin argues,\textsuperscript{38} the next to last, that of Socrates, may come nearest to expressing Plato's view at the time he wrote the dialogue. The dispute about the date when Plato composed the Symposium turns on whether Aristophanes (193al-3) referred, as Dover insisted, to Sparta's dissolution of Mantinea in 385/4 (Xenophon, Hellenica, V, 2.5-7; Diodorus Siculus, XV, 5.3) during the Corinthian War. Dover contradicted Mattingly's argument\textsuperscript{39} that Plato accurately recreated the situation in the Athens of 416, a couple of years after the Spartans had subjected Mantinea and that thus Aristophanes' reference was to that earlier action rather than to the Spartan dissolution of 385/4 as Dover believed. Dover argued: "Other dialogues [also] present us with possible examples of the intrusion of post-Sokratic events into situations otherwise located in Sokrates's lifetime."\textsuperscript{40}

Most important for us was his argument that when Pausanias says that homosexual relations are considered disgraceful in many parts of Ionia and in many other places under barbarian rule (182b, 6-7), he was speaking of the situation after 387/6 when the Peace of Antalcidas recognized Artaxerxes's demand that "all the cities in Asia should be his" (Xenophon, Hellenica, V, 1.31). At the time when Plato set the Symposium (416), the Ionian cities were under Athens, not Persia, and thus unless Pausanias meant that they did not approve of pederasty because they had formerly been under barbarian rule before being freed by Cimon, this is inexplicable. In fact, he said "are" (present tense), and thus introduced an anachronism. It seems unlikely that after the Athenians freed them and encouraged democratic constitutions and customs on the Athenian model they did not resume the pederasty that they had so enthusiastically practiced before the original Persian conquest in the 540s. Dover, however, cited no evidence that they did and so far I have not been able to find any either. But would it have been so easy for the Persians to stigmatize pederasty in Ionia in just two years between their reoccupation
and the composition of the Symposium?

In 1900 Wecklein observed that after more than a century of dispute no one could agree which symposium came first, Plato's or Xenophon's, a controversy still not resolved. Dover argued for the priority of Plato. He claimed that until 378 no "Theban or Boiotian force was deliberately organized on an erotic principle" and that because Pausanias the Athenian was probably not even living in the fourth century, much less discussing love, Plato had Phaedrus say: "if any device could be found how a state or an army could be made up only of lovers and beloved . . . in battle side by side, such troops although few would conquer pretty well all the world" (178e3-179a4) as though such a practice had not been tried, whereas Xenophon had Socrates say that Pausanias, Agathon's lover, say that in Thebes and Elis "the boys who sleep with their lovers still stand beside them in battle" (Xenophon, Symposium, 8.32). Thus Dover concludes that Plato's Symposium was composed before the formation of the Sacred Band of Thebes and Xenophon's after it, using the following table:

385/4: Dissolution of Mantineia.
After 385/4, but before 378: Plato's Symposium.
378: Creation of the Sacred Band.
After 378: Xenophon's Symposium.

Dover's hypothesis is unconvincing. In arguing that "it is not by lust that bravery is inspired" (Xenophon, Symposium, 8.32), Socrates claimed that "homosexual relations are customary in those [Theban and Elian] nations but here [in Athens] incur reproach" and it is irrelevant whether lovers fight together in battle as they do in those nations. We have no evidence that the Elians suddenly between 385/4 and the composition of Xenophon's Symposium not too long after 378 adopted the radical change of stationing lovers side by side in battle. I believe that lovers had often fought side by side in the past, from the early days of Crete and perhaps Sparta. Boeotian knights, as we have seen, adopted Cretan customs and perhaps directly, without Spartan mediation. Elis was even more old-fashioned than Thebes. I believe that the Symposium was composed either while the Sacred Band was being planned and organized by Theban exiles in Athens or perhaps even later when it had won such a resounding success, when Phaedrus's ironic prediction had in fact come true. In any case, Dover's hypothesis runs aground on the statements about Elians that appear in both dialogues and which he is unable to explain, his suggestion that Plato did not know about the situation in Elis being utterly unpersuasive.

