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Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta

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Chapter 4

HELOTAGE AND THE EXPLOITATION OF SPARTAN TERRITORY

This chapter extends the examination of Spartiate land-ownership to two interrelated aspects of the economic exploitation of their estates. The first part of the chapter will discuss the Spartiates' relationship to their helot servile labour force. I shall examine the character of Spartiate mastery over the helots, the relationship of the Spartiates and helots as landowners and cultivators, and the organisation of the agricultural tribute which the helots paid to their masters. The second part of the chapter will consider the geographical location and extent of Spartiate landholdings within Spartan territory.¹

Spartiates and helots

A fundamental feature of Spartan society was that the Spartiate citizen elite lived as rentier landowners supported economically by a servile population, the helots, who worked their estates. The Spartiates themselves inhabited a cluster of villages towards the northern end of the Sparta plain (see *Fig. 3*, p. 137).² Their landholdings, in contrast, were extensive. During most of the archaic and classical periods, when Spartan territory covered the entire southern Peloponnese, Spartiate estates farmed by helot cultivators were to be found in both its constituent regions, Lakonia and Messenia. Following Sparta's loss of Messenia in 370/69, the helots continued to be the predominant labour force on citizen estates in Lakonia until at least the second century BC.³ Agricultural labour was *the* distinctive feature of helot servitude. Although some helots were employed in other sectors such as service in Spartiate households and in the messes (and as batmen on campaigns), the essential servile function of the vast majority of helots was to work their masters' lands. Although there are hints in the evidence of some use of chattel slaves on wealthy estates, they were a small minority in agricultural production as a whole.⁴ The helots were, consequently, the indispensable mainstay of the Spartan property system. Yet, although scholars have been considerably exercised by the political relationships between Spartiates and helots, especially the extent of the threat posed by the helots and the brutal Spartan response, there has been little investigation of citizen–helot relations from the perspective of Spartiate land-ownership and agrarian economy.

Helot status: collective servitude or private slavery?

The precise status of the helots has perplexed commentators since antiquity,

owing to the mixture of communal and private elements in their servitude. The most common modern approach has been to regard the helots as collectively owned by – or at least in a position of collective servitude to – the Spartan polis. This perspective has been expressed in various ways: from ‘collective slavery’ (Lotze 1959), through ‘intercommunal servitude’ (Garlan 1988, 93–8) to the definition of helots as ‘state serfs’ (Ste Croix 1981, 149–50; Cartledge 1988a, 39). These views are founded on Strabo’s statement (8.5.4) that the Lakedaimonians possessed the helots ‘as, in a way, public slaves’ (*τρόπον...τινα δημοσίους δούλους*) and Pausanias’ designation of them (3.20.6) as ‘slaves of the community’. Strabo also cites the classical historian Ephorus as stating that the helots were ‘condemned to slavery on certain conditions’ laid down by the polis (*FGrH* 70F117): only the polis could manumit helots, not an individual Spartiate master; and there were restrictions on private sales. Indeed, Spartiate–helot relations were governed by a variety of communal measures. The ephors made an annual declaration of war against the helots (Arist. fr. 538 Rose, *ap.* Plut. *Lyk.* 28), signifying their position as public enemies against whom the citizens waged a truceless fight. In keeping with this ideology, the youths who took part in the *krypteia* could kill helots with impunity and without reference to their Spartiate holder (Herakleides Lembos 373.10 Dilts = Aristotelian *Polity of the Lakedaimonians* fr. 611.10 Rose). A Spartiate also had to let other citizens make use of his helots in case of need (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 6.3; Arist. *Pol.* 1263a35–7). Furthermore, the polis supervised the personal appearance of helots, putting to death those who exceeded the vigour proper to a slave’s condition and fining their masters for failing to prevent their growth (Myron of Priene, *FGrH* 106F2, *ap.* Athen. 657d). Individual citizens were thus personally responsible to the authorities for the condition of their helots.

For all the collective elements in their servitude, however, most helots were, at any given time, in the service of one particular Spartan individual or household. Every Spartiate landowner had a particular set of helots working his or her landholdings. Indeed, there is a minority but longstanding modern view that the helots were not publicly owned but the private property of individual Spartiates (e.g. Diesner 1953/4; Cozzoli 1979, 158–62). This view has received recent support from Jean Ducat’s examination of the textual evidence (1990a, 19–29), which argues that the fact that the helots were typically viewed as a collectivity does not necessarily mean that they were collective *property*. As Ducat notes, the idea of the helots as public slaves appears only in late sources like Strabo (born 64 BC) and Pausanias (fl. c. AD 50), who were writing after the late third-century revolution. This idea, he argues, was indissolubly linked to the revolution’s redistribution of private Spartiate estates into a system of state-controlled equal *klēroi*, which meant a real change in status for the helots working the *klēroi*, who now likewise became public property.

In contrast, there is no hint of collective ownership of helots in the classical sources. Xenophon (*Lak. Pol.* 6.3), when describing the right to use someone

else's helots ('he [Lykourgos] also gave permission, if someone needed, to use other persons' *oiketai*'),⁵ does not refer to them as communal property. He lists them along with other privately-owned possessions – horses, dogs and foodstuffs – which were also subject to communal use. Aristotle's reference to these same measures places them even more unequivocally in the context of private property, though moderated by communal use:

...while property should in a certain sense be communal, in general it should be private... Even now, this sort of arrangement exists in some states in an outline form...and in the well-run ones particularly it exists in part and in part might come about. For although each individual does have his own private property, he makes available some things to be used by his friends, while he has the use of others communally. For example, in Lakedaimon they use each other's slaves practically as their own, and horses and dogs too.

Similarly, although Ephorus (as noted earlier) describes certain conditions of helot servitude laid down by the polis, the form in which those conditions are presented is as a modification of the normal rights of a master regarding manumission and sale.

The exclusive capacity of the polis to liberate helots, mentioned by Ephorus, is sometimes used as an argument for public ownership, especially since on several occasions when we know the mechanism by which such liberations were effected the Spartiate holders of those helots are conspicuously absent from the transaction. In 425 when the Spartans needed persons to convey food to their soldiers trapped on the island of Sphakteria (Thuc. 4.26), in winter 370/69 when they desperately needed new troops to defend against enemy invasion (Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.28–9; Diod. 15.65.5), and in the infamous episode of uncertain date when they wanted to eliminate the most spirited helots (Thuc. 4.80), the method of selecting those helots who were to receive their freedom was an official call for volunteers. In theory, at least, this method placed the initiative in the hands of the helots themselves and was a direct transaction between polis and helots, with no role for the Spartiate master. As Ducat (1990a, 26) points out, however, such mass liberations without reference to the owner are also known from poleis where chattel slavery predominated, such as Athens and Chios.⁶ Neither is the absence of any hint of compensation for Spartiate owners significant, since there is no evidence at Athens either for compensation in the case of public manumission of groups of chattel slaves.

In the classical sources, then, the helots appear in some senses as the private property of their Spartiate holders, but also as subject to various forms of communal intervention. Moreover, the significance of this communal intervention should not be underestimated. The range and importance of the measures mentioned above indicate that public intervention was exercised far more strongly over the helots than over the private landholdings of Spartan citizens. The helots were thus in a real sense in a condition of 'double dependence'

on the individual holder and on the state' (Diesner 1953/4, 222), a situation which meant that Spartiate masters did not possess rights of mastery as full as owners of chattel slaves.

In this chapter I shall explore the socio-economic aspects of this combination of private ownership with lack of full rights of mastery. What were the characteristics of Spartiate agrarian exploitation of the helot population? I shall argue that Spartiate landowners were able to decide and vary the ways in which they utilized their labour force; but that they did so within a context of collective domination and communal intervention which gave the helots some limited rights vis-à-vis their individual owners. Furthermore, from the collective perspective of the Spartan citizen body, the helots were a self-reproducing population upon whose continued exploitation depended the entire Spartiate way of life. The range of public measures considered above indicates that the polis was anxious to preserve the integrity of, and to perpetuate, that population. Hence, in contrast to chattel slaves, helots enjoyed 'all the normal human institutions except their freedom' (Finley 1985, 63). Not the least of these institutions was family relationships which were recognised by the polis: when the helot rebels were given safe conduct out of servitude at the end of the 460s revolt, they were allowed to depart 'with their children and wives' (Thuc. 1.103).