As Plato aged, he became more censorious, condemning boys' wearing perfume or oiling their bellies. Couples had to restrict sex. Obscenity was censored. A dramatic masterpiece, often described as Plato's greatest, the Republic, sometimes entitled On
Justice, is approximately five times longer than any other dialogue except Laws. The dialogue may have been reworked many times or perhaps it was published c.390 and re-edited c.370. Perhaps the first book was an early dialogue that Plato incorporated two decades later as the beginning of his masterpiece. Most believe that it came out c.374, before Plato's second visit to Sicily and before the Spartan disaster at Leuctra. Conjectures for the dramatic date range from 456 to 409, 421 perhaps being the most probable. Following the line of reasoning that the dialogues that portray Socrates arguing in an unfair manner were composed before his execution, the scene with Polemarchus in the first section of the Republic must have been written before 399.44

Plato described in the Republic an ideal polity, but it was really more a treatise about justice than a practical blueprint. In a democracy everything was turned upside down: children ruled parents and women ruled men. Women shared the same nature as men and some could perform as well as men (see below). Plato had no concept of the interrelation of love with sex, a biological and lower act, necessary for procreation. He thus had no feeling or sentiment for the sexual act, regarding it merely as a biological need like eating and drinking under similar restrictions. Love did not arise from a primitive sexual urge. He held that there was no love between the sexes and no femininity in women. Real love, which was spiritual, occurred only between male guardians but it was not physical. Going beyond kisses and caresses from boys as rewards for services of guardians of the state and brave warriors was condemned:

"Can you name any pleasure greater and keener than bodily love?"

"No," said he, "and none madder." . . .

"Then this excessive pleasure must not be allowed to come near, and there must be no communion with it for lover and beloved if they love aright?" . . .

"Very well, for the city which we are founding you will, it seems, lay down the law thus: A lover may kiss his beloved, and be with him and touch him, as his own son, for the grace of the beautiful, and with his consent; in all else, if he cares for anyone, he should be careful to behave in associating with him so that there shall never be a suspicion of anything more intimate than this, or if there is, he will have the blame of bad education and bad taste (III, 402d).
In the Republic, Plato said that men reached peak physical condition between 30 and 55. Because he felt that older parents would produce weaker offspring, he wished couples to quit procreating when the husband reached 54 and the wife 40, during which time they should aim for conception during the winter (V, 459d-461c). Considering family planning essential to avoid too few or too many citizens, Plato set the minimum number of children for a family as one boy and one girl, although he expected some families, especially those of superior guardians, to have more but to donate their extra sons to sonless families so as not to diminish their patrimonies. Like Solon, Plato in the Republic sanctioned both exposure and abortion. 45

Aristotle blamed Plato for having allowed these half measures on sexuality and for not providing against homosexual incest:

Plato, while making sons shared by all, wishes to prohibit sexual intercourse between lovers, but not love itself, nor its most unseemly manifestations, as between brothers or between father and son, where the mere unindulged passion is itself unseemly. And why prohibit sexual intercourse that is otherwise unobjectionable, merely on the grounds of the excessively powerful pleasure it gives, and yet believe that it makes no difference if intercourse takes place between brothers, or father and son? (Pol., II, 4, 2-3).

Set between 411, when Lysias, who was to become the most famous orator only after 403, returned to Athens, and 404, when the Thirty proscribed him and two of his brothers, putting the third to death, the interlocutors in Phaedrus debated who benefits more, the lover or the beloved, and deprecated one who loves the body only. This most poetic was probably not the earliest dialogue, as a tradition reported by Diogenes Laertius (III, 36-39) held and still maintained by a few. Some place it almost thirty years later around 370, later during the Middle period than the Republic and the Symposium. 46

Skilfully imitating the orator's style, Plato had Lysias recommend a marriage of reason between a boy and a man and advise a boy to take a lover who is not in love with him because he will help him more than a lover who is, the latter being irrational because of jealousy and selfish because of lust. Socrates, in his first discourse, praised delirious, ecstatic love as inspiring love of knowledge. Eros, who drove lovers mad, caused them to sprout wings, painfully, as when a child cuts teeth, but which allowed a soul to soar in search of beauty and truth. By seeing
in his beloved a reflection of eternal beauty, a lover can come to appreciate it. The beloved provided the only medicine capable of curing the lover's pains. Like a successful charioteer, reason had to regulate the two horses, dominating the evil one in lusting upon experiencing a "tickling" and a "pricking of desire" and approaching after a beautiful boy on sighting him (253c and 254a) and following the noble one. The eromenos, grateful for the restraint shown by his erastes, hugs and kisses and wants to lay with and refuse the erastes nothing and they may give in to bodily temptations (255d-256d) becoming inferior to those who resist or yield only very occasionally to bodily demands. Socrates seemed indulgent, if somewhat condescending, toward chaste couples who were not true philosophers, but only gentlemen of action. In a second discourse, however, which refuted both Lysias's and his own first discourse, Socrates argued, perhaps ironically, that passionate love destroys the lover who prefers the beloved to his family and wealth and who jealously seeks to reduce the beloved to total dependence on himself, all of which disgusted the entrapped beloved. Therefore there can be no rational love in Lysias's sense. "Let that then, my boy, be your lesson. Be sure that the attentions of a lover carry no good will; they are no more than a gluttoning of his appetite, for 'As wolf to lamb, so lover to his lad!'" (241d).

HEROES OF THE SACRED BAND

No military group in antiquity is as renowned as the crack Sacred Band of 150 pairs of lovers from Thebes who defeated the previously invincible Spartans and, hopelessly outnumbered, died fighting to the last man defending Greek freedom against Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedonia, in 338. In modern as in ancient times, many associate Thebes more closely with pederasty than even Crete or Sparta. Some even claim that it rather than the latter two was where the custom arose: the myth of Laius and Chrysippus. The Laius myth must have buttressed the burst of patriotic pederasty in fourth-century Thebes associated with Pammenes, Pelopidas, and Epaminondas. The only exclusive cult of the god of love Eros in Hellas was just eighteen kilometers away. As in Crete, the Theban lover gave his beloved a suit of armor when he reached military age (Plutarch, Erotica, 761B ff.) and as in Elis lovers also cohabited (Xenophon, Const. Lac., 12-13, Symposium; Plato, Symposium, 182b). Whatever the origins and evolution of pederasty in early Thebes or in early Boeotia, Thebes was the natural center over whose amphictyony of eight other cities it always strove for domination. Fourth-century Athenians identified Boeotia along with rural Elis as the areas most given to pederasty. In those areas Plato claimed that, contrary to customs in the other Greek areas, boys lived with their lovers and fought alongside of them in battle. He also claimed that being dim-witted lovers, they did not have the brains to court boys who
made love to them without ceremony.

Whether these conditions antedated the formation of the Sacred Band in 378, which repeatedly defeated the invincible Spartans, giving Thebes hegemony in Greece for a generation, or not is much disputed. No one has explained why these two quite different areas alone, if we deny certain statements that the Spartans had at times fought alongside their lovers as the Cretans certainly did at times, should have developed the custom. In the closing years of the Peloponnesian War, Episthenes must have formed his "company of beautiful youths and proved himself a hero amongst them," without regard for anything except the beauty of his recruits that he led with valor among the Ten Thousand (Xenophon, Anabasis, VII, 4, 7-8). They may have been a herd of eromenoi more than pairs of lovers. Xenophon, however, underscored the idea that an army of erastai and eromenoi was foreign to Spartans, unlike Elians and Boeotians (Symposium, VIII, 32, 35). The Carthaginians also created a Sacred Band, perhaps along Theban lines. It was crushed by Timoleon, the Corinthian general who was summoned by Syracusan aristocrats to liberate their city from tyranny and saved Syracuse from a Carthaginian attack in 341, three years before Philip of Macedonia vanquished the Sacred Band in 338.