The effect, I submit, was to create, in the sphere of agricultural production, an exploitative but nevertheless interdependent relationship between Spartiate masters and helot cultivators which we can fruitfully study from the comparative perspective not just of other slave societies but also of other systems of dependent labour. I stress this last point, since the value of this perspective has been challenged by Paul Cartledge (1993b, 132; cf. 1998, 13) who has criticised my earlier study (Hodkinson 1992a) of Sparta's economic exploitation of the helots, on the grounds that 'the use of "peasant" (or "sharecropping tenant", as in Hodkinson 1992) seems to me unusually inappropriate and rather grossly misleading, since ...the Helots were also in official Spartan parlance "slaves" ...'. It is true that the helots are labelled *ἡ δούλεια* – the collective noun cognate to *douloi*, 'slaves' – in the Sparto-Athenian treaty of 421 (Thuc. 5.23). The context, however, is both heavily propagandistic (the treaty was prominently displayed in major sanctuaries in both poleis) and politicised, in that Athens was agreeing to aid Sparta against the helots, in abandonment of her previous policy of promoting their liberation as free 'Messenians'.⁷ To view such official rhetoric as providing an exclusive or comprehensive statement of the helots' position is to read their history solely from the masters' viewpoint (cf. Alcock, forthcoming). In any case, it has never been my purpose to *describe* helots as 'sharecropping tenants', as Cartledge implies, simply to illuminate critical features of their position through comparative evidence from other types of labour systems. As I stated in my study, my concern 'is not to deny the primary phenomenon of helot servitude...but simply to recognize that complete analysis

of the complex nature of the helots' position requires the application of a variety of approaches. No single model can claim a monopoly of insights or of truth' (Hodkinson 1992a, 125). This should not be a matter of controversy. After all, the comparative study of different types of labour systems – whether involving peasants, dependent tenants, serfs or slaves – has been successfully practised for many years in the field of modern socio-economic history (e.g. Hoch 1986; Kolchin 1987).

Helots, Spartiates and the land

The first important issue concerning the agricultural exploitation of the helots by Spartiate landowners is the exact relationship of the helots to the landholdings they worked. The degree to which a dependent farming population possesses effective security of cultivation of particular landholdings or can be shifted around at the wish of the landowner is invariably a major determinant of interaction between landowner and cultivator. In the region of Tuscany in post-unification Italy, for example, tenants' rights were weak. The landlord's control was ensured by terms of contract which specified that the labour capacity and subsistence needs of the tenant's family should match the labour requirements and size of the holding. To achieve this balance landlords were able to disperse members of their tenants' families elsewhere or order the adoption of living-in help, could give or withhold permission for marriage, could vet the appointment of new heads of households and could ensure that tenant families never amassed sufficient saleable surplus to achieve independence (Gill 1983, 147).

How secure was the position of the helots? The most informative evidence is the passage of Strabo (8.5.4) cited above:

Ephorus says...[that] the Heleians, the inhabitants of Helos, revolted and were forcibly subdued by a war and condemned to slavery on certain conditions, namely that it was not permitted for the holder either to liberate them or to sell them outside the boundaries; and that this was called the war against the helots. In effect, it was Agis [I, son of Eurysthenes] and his associates who instituted the helotage which lasted down to the time of the Roman supremacy; for the Lakedaimonians possessed these as a kind of public slaves, fixing for them certain places of residence and particular duties (*κατοικίας τινάς αὐτοῖς ἀποδείχαντες καὶ λειτουργίας ιδίας*).

At first sight, the final clause of this passage might seem to prove that helots in the classical period possessed a strong degree of security in the cultivation of particular landholdings; but it is essential to distinguish different layers of evidence within the passage. The passage begins with a quotation from the classical historian Ephorus, but this lasts only till the end of the first sentence. The following sentence, which includes the statement that helotage lasted down to the time of Rome's supremacy, cannot come from Ephorus, since Rome's supremacy came long after his death. This sentence, including the statement

that the helots had fixed residences and particular duties, must come from Strabo himself. Hence the statement does not constitute contemporary evidence for helotage in classical times. Its close linkage to Strabo's previous statement that the Lakedaimonians possessed the helots as quasi-public slaves marks it out as late evidence, connected with the conditions of the third-century revolution, which has nothing to do with conditions in the classical period. The idea that the polis intervened directly to fix specific residences and duties – indeed the notion of the helots performing *leitourgiai* (public services) – is incompatible with the classical evidence viewed above.

The sole classical evidence in the passage is Ephorus' statement that it was not permitted for the Spartiate holder either to liberate helots or to sell them outside the boundaries. Both the precise meaning of this statement and its import for the extent of the helots' security of cultivation are open to interpretation. The passage is usually interpreted as signifying that a Spartiate landowner had no right to alienate his or her helots, whether by sale or manumission (cf. Finley 1985, 63). This would not necessarily entail their full security of tenure, since some landowners might still be able to move helots between their various holdings; but it would apply a certain limitation on the landowners' capacity to augment or reduce their labour force to match fluctuating labour needs. Of course, the passage does not state categorically that sale was completely forbidden, merely that it was not permitted 'outside the boundaries' (ἐξω τῶν ὅρων). These 'boundaries' are normally interpreted as the borders of Spartan territory, thus leaving open the possibility of sale between Spartiates. MacDowell (1986, 35), however, argues that the reference is rather to the boundaries of particular landholdings, signifying that 'the Spartiate could not sell a helot and thus remove him from his land'. Even among scholars who follow the normal interpretation of the phrase, it is frequently argued (e.g. Jeanmaire 1939, 478) that Ephorus' reported words do not constitute a complete statement of the ban on sale and that, owing to its juxtaposition with the prohibition of private manumission, the ban should be viewed as applying inside as well as outside Spartan territory.

Against this last argument, a number of scholars have insisted that Ephorus' evidence should be read as it stands. They argue, in particular, that a complete ban on sale would have marked a clear distinction between helots and chattel slaves which Ephorus could not have failed to mention (Ducat 1990a, 21–2; cf. Kahrstedt 1919; Klees 1975, 146). The implication of this argument is that one must either follow MacDowell's interpretation of the boundaries as signifying those of particular landholdings or accept that the ban on sale only applied to external transactions. Against MacDowell's interpretation, moreover, Ducat has urged the comparable case of the Mariandynoi of Herakleia Pontika, whose status is frequently compared to that of the helots. According to certain post-classical sources (Poseidonios fr. 60, Kidd, *ap. Athen.* 263c–d; Strabo 12.3.4), the Mariandynoi accepted a state of servitude under the Herakleioti

on condition that they could be sold inside but not outside the territory of Herakleia. Ephorus' statement, it is claimed, with its reference to the helots' being condemned to slavery 'on certain conditions', embodies a similar idea of a 'contract of servitude' between Spartiates and helots.

It is unclear, however, whether this parallel with the *Mariandynoi* is truly apposite to the interpretation of Ephorus' text. The evidence regarding the *Mariandynoi* comes from post-classical passages written at a time when the notion of a quasi-voluntary contract of servitude had become well-established (Ducat 1990a, 70–6). A similar notion may be detectable in the post-classical sources for the helots (e.g. Myron of Priene *FGrH* 106F2, *ap.* Athen. 657d; *Inst. Lac.* no. 41 = Plut. *Mor.* 239d; Plut. *Lyk.* 24.3).⁸ These, however, are sources affected by the third-century revolution, in contrast to the earlier evidence of Ephorus. Ephorus' statement does not stem from the notion of a contract of servitude. On the contrary, the basis of his statement is the helots' revolt and forcible enslavement and the implicitly harsh conditions imposed upon them. The references to the ban on private liberation and sale abroad are intended to signify, not advantages for the helots, but rather the Spartiates' determination to ensure their permanent enslavement through the impossibility of escape from helotage by private manumission. It is therefore unsurprising that Ephorus says nothing about sale inside Spartan territory. It is irrelevant to his concerns, since internal sale did not entail the end of helot status. His lack of reference to a ban on internal sales, consequently, cannot be treated as a sign that such sales were permissible.

The evidence of Ephorus and Strabo is therefore inconclusive.⁹ In assessing the extent of the helots' security of tenure, one must consequently turn to general considerations. On this issue, it is notable that even Ducat, who advocates the permissibility of private sale, explicitly abjures the idea of helot 'markets'. Indeed, he envisages rather that sales were personal transactions which took place when land under helot cultivation was transferred from one citizen to another, so that the helots would remain attached to the land they were cultivating. Consequently, even on Ducat's view, most helots would have effective security of tenure, regardless of changes of Spartiate owner, even if that security was not legally defined.

Indeed, such an arrangement fits well with our understanding of the origins of helotage. This is especially so in the case of the Messenian helots, who were subjugated by conquest (Tyrtaios fr. 5, West). After their conquest most Messenian working farmers presumably became servile cultivators of the same fields they had farmed before the conquest. Concerning the origins of Lakonian helotage there is more dispute (cf. Ducat 1978, 5–13), but almost all theories accept that most of those thus enslaved were working farmers, who in their new state of servitude simply continued to farm their former landholdings for the Spartiates' benefit.

The nature of the helots' position as a self-reproducing group with their

own families also suggests a population with a stable existence and subsistence derived from secure cultivation of particular landholdings, rather than one subject to continual movements from estate to estate as the property holdings of their individual masters' lineages altered through the generations.¹⁰ The latter arrangement would have produced an extraordinary level of disruption for the helot population under the Spartiate inheritance system, which operated, as we saw in chapter 3, on the basis of division of the parental property among all their children, including daughters. When not only men inherit land but women also, and those women receive at least a portion of their inheritance on marriage, land changes hands both down the generations and between the sexes at almost every adult death and at every marriage (Goody 1976b, 10). The ownership of specific holdings is drastically reorganized every generation and continually reallocated from one patriline to another. Given such ongoing perturbation of Spartiate land-ownership, self-perpetuating helot families could hardly have maintained themselves over several centuries, unless they had been a fixture on the land who normally changed ownership along with the holdings they cultivated.