During the fifth century the Greeks had scorned Thebes because it had "medized," i.e., gone over to the Persians at the time of Xerxes's invasion when the Plataeans, their nearby rivals, had supported the Greek cause not only then but ten years earlier had sent hoplites to Marathon to assist the Athenians. Consequently, Thebes was deprived of the leadership of the Boeotian Amphictyony which could raise 10,000 hoplites, giving it a fighting force roughly equal to that of Sparta at its height and Attica. In 395, when we have our best description from a papyrus fragment by an anonymous historian, Boeotia contained eleven regions: Thebes, Orchomenus, and Hyettus contributed 2,000, Thespia, Eutresis, and Thisbae 2,000, Tanagra 1,000, Haliartus, Lebadea, and Coronea 1,000, and Acraephium, Copai, and Chaeronea 1,000. This federal organization may have gone back to the sixth century and certainly both Herodotus and Thucydides imply some kind of league in which Thebes preponderated. Coinage from the league is dated as 550-525. But partly because of the opprobrium Thebes was unable to assert its natural hegemony and in any case Boeotia, being essentially a farming community, was not as rich as Athens nor as prestigious as Sparta, between which it frequently changed sides.

It was only after those antagonists had exhausted themselves in the Peloponnesian War and then the Spartans had discredited themselves that Thebes had a chance to assert itself. "Indeed, after the Peloponnesian war and the defeat of Athens they [the Spartans] looked upon the Thebans as rivals and as the only people
that would dare to resist them" (Cornelius Nepos, XVI, 1.4). In fear of such an attempt, the Spartan commander Phoebidas, whether or not at the instigation of his government is debated, treacherously seized the Cadmea, the citadel of Thebes, in 382, perhaps "at the instigation of a few Thebans" (Cornelius Nepos, XVI, 1.3).

Athens welcomed the Theban exiles just as the Thebans had welcomed Athenians fleeing the Thirty Tyrants who had seized control of their city twenty years before. In Athens "only a dozen young men came together of those who had been punished with exile, and there were not more than a hundred in all to confront so great a peril" (Cornelius Nepos, XVI, 2.4). These Theban exiles must have discussed the formation of the Sacred Band in Athens. Gorgidas seems to have organized it in 378, with pairs of lovers in the front ranks of the phalanx. Then perhaps Pelopidas made it a separate unit (Plutarch, Pelopidas). They stole into Thebes disguised as peasants and, on the night that the Theban magistrates engaged in a drunken celebration at a festival:

[From Athens] they set out in two companies; Pelopidas and Damoclides with their party went against Leontidas and Hypates, that lived near together; Charon and Melon against Archias and Philip, having put on women's apparel over their breastplates, and thick garlands of fir and pine to shade their faces; and so, as soon as they came to the door, the guests clapped and gave an huzza, supposing them to be the women they expected. But when the conspirators had looked about the room, and carefully marked all that were at the entertainment, they drew their swords, and making at Archias and Philip amongst the tables, disclosed who they were. Phillidas persuaded some few of his guests to sit still, and those that got up and endeavoured to assist the polemarch, being drunk, were easily despatched (Plutarch, Pelopidas).

Disputes rage over who conceived and formed the Sacred Band, when they did so, whether it had precedents in earlier Boeotian or Theban military organization, whether the principle of having lovers fight side by side extended to the whole Theban or even to the entire Boeotian army, or whether its members at least originally fought in the front ranks of a regular unit and then were separated to form a unit of its own. Since Phaedrus discussed such a battalion in the Symposium, Plato may have written that dialogue after 382, when the Theban exiles arrived at Athens, or even in 378, when tradition has it that they formed the Band, instead of the more usual date in 385, two years after the
Persians regained Ionia and suppressed pederasty there as inimical to tyranny, as one of the interlocutors noted, as was once assumed. Plato had Phaedrus argue that "if any device could be found how a state or an army could be made up of lovers and beloved, they could not possibly find a better way of living" (178a-180b). Whatever the answer to these technical questions, that unit chalked up the most heroic record in Greek history.

Plutarch credited Pammenes, Epaminondas's younger contemporary, with creating a fighting force of lovers, rejecting Nestor's recommendation (Iliad., II, 362) that relatives should be placed next to each other in battle (Pelopidas, XVIII, 2; Qu. Conv., 618d; Loves, 761b). If Pammenes actually restructured the whole Theban army, he must have done so sometime in the 360s or maybe even the 350s, but perhaps Plutarch was referring to the troops that Epaminondas took to Asia who were probably mercenaries, not Theban militia. Plutarch, like Hieronymus of Rhodes (fr. 34 Wehrli) agreed that Gorgidas formed the Sacred Band, which first won fame fighting at Tegyrai in 376/5 (Pelopidas, 16-17; Diodorus Siculus, XV, 37, 1-2; cf. Xenophon, Hellenica, V, 4.63), although some believe that Epaminondas formed it (Hieronymus, fr. 34, as cited, and perhaps embellished by Atheneus, XIII, 602a). Dover concluded that Gorgidas founded the Sacred Band or first commanded it or both. But Dover erred in rejecting outright the idea that before 378 "any Theban or Boiotian force was deliberately organised on an erotic principle."

The Sacred Band of 300 lovers triumphed repeatedly over the ostensibly invincible Spartans, most notably at Leuctra (371) and Mantinea (362), where its inspired leader, Epaminondas, fell, Pelopidas having perished in battle two years before. "Temperate, prudent, serious, and skilful" as well as "self-controlled, kindly, and forbearing," Epaminondas towered over all Theban heroes in strength, knowledge, virtue, and achievements. He shone in music, dancing, and philosophy, which he learned from the Pythagorean Lysis of Tarentum, from whom as a youth he was inseparable (Cornelius Nepos, XV, 1-3). When the Persians bribed the youth Micythus, whom Epaminondas loved, to win the leader over, Epaminondas refused the temptation and made Micythus return the bribe, threatening to hand him over to the magistrates if he refused (loc. cit., 4). Epaminondas advised his fellow citizens: "Therefore if you wish to be the leading city of Greece, you must frequently the camp and not the gymnasion" and wittily dismissed friends as well as rivals who taunted him for neither marrying nor having children (loc. cit., 5). Having placed Thebes at the head of the Boeotian League which he reconstructed, he died commanding at Mantinea, his beloved bravely falling by his side when the Spartans ganged up on him, having boldly advanced too far ahead of his men. The Spartans were correct in believing that by killing him they would deprive the Thebans of their greatest advantage.
His finest achievement, perhaps, besides his victories, was the restoration of an independent Messenia in 370, an act which permanently undermined Sparta by depriving her of one-third of her territory which she had taken centuries before during the Messenian Wars.

After the death of Epaminondas, the Thebans lost their hegemony over Greece that he had been on the verge of consolidating. Worn down by rivalry with Athens and a sulking, vengeful Sparta, deprived of inspirational leadership, the Thebans were unable to control affairs in Thessaly and soon failed to crush a band of mercenaries led by Phocian renegades. Because of this and other failures of theirs, Philip II of Macedonia was able to infiltrate and then subjugate Greece. The Sacred Band remained undefeated until it met the irresistible Macedonians at Chaeronea in 338. Moved to tears at the sight of the dead of the Sacred Band on the battlefield, Philip exclaimed, "Woe to them who think evil of such men" (Plutarch, Pelopidas).