The drastic effects that Spartiate inheritance laws would have had on the helots, if they were not normally fixed to the land but had to follow their masters, is well illustrated by Singor (1993, 47–8), who believes that this was indeed the helots' fate. As he notes, when a piece of land worked by a helot family was divided among two Spartiate heirs, either one heir would have had to take over the helot family with half the land, or the family would have had to be broken up, a practice feasible only if it possessed an adult son. As Singor acknowledges, 'we have to assume that very often at partitions of inheritance one of the heirs got land without helots, while another got both land and helots... In the second instance a helot family would see its plot of land drastically reduced. Unless their Spartan master had other pieces of land that could be reassigned to them, their future as a household was in peril.' Singor suggests various possible 'solutions' to this difficulty: the permanent loan of family members to another master, subsistence help from better-off helots, adoption of children into other helot families, flight and a consequent life of brigandage. He concludes, however, that 'it was the helots who suffered first when ...the property within a Spartan family line diminished while the number of helots attached to that family remained the same or at least did not go down proportionately'. These consequences would have ensued from a sizeable proportion of all inheritance divisions in every generation, especially as many Spartiate families fell into increasing poverty in the later fifth and fourth centuries (see further below). In my view, the continual large-scale disruption to, and impoverishment of, helot farmers implied by Singor's theory is irreconcilable with the reality evident in our sources, which attest a thriving and numerous servile population whose farming sustained both itself and its Spartiate masters over a period of several centuries.¹¹ Indeed, some helots were apparently even

able to amass a disposable surplus, as in the case of 6,000 Lakonian helots in the year 223 BC who had accumulated wealth to the value of five minas (500 drachmas), with which they purchased their freedom (*Plut. Kleom.* 23).¹²

The *de facto* security of tenure which I am suggesting does not of course mean that helot cultivators were never transferred from their original holdings when the latter passed into different ownership. Likewise, Spartiate landowners may sometimes have intervened to rearrange the personnel working on their estates. No doubt such factors as the changing requirements of agricultural exploitation, the varying demands of Spartiate households and the diverse demographic histories of helot families sometimes made it a practical necessity. The successful self-reproduction of the helot population over several centuries suggests, however, that this intervention was not employed on such a widespread or disruptive scale as to interrupt the fundamental security of cultivation of most helot families. The resulting intimate knowledge of the local terrain, with its diverse microclimates and specialised ecological niches, acquired by stable helot families was surely a valuable asset for absentee Spartiate landowners concerned to maximise the productivity of their estates, especially given the frequent movement of holdings from one citizen lineage to another.

If helot families normally remained farming particular landholdings regardless of changes of Spartiate owner, some significant implications follow for the relationship between landowners and cultivators. The post-classical sources (*Inst. Lac.* no. 41 = *Plut. Mor.* 239d–e; *Plut. Lyk.* 24.3; cf. 8.4) – influenced by the third-century revolution with its vision of equal, inalienable *klēroi* – conjure up a simple image of an enduring relationship between an unchanging group of helot farmers and a single Spartiate owner. The classical reality will have been a more fluid situation involving a complex web of relationships in which changing helot personnel owed their obligations to a number of different Spartiates. To appreciate this situation more fully, a brief discussion of the impact of inheritance customs and demographic factors is necessary.

First of all, on the Spartiates' side, the identity of the owner of a given piece of land will have changed constantly as portions of the parental estates were handed over to daughters on marriage and divided among the surviving heirs on the owner's death. Demographic studies of pre-industrial societies have observed that, even given varying rates of fertility and mortality, only a small minority of families – typically some 10–20% – produce just a single heir or heiress; the remaining 80–90% produce either no heirs or multiple heirs.¹³ Even if we take account of the tactic of adoption (*Hdt.* 6.57), which many heirless parents may have practised in order to ensure a single direct heir, a sizeable majority of parental estates will have been subject to some level of division. The precise impact of this division upon the relationship with the helot farmers will have varied according to circumstances. One should assume that the estates of most Spartiate households were split into different holdings scattered throughout Spartan territory. This has been the typical pattern of landholding in peasant

societies the world over and is attested also among the wealthy elite in other regions of ancient Greece (Osborne 1987, 37–40; Gallant 1991, 41–5). At Sparta it was built into the property system, since both husband and wife brought their own separate landed property to the household. In principle, then, division of inheritance could have been managed in some cases by allocating each of the heirs one or more discrete, intact holdings. In such situations the helot cultivators will simply have experienced a change of owner. In other cases, however, the division of inheritance will have operated at the deeper level of the splitting of individual holdings. In these situations the impact upon the landowner–cultivator relationship will have been more significant, leading to the separation of the helot farmers between the newly-split parts of the former holding.

Is it possible to estimate the relative extent of these alternative possibilities? The issues are complex and much-debated (cf. Bentley 1987, esp. 35–40). In some societies, such as modern Greece, systems of partible inheritance have been responsible for the widespread fragmentation of individual fields, especially when strict equity between siblings or considerations of risk management, crop scheduling or use of multiple ecozones have been overriding considerations for the heirs (Herzfeld 1980, esp. 93–7). This is not, however, a universal phenomenon. In other societies this outcome has been avoided, at least below a certain ‘minimum threshold size’, when absolute sameness of inheritance and claims for tiny shares of small fields have not been insisted upon. This happens more frequently in areas of minimal environmental diversity, where there is less value in possessing scattered holdings to reap the benefits of exploiting different agricultural niches. It might be thought that Spartiate landholding falls into this category, since many of their landholdings were concentrated in the central plains of Lakonia and Messenia. As I shall argue below, however, the agricultural environments of these plains were themselves by no means completely uniform and Spartiate estates probably spread also into other locations, especially the diverse rolling hill country of western Messenia.

Some studies have suggested that overpopulation may be a more potent factor than partible inheritance in leading to fragmentation, and one study has employed a mathematical model to demonstrate that without population growth land becomes no more fragmented over time (McCloskey 1975). The critical factor here is whether a family owns sufficient discrete fields to distribute without requiring internal fragmentation: when the number of fields is fewer, equitable division without splitting becomes more difficult. The crucial issues are therefore the distribution of property among the Spartan citizen body and the size of Spartiate estates. Unfortunately, we have no statistics either for the overall size of Spartiate estates or for the size of individual plots. Moreover, as we saw in chapter 3, global generalisation is impossible, since land was always unequally distributed among Spartan citizens. Nevertheless, the position of the citizens as full-time hoplite warriors freed from economic activity made it

necessary that all should possess a sufficient competence of land. The fact that they had to support not only Spartiate subsistence needs and mess contributions but also the helot cultivators suggests that during the heyday of the property system, down to the early fifth century, Spartiate estates will have been significantly larger than the holdings of ordinary citizens in other poleis, such as the 4.5–5.4 hectare plots apparently regarded elsewhere as standard-sized hoplite farms (Burford Cooper 1977/8; Gallant 1991, 86–7). I shall suggest later (ch. 12) that the mean size of landholding owned by ‘ordinary’ Spartiates was of the order of 18 ha. If this is right, Spartiate landholdings will have fallen comfortably into the upper bracket of estate sizes attested across different times and places in the Mediterranean region (Gallant 1991, 82–86, esp. fig. 4.7). It may be, then, that during the archaic and early classical periods the splitting of individual plots could often be avoided, if it was felt desirable to do so. During the later fifth and fourth centuries, however, there developed an increasing number of poor citizen families whose overall landholdings – and, presumably also, number of discrete plots of land – were much more limited. In these circumstances the splitting of plots was probably a more frequent occurrence.

It is true, as Lane Fox (1985) has pointed out, that for such families there existed various means of delaying or modifying this kind of fragmentation. One of these was temporary or permanent fraternal cohabitation and there is evidence for the practice in Sparta of adelphic polyandry (Plb. 12.6b.8). This tactic itself, however, substituted a corporate for a single landlord and would not have prevented some portion of the land going to any sisters. It was perhaps for the latter reason that close-kin marriage and the combination of wife-sharing with uterine half-sibling marriage were also practised in classical Sparta.¹⁴ In the latter arrangement two brothers could produce by the same woman children who could then intermarry to reunite their paternal grandparents’ original properties. But even this manoeuvre, though it concentrated overall property holdings, did not eliminate boundary alterations and changes of ownership between the sexes, as regards either the paternal grandparents’ holdings or the property belonging to the shared wife. It is uncertain, moreover, that these marital manoeuvres were practised primarily by poorer families who were most likely to split their landholdings. In other societies polyandry has often been a tactic of the wealthy concerned to conserve their property and social position (Leach 1955; Kunstler 1983, 475, 593 n. 990); and the attested cases known from other regions of ancient Greece relate primarily to better-off families (Lane Fox 1985, 222–3). For poorer families, in contrast, faced with the risk of insufficient production for their essential needs, fragmentation of landed property is often viewed more positively as a means of spreading that risk, so that disasters to plots in one region do not affect their holdings elsewhere. We should therefore envisage a particularly complex web of relationships between Spartiate owners and helot farmers on the landholdings of poorer families. Many of their rather small individual plots will have been insufficient to support

an entire helot family off the latter's share of the produce. Consequently, helot households farming several tiny holdings belonging to multiple poorer landowners may have been a common occurrence.

We must also take account of the impact of frequent changes of ownership between the sexes as daughters inherited from their fathers and sons from their mothers. The ownership of land by women, together with Sparta's comparatively loose regulation of the marriages of heiresses, meant – as we saw in chapter 3 – a high level of transference of land between lineages. This factor, when combined with a high failure rate to produce a surviving male heir (about 40% of marriages in most pre-industrial societies), will have meant that only a minority of holdings were passed down within the male line from father to son over a number of generations. Only in a small proportion of cases, therefore, will there have been an enduring relationship between a Spartiate lineage and the helot family farming its estates.

In sum, helot farmers will have experienced considerable and continuous changes in the identity and number of the Spartiate masters or mistresses for whom they worked. There was probably also considerable variation in the numbers of helots on different landholdings. On larger holdings, particularly as property concentration advanced from the fifth century onwards, there will have been several helot families. This is exemplified in Xenophon's account of the conspiracy of Kinadon in the early 390s, when the latter pointed out to the informer that each master on the estates near to Sparta itself was outnumbered by many helots (*Hell.* 3.3.5). On the other hand, the phenomenon of plot fragmentation and the increasing number of landowners who, as either poor Spartiates or Inferiors,¹⁵ owned comparatively little land, probably meant that many helots were farming for more than one master. Some helot families may even have cultivated more land than their masters owned.¹⁶

In considering these effects of Spartiate demography and inheritance, we should not forget the impact of similar factors within the helot population. Even if a helot family remained attached to its plot of land when Spartiate ownership changed, that family was itself not a static entity but an ever-changing unit subject to the normal household life cycle resulting from the birth and marriage, the ageing and death of its constituent members. The number of able-bodied cultivators on each holding will have been constantly fluctuating. In addition, helot households will in each generation have experienced differing demographic histories, with the usual range of permutations of single male heirs, several surviving sons and no sons at all. We have no direct evidence for how the cultivation of specific holdings was passed on through the generations. However, there must have been some arrangements for the devolution of *movable* property which helots are attested as owning (Hdt. 9.80; Thuc. 4.26; Plut. *Kleom.* 23). Some degree of negotiation with the Spartiate landowner was no doubt necessary. But, given that the helots apparently had family relationships comparable to those of free Greeks, it is logical to believe that the

cultivation of one's holding was normally passed to one's descendants through some system akin to the partible inheritance found throughout the rest of Greece – with agnatic kinsmen perhaps having the usual residual claims in the case of sonless or heirless families.

Allowance should also be made for the varying conditions of cultivation. Helot households working together on larger Spartiate holdings may often have intermarried in order to benefit from spreading the extremes of variable fertility and child mortality over several families, with those households with several children taking up the slack from those without sons. These intermarrying families may even have resided together, forming multiple family households such as is attested among sharecropping households in regions of modern central Italy (Kertzer 1984). The existence of such co-residential arrangements might find some support from archaeological evidence that the settlement pattern in archaic and classical Messenia was more nucleated than in other parts of mainland Greece.¹⁷ Through such arrangements the usual problem of partibility – the fragmentation of holdings for descendants in subsequent generations – might often have been avoided. In contrast, for helot households working on their own on smaller holdings or on land which embraced the properties of more than one Spartiate, the situation may have been more fluid. In the absence of other families with an interest in mutual co-operation, such households may have faced a less predictable pattern of marriage alliances and possessed less insurance against the reproductive problem that faces any individual farming household: namely, the difficulty of avoiding either leaving no (male) heirs or having too many surviving sons to share a holding that formerly supported a single household.

Whatever the details, it is a plausible assumption that differential reproduction and mortality and diverse conditions of cultivation led to the development of inequalities among the helots in their access to land. There is a hint of such socio-economic differentiation in an emended gloss of Hesychios (μ 1626, ed. Latte, ii.676) which mentions certain 'leaders of the helots'.¹⁸ On the other hand, since it seems likely, given the exigencies of a servile labour force, that the devolution of cultivation 'rights' would *not* normally pass down to women, transfers of possession were presumably less frequent and division less severe than in the case of Spartiate ownership. Consequently, although – given the constraints of demography – few helot lineages will have had an unbroken ancestral association with the plots to which they were tied, their links with those plots will generally have been more continuous than was the case for their masters. The three-way relationship between landed property, its Spartiate owners and its helot cultivators was clearly far from straightforward.

Economic exploitation: fixed rent or sharecropping?

I turn now to examine the nature of the economic support which the Spartiates extracted from the helots. It is clear that the helots had to provide a tribute

in kind from the produce of the Spartiates' estates. The details of this tribute, however, are controversial, since the ancient sources disagree about whether the Spartiates extracted a *proportional* or a *fixed* share of the crops.

The post-classical sources typically refer to the extraction of a fixed share.¹⁹ According to the hellenistic *Instituta Laconica* no. 41 (= Plut. *Mor.* 239e),

the helots worked the land for them, paying over the tribute (*apophora*) set down in the past. A curse was laid on anyone who charged more, in order that they might serve gladly because they were making a profit and [the Spartiates] themselves might not try to get more.

The term *apophora* is often used of fixed sum payments.²⁰ Plutarch repeats it twice in his *Life of Lykourgos*. At 8.4 it describes the 70 and 12 *medimnoi* of barley and proportionate quantity of tree crops supposedly produced annually for, respectively, a Spartiate and his wife by each of the 9,000 equal Lykourgan (and Polydoran) *klēroi*. At 24.3 Plutarch refers back to these amounts, saying that the helots paid 'the *apophora* mentioned above'.²¹

There is, however, reason to doubt that such fixed rents operated in the classical period. Their authenticity cannot be separated from that of the Lykourgan/Polydoran *klēroi* from which Plutarch says they were produced; but, as I have argued (ch. 3), these equal *klēroi* reflect not classical reality but the work of the third-century revolution. The same conclusion necessarily follows for the idea of a fixed rent.²² There is indeed an air of unreality in the account in the *Instituta Laconica*. There is the naive assumption of the helots' willing service, which Ducat (1990a, 57–9) has identified as an element of the hellenistic notion of a 'contract of servitude' that sought to give helotage a favourable image. There is also the equally naive assumption of profit by the helots, with no hint of the subsistence risk which is inherent in a system in which the master takes a fixed amount of produce regardless of the amount harvested. The operation of a single rent fixed globally by the state is, moreover, incompatible with the private holdings of variable size owned by classical Spartiates (cf. Cozzoli 1979, 162–3). How was such a rent apportioned between different plots among a Spartiate's holdings? What rent was due when the landowner was not an adult male Spartiate with a wife, but a woman or a minor? Could wealthier landowners receive no more rent from their larger estates than could ordinary citizens from theirs? And if so, how can one reconcile this with their known additional expenditures (see chs. 9–11)?

What then of the evidence for a proportional (or sharecropping) quota? The earliest evidence is a fragment of Tyrtaios from the seventh century (fr. 6, West):

Like asses oppressed with heavy burdens;
bringing to their masters (δεσποσύνοισι) under grim compulsion,
half... of what the soil bears as fruit;
(Ἔμισυ πάνθ' ὄσσων καρπὸν ἄρουρα φέρει).

This passage is quoted by Pausanias (4.14.4) in his account of the conditions suffered by the Messenians after their initial conquest; and most scholars accept this as an accurate reading of its context.²³ Both Pausanias and Aelian (*VH* 6.1) interpret Tyrtaios as saying that the Messenians had to render half the produce to their Spartan masters; and this too is the sense adopted by most historians.²⁴

There is one apparent difficulty with this interpretation. Our manuscripts are defective at the critical phrase ἡμισυ πάνθ' ὄσσων and the word πάνθ' has been judged ungrammatical (cf. MacDowell 1986, 33). Textual critics have suggested various emendations which preserve Pausanias' interpretation of the passage's meaning, such as ἡμισυ παντός and, most frequently, ἡμισυ πᾶν, 'an entire half'.²⁵ The emendation, however, which remains closest to the manuscript readings is ἡμισυ πᾶν θ', which gives a slightly different sense: 'half and all' or 'half and the whole' (Allen 1936, 202; Rocha-Pereira (ed.) 1973, ad loc.). MacDowell, interpreting this to mean that 'some helots handed over half and some the whole of their produce', suggests that it is poetic rhetoric which makes it 'doubtful whether the passage can be used as evidence that a half was a legal figure'. He argues that Tyrtaios is saying that a fixed rent in practice often amounted to a half.