We hear no more of lovers fighting alongside each other in Theban, Boeotian, or Carthaginian armies except from the much later author Plutarch, who was from Chaeronea, a small town near Thebes. Doubtless he was speaking of the past nevertheless, when he argued, in the present tense, that although love of women could inspire warriors to the most heroic of deeds, "we find that the most warlike of nations are most addicted to [pederastic] love as the Boeotians, Lacedaemonians, and Cretans" (On Love, 13). Most Greeks, notably Aristotle, associated pederastic couples with courage. Like Achilles and Patroclus, Iolaus fought at the side of Heracles. Even Latin authors shared the belief, although there are almost no Roman examples (Scipio's army may have contained a company of friends). From the Theban Sacred Band Plutarch generalized:

For men of the same tribe or family little value one another when dangers press; but a band cemented by friendship grounded upon love is never to be broken, and invincible; since the lovers, ashamed to be base in sight of their beloved, and the beloved before their lovers, willingly rush into danger for the relief of one another. Nor can that be wondered at since they have more regard for their absent lovers than for others present; as in the instance of the man, who, when his enemy was going to kill him, earnestly requested him to run him through the breast, that his lover might not blush to see him wounded in the back (Pelopidas, XVIII).
Sparta's victory in the Peloponnesian War was extremely costly. Her enormous losses were never repaired. If the number of Spartiates had long been declining from the 9,000, for which cleroi were provided at the end of the Second Messenian War, there were still, according to Herodotus (VII, 234), 8,000 at the time of Xerxes' invasion. Low birth rates owing to long and frequent absences of men on campaigns, late marriage, perhaps also pederasty, anal intercourse with wives, and exposure, which was carried out with the intent that the weak and deformed male infants would die, compounded war casualties. According to Thucydides (V, 68.3), by 418 the number of Spartiates had been reduced to 3,072. On the island of Sphacteria alone in 424 the Spartans lost 420 hoplites—128 killed and 292 captured, of whom 120 were "equals" (IV, 41). Even after the tide turned irreversibly for Sparta after the Athenian disaster at Syracuse, casualties mounted. Probably Spartans resorted to earlier marriages with hasty trips home from the front and the allowance of virile young men to father children on wives of older, impotent, absent, or less active fellows, practices mentioned during their previous crises during the Messenian Wars. But nothing stemmed the decline or replaced the losses during the war.

No one has been able to estimate how far the number of Spartiates rebounded after the war. From the testimony given about female heiresses and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few with a consequent loss of equality, we can assume that they did not recover to the 7,000 or 5,000 of earlier times. Critical of a fallen Sparta after the debacles at Leuctra (371) and Mantinea (362), Aristotle explained that the excessive reduction of the number of Spartans caused the undesirable concentration of property that had weakened the state:

For we find that some Spartans have come to have far too many possessions, others very few indeed; hence the land has fallen into the hands of a small number. Here there have been errors in the legal provisions too. For their lawgiver, while he quite rightly made it a disgrace to buy and sell in someone's possession, left it open to anyone to transfer it to other ownership by gift or bequest—and yet this inevitably leads to the same result. Moreover, something like two-fifths of all the land is possessed by women. There are two reasons for this: heiresses are numerous and dowries are large. It would have been better to have regulated dowries, prohibiting them altogether or making them small or at any rate moderate in size. But
as it is an heiress may be given in marriage to any person whatever. And if a man dies intestate, the person he leaves as heir gives her to whom he likes. So although the land was sufficient to support 1,500 cavalry and 30,000 heavy infantry, the number fell to below 1,000. The sheer facts have shown that these arrangements were bad: one single blow was too much for Sparta, and she succumbed owing to the shortage of men (Politics, 1270a).

The disastrous Spartan routs by the Thebans at Leuctra, where the Spartans and their allies lost half of their force of 11,000, including 400 Spartans (one-fourth of citizen hoplites), and Mantinea accelerated the population decline which had been endemic since 479 and catastrophic since 431. The ranks of Spartans dwindled as more and more became unable to contribute to the syssitia while a minority, buying up land and impoverishing many, enriched itself from the plunder of the Spartan empire after 404. By 400 Sparta could count on a maximum of 3,000 hoplites. During the fourth century, Spartans were compelled to fill their depleting numbers by recruiting ever more periokoi into the army and even by emancipating thousands of helots and training them as hoplites. The decline continued with only 900 in 339 and 700 in the third century before Agis IV and Cleomenes III redistributed the wealth and created new citizens in a valiant but tardy attempt to revive the state.

THE SACRED WAR