Although this last argument introduces an element of uncertainty, it is far from conclusive. First, Allen, the originator of this emendation, admitted that it was, to his knowledge, a singular usage. Secondly, the interpretation given by Pausanias and Aelian should be given some weight. As Habicht (1985) has demonstrated, Pausanias was a careful researcher whose accurate verbatim copying and interpretation of hundreds of inscriptions, often written in unfamiliar alphabets and dialects, is abundantly substantiated. Moreover, he probably had a better text than the defective ones in our manuscripts. Thirdly, claiming half the movable goods was common practice in archaic Greek wars (*Iliad* 18.509–12; 22.114–121; Singor 1993, 43). The extraction of half the produce is simply an extension of that practice to a situation of permanent conquest. Even if one prefers Allen's reading and MacDowell's translation, however, the passage is still reconcilable with the idea of a proportional share. Sharecropping arrangements frequently contain different provisions for different crops (e.g. Warriner 1962, 27; Reid 1973, 118, 128–9; Delano Smith 1979, 79; Valensi 1985, 109) and the passage could reflect a situation in which staple crops were shared equally, but non-subsistence foodstuffs went entirely to the Spartiate owner. There is therefore no good reason to doubt that the evidence of Tyrtaios attests the operation of a sharecropping arrangement between Spartiates and the conquered population of Messenia.

What relationship do these terms of economic exploitation imposed upon early Messenia bear to the situation in Lakonia and Messenia in the later archaic and classical periods? There is no hard evidence on the point; but there is nothing to suggest that within Messenia itself the initial terms of servitude were

significantly altered in later centuries or that the same terms of exploitation did not apply in both Messenia and Lakonia. As Cartledge (1979, 97) has noted, ‘there is nothing in the ancient literary sources to suggest that the status of the Lakonian helots differed from that of the Messenians’. It is *a priori* likely that Spartiates would have assimilated the Lakonian and Messenian helots to a single set of conditions. Hence it seems more probable than not that the sharecropping arrangement described by Tyrtaios constituted a condition of helotage throughout our period (cf. Singer 1993, 43).

Some scholars have, admittedly, claimed that at the time of Tyrtaios the Messenian helots had not been fully helotised, a process which they insist took place only after the Second Messenian War (Kiechle 1959, 57–62) or the revolt of the 460s (Ducat 1990a, 60–1, 141–4). On this view, the sharecropping arrangement is characteristic of a semi-independent people only partially enslaved, not of the full state of helotage. There are, however, difficulties with this interpretation. The idea of a semi-independent Messenia depends largely upon Pausanias’ portrayal of her as a vassal state which had accepted an oath of loyalty to Sparta (4.14.4). In contrast to the issue of agricultural tribute, he is unable to cite a passage of Tyrtaios to support the notion of an oath. On this point Pausanias’ account is heavily influenced by the pseudo-historical Messenian tradition which developed after her liberation in 370/69. The idea that they remained semi-independent after the original conquest is a means by which the Messenians created an ‘early history’ for themselves; as historical reality it is highly suspect (Pearson 1962; Oliva 1971, 111). There is no support for this idea in the archaic or classical evidence. In the surviving fragments of his poems Tyrtaios clearly portrays the relationship of the Messenians to the Spartans as one of enslavement: the Spartans are described twice as their ‘masters’ (*desposynoi* and *despotai*: frs. 6.2, 7.1, West).²⁶ Ducat argues that Herodotus consistently treats the Messenians as a separate entity whom he never confuses with the helots. Whitby (1994, 94–5), however, has shown that Herodotus’ references to ‘helots’ are not restricted to Lakonians; and that his use of the term ‘Messenian(s)’ is, with one mythical exception (6.52), confined to the context of military conflict with Sparta (Hdt. 3.47; 5.49; 9.35, 64).²⁷ Herodotus used the specific term ‘Messenian(s)’ where it was appropriate, otherwise the generic term ‘helot(s)’ embracing both Lakonians and Messenians. He provides no grounds for believing that the Spartans treated the Messenians as a separate entity. As Figueira (1999) has demonstrated, the main inspiration for the evolution of a separate Messenian identity – which took place relatively late during her period of subjugation to Sparta, after the 460s revolt – was external Athenian propaganda, which was firmly resisted by the Spartans. This is not to deny that there *were* certain distinctive features of communal organization and local consciousness among the Messenian helots, as exemplified by their religious dedications (Ducat 1990a, 142–3) and capacity to revolt (Cartledge 1985a). But these are better explained in terms of the differential operation of

common terms of helotage in Messenia and Lakonia, due mainly to differences in their proximity to Sparta.²⁸ There is therefore no reason to believe that the sharecropping arrangement attested by Tyrtaios was merely an ephemeral phase in the early history of Messenia rather than an essential element of helot servitude in both Messenia and Lakonia.

Sharecropping has been termed ‘probably the most widespread form of economic organization in the world’ (Warriner 1962, 59). It is therefore worth considering its practical impact and suitability for Sparta’s exploitation of the helots in the light of comparative evidence from other societies. Some scholars have thought a 50% quota too large to be a regular levy; but it has been common practice elsewhere, as is indicated by the etymology of the standard French and Italian terms for sharecropping, *métayage* and *mezzadria*.²⁹ Sharecropping quotas are attested historically as varying considerably, with landlords taking between 10% and 80% of the main crop (Delano Smith 1979, 79; Valensi 1985, 107–8), depending on a variety of factors, such as density of population, alternative employment opportunities, quality of land and especially the relative proportions of the factors of production supplied by landlord and tenant. The situation on Spartiate estates fulfilled several of the conditions favouring higher quotas: a high population density, a captive labour force and high-quality land.³⁰ The one uncertain aspect is the relative production inputs of Spartiates and helots. The Spartiates provided the land and the helots the labour; but who supplied the seed, draught animals and equipment such as ploughs, pressing beds and milling installations? No direct evidence exists and it may be rash to expect a single answer, owing to the considerable inequalities in access to landed resources among both Spartiates and helots and the significant differences in distance from Sparta between plots in the central Lakonian plain and those in remoter parts of Messenia. The Spartiate landowners depicted by Xenophon as supervising their nearby large estates containing numerous helots are likely to have been interventionist and proactive in supplying higher-quality livestock and materials to maximise production. On distant Messenian smallholdings there was probably greater reliance upon local inputs from more self-sufficient helot households. The system as a whole was well designed to combine a degree of security for poorer Spartiates with a proportionate return for richer landowners. However few production inputs poorer Spartiates could contribute, they were guaranteed half the produce. Richer, more proactive owners, on the other hand, would share in the increased harvests produced by the extra inputs which they had supplied.

Sharecropping also provided a degree of security for the helots – certainly far more security than the system of fixed rents described in the post-classical sources. When the landowner extracts a fixed rent, the cultivator reaps the profits of potential crop surpluses (as the passage from the *Instituta Laconica* implies), but he also has to bear all the risks of crop failure – a point the passage conveniently ignores. A sharecropping arrangement provides a more

equitable distribution of both profit and risk. As James Scott's classic study of the 'moral economy' of peasants in southeast Asia (1976, esp. 7 and 46–9) amply demonstrates, subsistence farmers typically prefer to avoid fixed rents in favour of sharecropping, even if the former are more profitable in most years, precisely in order to escape the risk that in bad years the fixed rent will leave them with little or nothing to live on. These considerations are equally relevant in conditions of Mediterranean farming, which are marked by a high interannual variability of weather conditions, leading to considerable fluctuations in crop yields. Recent studies have suggested that 'the vast majority of communities of the [ancient] Mediterranean were endemically vulnerable to food crisis' (Garnsey 1988, 45; cf. Gallant 1989; 1991). Besides sharing the risk, sharecropping may also contribute to overall risk *reduction* by permitting a more flexible agricultural response than is possible under fixed rent to the emerging and variable conditions of each year (Reid 1975/6).³¹ Of course, Scott's 'moral economy' approach does not in itself explain Sparta's employment of sharecropping. We need not credit the Spartiates with any philanthropic concern for the helots' well-being. Their needs would have been of little avail had sharecropping not also suited the 'political economy' of the Spartiates, to borrow the phrase adopted by Popkin (1979) in his critique of Scott's peasant-centred approach. The uninterrupted maintenance of helot production was crucial to their own position. Sharecropping was consequently the most secure arrangement in the Spartiate–helot relationship, characterized as it was by a long-term mutual interdependence between landowner and cultivator.

At the same time, sharecropping is not ineffective in producing surpluses. Sharecropping has traditionally suffered criticism from neoclassical economists for its inefficiency, in that a cultivator who receives only half the crop has an incentive to stint his efforts when the marginal product of his labour is still twice as high as the marginal costs, whereas the owner-cultivator will labour on until the costs are as high as the product. These criticisms, however, have been undermined by studies within both the neoclassical and Chayanovian schools of thought.³² Marginal productivity under sharecropping can be as high as, if not higher than, under alternative regimes. It is often employed by landlords as a means of maximizing labour input, total productivity and surplus, particularly when the holding worked is relatively small. The 'whip of hunger' forces the sharecropper to work as hard and long as is necessary to ensure survival.³³ This effect counteracts the Marshallian principle that sharecropping is inefficient where there is 'practical fixity of tenure' (such as the helots possessed) because the landlord has no instrument for increasing the output of labour. Long tenures can in fact lead to increased productivity because they encourage improvements (R.A.C. Parker 1955/6, 158; Herring 1983, ch.9). The considerable difference in population between helots and Spartiates worked to the latter's advantage here. In providing their own subsistence, the numerically superior helots will necessarily have produced abundant surpluses for their masters. Only the increasing disparity

in land between rich and poor Spartiates ultimately ruined this system by diverting too much of this surplus into too few hands.

Sharecropping was, accordingly, an effective means of sustaining the long-term economic relationship between Spartiates and helots. It was also well-suited to prevailing political conditions, permitting the Spartan polis to control and regulate citizen-helot relations. By maximizing labour input, it kept the helots occupied with farming at the expense of subversive activities. The global imposition of a standard proportion also enabled the polis to limit the acquisitiveness of its citizens in years of poor harvests, thus safeguarding helot subsistence and the essential foundation of Spartan society. The sharing of produce also fitted with the responsibility of citizens for the personal condition of their helots. Citizens were in a better position to influence cultivation choices and to control the foodstuffs available for helot consumption. Finally, sharecropping eased the problem of extracting tribute from distant parts of Spartan territory in years of crop failure. Tenants faced with rents which would take the bulk of the crop often simply appropriate whatever is needed for their subsistence (Scott 1976, 124–46). As the younger Pliny complained of his distant fixed-rent Italian tenants, ‘they even seize and consume the produce of the land in the belief that they will gain nothing themselves by conserving it’ (*Letters* 9.37). The sharing of reduced harvests will have minimised the growth of grievances and increased the likelihood of helot compliance. From all perspectives, therefore, the interests of the ‘political economy’ of the Spartiates and of the ‘moral economy’ of the helots coincided to make sharecropping the most effective means of economic exploitation.

The economic geography of Spartiate-helot landholdings

The character of agricultural exploitation

The geographical location and extent of citizen landholdings cultivated by the helots are important matters in their own right and for their implications for the character of Spartiate-helot agriculture and the size of individual citizen estates. Yet, partly due to the paucity of written evidence, these are questions of considerable controversy and uncertainty.

There are wide differences in modern estimates of the amount of land occupied by citizen estates in Lakonia and Messenia (TABLE 1). These divergences stem from different approaches to several key variables. The highest estimates in older studies stemmed from an over-simplified reliance upon gross topography which assumed that all valley areas were equally suitable for arable cultivation, without attention to local geology, geomorphology or soil type; Bölte’s more cautious estimate was the first serious attempt to take these factors into account. Some early studies were also significantly over-pessimistic or over-optimistic in their estimates of productivity.³⁴ More recent differences stem from disagreement over two further issues. The first is the geographical distribution of Spartiate landholdings, in particular whether they were confined to the main arable

TABLE 1. Estimates of the area of citizen landholdings (in hectares).

	<i>Lakonia</i>	<i>Messenia</i>	<i>Total</i>
Busolt–Swoboda (1920–26, ii.641–2)	120,000		
Kahrstedt (1919, 280–1)			200–250,000
Jardé (1925, 112–13)	90–100,000	126–140,000	216–240,000
Cartledge (1987, 173)	50–75,000		
Figueira (1984, 102–3)			92,500
Ehrenberg (1924, 47)	60,000		
Bölte (1929a, 1339–40)	<50,000		
Jameson (1992, 137)	21,000		
Roebuck (1945, 151, 156–7)			20,000

NB. In the cases of Kahrstedt and Jardé the different figures given represent their estimates of Spartiate land exclusive and inclusive of land devoted to arboriculture (which Jardé appears to believe was not divided among individual citizens).

plains or spread more widely. The widely varying estimates for citizen estates in Messenia, for example, derive from the fact that Jardé and Figueira view them as covering a significant portion of Messenian territory, whereas Roebuck would restrict them to the eastern plains (Stenyklaros and Makaria) and the adjoining Soulima valley (see *Fig. 5*, p. 143). The second issue is the interrelated question of the character of agricultural exploitation. Jameson's very low estimate for Lakonia, based on his belief that Spartiate land was restricted to the main valleys of the Sparta basin and Helos plain (see *Fig. 4*, p. 140), is allied to his assumption of a conservative agricultural regime based upon extensive cultivation of subsistence crops, especially cereals, and a low level of production for sale. In his opinion, Sparta's 'serf system worked well only on large estates of the best land' (1992, 137), in contrast to the diversified, specialised, intensive and more market-oriented farming in parts of Greece where agriculture was based upon chattel slavery (cf. Jameson 1977/8). The resulting differences between the extent of Spartiate landholding estimated by various scholars are quite radical, since the combined figure of a mere 41,000ha produced by Jameson's and Roebuck's figures for Lakonia and Messenia, respectively, is many times fewer than the generous 200,000+ha proposed by Kahrstedt and Jardé and less even than Bölte's conservative figure of <50,000ha for Lakonia alone.

We are, consequently, presented with a stark choice between two fundamentally different images of the geography of Spartiate landholding. To decide between them we should first assess the plausibility of the interpretations of the character of Spartiate–helot agriculture with which they are associated. In what follows I shall argue, first, that, although the broad outlines of Jameson's view are correct, certain important qualifications should be entered regarding the supposed low degree of intensification of the agrarian regime; secondly,

that these and other factors suggest that Spartiate landholdings were not as geographically restricted as Jameson and Roebuck propose.

In some respects the Spartiates' exploitation of their estates was clearly geared towards subsistence crops. The primary purposes of each citizen's holdings were to feed his family and to supply his required contributions to the common mess. The foodstuffs demanded for the mess were basics of life: barley meal, wine, cheese and figs (*Dikaiarchos*, *FHG* 2.242, fr. 23, *ap. Athen.* 141c; *Plut. Lyk.* 12.2). Indeed, evidence that the quantity of mess dues demanded of each citizen was higher than he can personally have consumed (Figueira 1984, 91) indicates that state intervention pushed Spartiate landowners in the direction of an even greater orientation towards subsistence crops. Citizen estates, moreover, also had to supply the subsistence needs of the helot labour force. This orientation towards subsistence crops, however, was not complete, nor need it imply a low degree of diversification, intensification or even of market production. As we have seen, the sharecropping system produced abundant surpluses for many Spartiates. As Jameson himself acknowledges (1992, 137), 'the elite used the surplus they controlled to acquire personal possessions... The market was probably always a restricted but not insignificant element in the economy.' Wealthy landowners also used their large estates for non-subsistence crops, such as wheat for the high-status bread that they contributed voluntarily to the messes (*Xen. Lak. Pol.* 5.3).

Wealthy Spartiate estates, moreover, were not merely arable prairies but included a significant level of animal husbandry that reportedly put Athenian estates to shame:

Not one of our estates could compare with theirs in extent and excellence, not in ownership of slaves, especially the helot class, nor of horses, nor of the other livestock that graze in Messene ([Plato] *Alk.* I 122d).

Note that the contrast made between Spartan and Athenian estates is one of size and quality, not of contrasting types of agricultural practice. (It is even envisaged that wealthy Spartiates would employ not only helots but also some chattel slaves, thus opening up further possibilities for intensification of farming.) A similar picture of Spartiate farming is presented by Euripides (*ap. Strabo* 8.5.6), who describes Messene as,

watered with countless streams, furnished with good pasture for both cattle and sheep, being neither very wintry, nor yet made too hot by the chariots of Helios.

As Euripides emphasizes, Messenia possessed an ideal environment and climate for the practice of diversified agriculture with a substantial pastoral element. Recent studies have emphasized that animal husbandry at anything above subsistence level typically involves a significant degree of involvement in market transactions as a means of exchanging the wide range of secondary products deriving from pastoral activity (cf. Khazanov 1984, 202; Whittaker (ed.) 1988, 4;

Forbes 1995, 338). Wealthy Spartiates needed to engage in such exchanges to fund the variety of expenditures demanded by their elite lifestyles (see further chs. 5, 9–11.) From this angle too, the agricultural practices of wealthy Spartiates appear more complex than those of an unintensive subsistence regime.

Furthermore, we should not draw too firm a line between the agricultural activities of the rich and of ordinary Spartiates. The range of compulsory mess contributions indicates that farming on the holdings of ordinary citizens was diverse in its scope, involving not only arable culture but also viticulture, arboriculture and animal husbandry. Scholars often envisage these diversified activities as operating in marginal settings divorced from areas of cereal production. Jardé (1925, 112–13) thought that land devoted to arboriculture was not divided among individual citizens. Jameson assumes that ‘the considerable amount of hilly and rough country adjoining the Spartiates’ *kleroi* was used by helots for grazing, while small patches of cultivable land in these marginal areas were used for vines, fruits and field crops’ (1992, 137 n. 12). According to Roebuck (1945, 151), Messenia was exploited through ‘cereal production on the Spartan *kleroi* in the plains and...stock-raising in the hills’. This supposed separation of activities, however, runs counter to current understandings of the practice of Greek arboriculture and animal husbandry. Arboriculture frequently included the intercropping of trees and cereals (Gallant 1991, 38–41) and animal husbandry typically involved the integration of arable and pastoral activities, often including a degree of on-farm husbandry (Hodkinson 1988; Forbes 1995).

Nor should we think of production on ordinary citizen estates as necessarily unintensive or isolated from the market. The year-round requirement upon every household to supply the specified mess contributions probably created an ongoing demand for these products as households sought to obtain particular foodstuffs of which they were (temporarily) in short supply, balancing their acquisitions where possible through the disposal of items in surplus. Whether these transactions took place through the market or through more personalised exchange does not affect the boost given to production for surplus. The increasing poverty of many Spartiate households from the fifth century onwards probably also led to increased intensification in an effort to maintain production of the mess dues from smaller holdings.

Further intensification of cultivation stemmed from subsistence pressures on the helot cultivators. The size of the helot population is uncertain, even for the better-attested periods of the fifth and early fourth centuries, with modern estimates varying between 140,000 and 375,000.³⁵ (For further discussion, see ch. 12.) No doubt it was not static, and it probably adhered to the general population increase evident throughout archaic and classical Greece (Sallares 1991, 50–107). Most scholars, however, whatever their precise figures, would subscribe to Cartledge’s proposition (1987, 174) that ‘most helots could have been living at or near the margin of subsistence’.³⁶ Far from a regime of extensive cultivation, we should arguably envisage on many estates a considerable

degree of intensification as helot families struggled hard, making high labour inputs to ensure their subsistence. Even with such intensive farming, it would have been a major struggle for even a mere 140,000 helots to live off half the produce of Roebuck's and Jameson's projected 41,000ha, at an effective population: farmland density of almost seven persons per ha. In fact, not all helots did live on the subsistence margin. We saw reason earlier to postulate considerable differentiation within the helot population, with some households cultivating sizeable landed properties capable of surplus production. Although the mechanisms by which surpluses might be disposed of are unclear, there are intimations in both the literary and archaeological record that means existed by which helots could engage in exchange and constructively employ their surplus resources.³⁷ For better-off helots too there were good reasons for practising more intensive cultivation.

We should conclude, therefore, that the depiction of Spartiate-helot agriculture as a system of unintensive cereal cultivation which worked well only on large estates of the best valley land is altogether too simple. Indeed, Jameson himself acknowledges the existence of systems of serf labour elsewhere in other regions of Greece – at Sikyon and Lokris – which were less suited to large-scale extensive cultivation (1992, 138–9). In Sparta too the system of partible inheritance embracing both sons and daughters probably meant that the landholdings of most households were fragmented into individual plots of modest size. Hence even the estates of wealthier citizens will have been an aggregation of smaller-scale units of cultivation.

Agricultural potential and the spread of Spartiate landholdings

The implication of these preceding remarks for the location of Spartan estates is surely to dissolve the sharp distinction between the agricultural exploitation of the plains and of other land which dominates much scholarly discussion. In the light of this observation, let us consider the regions of Lakonia and Messenia in turn.

Lakonia

The pressures towards intensification discussed above suggest that one would expect Spartiate landholdings in Lakonia, especially in the parts closest to Sparta, to spread beyond the Eurotas valley, westwards and eastwards up the hill sides towards the Taygetos and Parnon ranges, to occupy every available niche. The plausibility of this expectation is confirmed by study of the area's agricultural potential. Although definitive assessment is problematic in the absence of systematic geomorphological surveys, some provisional comments can usefully be made.³⁸

We can start with the area most easily accessible for Spartiate exploitation, the Eurotas valley close to Sparta itself (*Figs. 2–3*). The precise chronology of the fluvial sequences which contributed to the formation of this landscape is as

yet unknown. From the available studies, however, it seems clear that land in the valley bottom in antiquity was not always markedly superior to the adjacent hill land. The present-day soil cover in the valley bottom itself varies considerably in character and fertility and has been formed in different periods by a diverse range of processes.³⁹ The modern landscape comprises a dissected chain of low hillocks running down the length of the valley (shown in the foreground of *Fig. 2*), consisting of light, fertile Neogene marls, conglomerates and sands. This chain is flanked, to the west, by a broad, shallow alluvium-filled depression, which itself gives way to less fertile piedmont fans characterised by red soils at the foot of Mt Taygetos. (Both features are evident in the background of *Fig. 2*.) To the east, the chain of hillocks is flanked by a lower terrace of fertile alluvial soils which runs along the banks of the River Eurotas.

As regards the valley in antiquity, recent studies, based especially upon magnetic data, suggest that the mid-Holocene (Neolithic and later) landscape also comprised distinct subdivisions containing soils of diverse fertility (Pope 1995). The following description moves across the valley from west to east (see *Fig. 3*).

First, on the valley's western margin, the piedmont fans mentioned above were still active with deposition, causing them to extend towards the interior of the basin. The upper fan surfaces were relict landforms, although the soils developing on them were susceptible to erosion which removed the A-horizon and exposed the less fertile underlying B-horizon. Secondly, the aforementioned broad alluvial depression probably experienced intermittent erosion by occasional run-off from the Taygetos range which in turn partly truncated the soils developing on the surface.



Fig. 2. View over central and western parts of Sparta valley, looking towards Mt Taygetos (photo courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens). Note, in the foreground, the chain of hillocks and, in the distance, the shallow alluvial depression and piedmont fans.

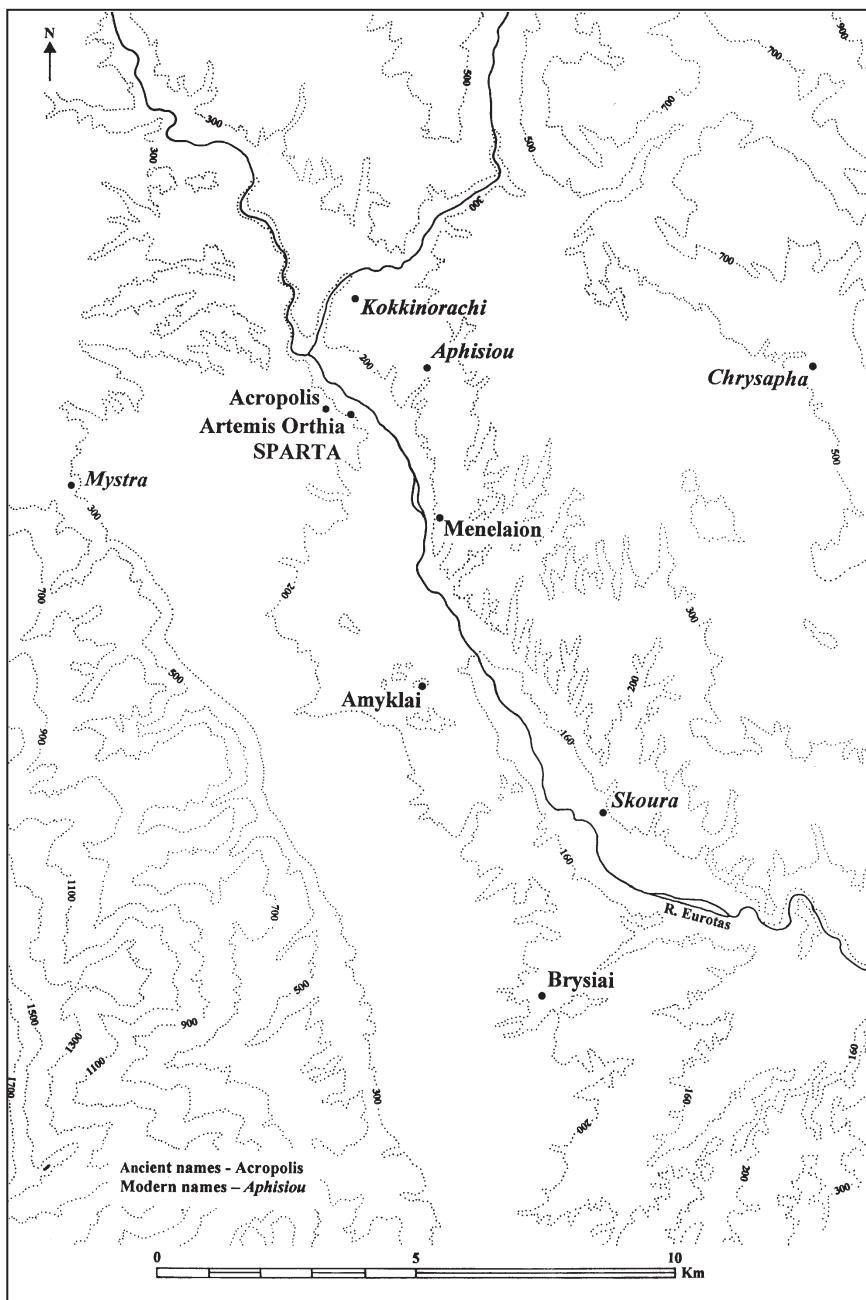


Fig. 3. Sparta Valley.

Thirdly, the low Neogene hillocks were by this period largely a relict landscape formed by erosion of the initial Neogene landscape and subsequent dissection, probably during the middle Pleistocene; in consequence, *in situ* weathering of Neogene deposits provided material for soil formation. Fourthly, due to this erosion, material was transferred to the central parts of the basin, where fertile soils evolved from reworked Neogene deposits. Bore-hole data suggests that reworked Neogene now underlies the alluvium and alluvial soils developing in the area adjacent to the present-day River Eurotas.

Finally, down the basin's eastern side soils were developing on Holocene fluvial sediment deposited by the River Eurotas. However, many of the current fertile soils which have developed on the alluvium are probably of post-classical date. The thesis of Vita-Finzi (1969) and Bintliff (1977) that the alluvial soils known as the 'Younger Fill' were not deposited until after AD 400 as a consequence of Mediterranean-wide climatic change is nowadays heavily disputed (Wagstaff 1981; van Andel et al. 1986). Current theories emphasize instead the impact of human cultivation and the differential timing of deposition in different locations. Nevertheless, Wagstaff (1981, 250 table 1) accepts a late Roman date for alluviation at Limnai in Sparta itself. Geomorphological studies of the north-eastern part of the Eurotas valley for the British School at Athens Laconia Survey have dated the later phase of alluvial fan deposits and basin fill to the late classical/hellenistic period and the current river terraces to the last 200–700 years.⁴⁰

Overall, therefore, it seems that before the widespread deposition of alluvial soils, which took place largely after our period, certain parts of the Sparta plain in antiquity were significantly poorer in quality than they are today. In classical times soils developing on the Neogene were probably more extensive within the Eurotas basin and probably constituted the prime agricultural land. These soils, however, were not confined to the valley bottom. Even today fertile soils developing on Neogene extend into the foothills north-west of Sparta and north of Mystra. They are extensive also to the east of Sparta, on the plateau above the valley bottom. Although nowadays this region is heavily dissected and eroded, substantial areas of Neogene-derived soils still remain north-east of Sparta between the modern villages of Kokkinorachi and Aphisiou, around the sanctuary of the Menelaion and (further south) near the village of Skoura. Further areas are found in the south of the Sparta basin and at the northern end of the Helos plain (Bintliff 1977, ii.374–5, 382–3, 389 and 445 fig. 3; Cavanagh et al. 1996, 362). Geomorphological studies within the Laconia Survey area have concluded that, as in the Eurotas basin, the soils developing on Neogene on the plateau east of Sparta were deeper and more extensive in antiquity. It is *a priori* likely, therefore, that during the expansion of their territorial control Spartiate households took the opportunity to acquire these nearby high-quality areas of Neogene, which may have been superior to some valley land. This hypothesis is supported by the fact that they contained the

greatest amount of classical surface archaeological material within the Survey area (Cavanagh et al. forthcoming, ch. 2).

The evidence from the Sparta valley, consequently, provides further indications that citizen landholdings in Lakonia as a whole were spread more diffusely than is usually thought. Traditionally, Spartiate landholdings in Lakonia are envisaged as having been located in discrete blocks clearly separated from the territories of the *perioikoi* (Bölte 1929a, 1321–40). This view is founded almost exclusively upon the passage of Plutarch, *Agis* (8.1) which describes King Agis IV's proposals for a complete redistribution of land in the 240s. According to these proposals,

the land should be divided up, that which lay between the water-course at Pellene, Taygetos, Malea, and Sellasia, into 4,500 *klēroi*, that which lay outside into 15,000; and this latter should be apportioned among those of the *perioikoi* who were capable of bearing arms, that inside to the Spartiates.

As has already been demonstrated (ch. 3), Agis's proposals, though presented as a return to Sparta's glorious past, were a radical departure from previous practice. Hence there is no surety that the precise demarcation between areas of Spartiate and perioikic landholdings reflects the classical situation. Although it made sense for Agis to use the existing perioikic poleis of Sellasia and Pellene for fixing his northern boundary, there is no evidence that this stemmed from the presence of a similar boundary between Spartiate and perioikic private estates in classical times.⁴¹ The specification of the Taygetos range and Malea peninsula as the other boundaries in fact contradicts classical arrangements, since the huge area thus delimited embraces certain probable classical perioikic sites. (It also includes far more territory than just valley land, thus offering no support for notions that Spartiate landholdings were confined to the plains.)

In contrast to Agis's proposals, the organisation of Spartan-perioikic relations in classical Lakonia was not the result of systematic planning. The increasing infilling of the landscape revealed in the archaic and classical archaeological record shows that the establishment of perioikic communities took place over several centuries and must have sprung from a variety of circumstances.⁴² Consequently, we should not expect strict demarcation between areas of Spartiate and perioikic landholdings. Indeed, we know that the kings held land within many perioikic territories (Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 15.3). The location of certain perioikic settlements, such as Brysiai and Krokeai, in the Sparta and Helos plains also suggests a patchwork of Spartiate and perioikic farms;⁴³ and Graham Shipley (1992, 217–19) has suggested several other cases outside the central valleys (Geronthrai, Chrysapha and the plain south of modern Molaoi) where this may have applied. This intermingling of farms would help explain the markedly dispersed character of perioikic settlements (G. Shipley 1992, 223).

Where does this leave the question of the extent of Spartiate landholdings in Lakonia? The considerations discussed above suggest that Jameson's estimate

The anatomy of the Spartiate property system

of a mere 21,000 ha of Spartiate land is too low. As he notes, the Greek National Statistical Service's 1961 Agriculture-Livestock Census recorded 47,153 ha of cultivated land within the modern administrative unit, the Eparchia Lakedaimonos, which covers the Sparta valley and adjacent areas, including part of the Helos plain. To bolster his argument that the Spartiates themselves exploited less than half of this area, Jameson not only excludes the

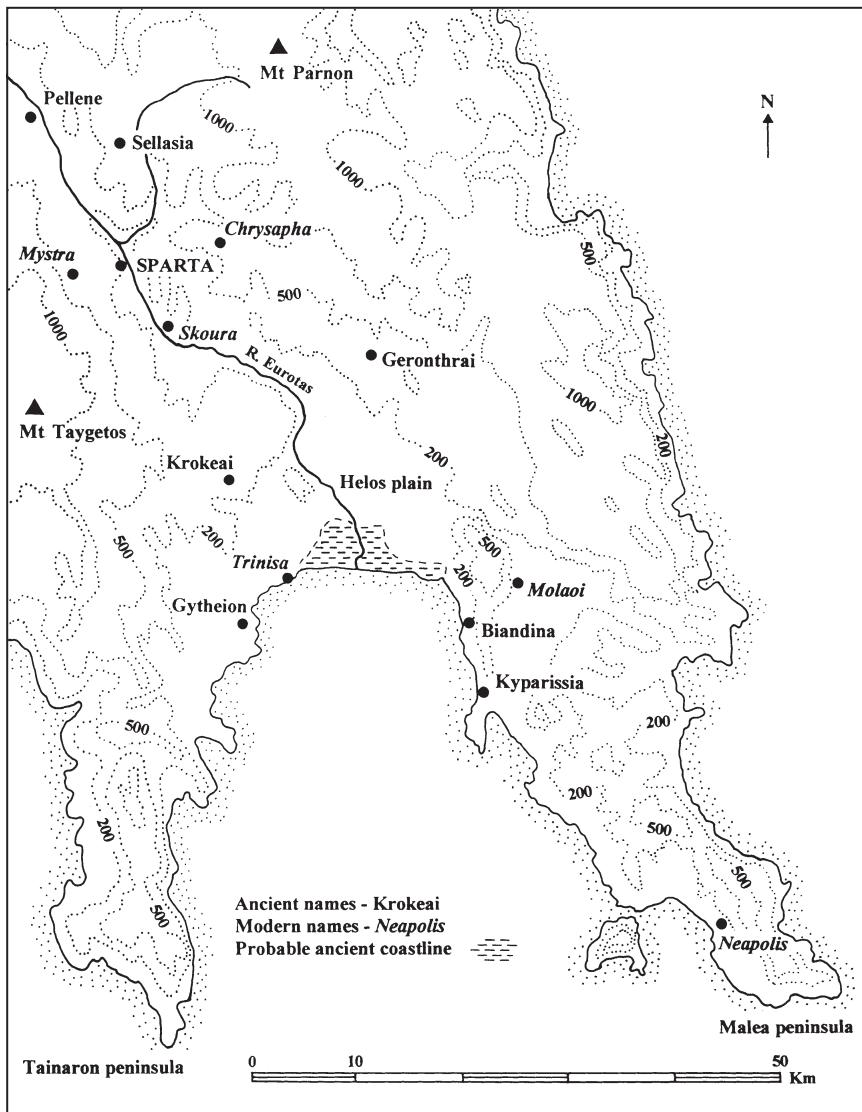


Fig. 4. Lakonia.

non-plains areas but also argues for a further reduction of the area within the Eparchia available for Spartiate landholdings, on the grounds that the ancient Helos plain was considerably smaller before post-classical alluviation (1992, 137 n. 14). In fact, however, the Eparchia Lakedaimonos includes only about one-third of the plain's post-classical alluvial areas: those located in the plain's south-western sector.⁴⁴ Most of the recent alluvium falls outside the Eparchia Lakedaimonos, within the neighbouring Eparchia Epidaurou Limiras. Hence more of the cultivable land within Sparta's immediate region was available for cultivation than Jameson acknowledges. Indeed, the Eparchia Epidaurou Limiras itself also includes about 5,000ha of non-alluvial cultivated land in the eastern part of the Helos plain, which should be added to the area available for Spartiate estates.⁴⁵

There were probably also Spartiate–helot farms further south-east, in the Malea peninsula (see *Fig. 4*). In 415 the Athenians established a fort at the southern end of the peninsula opposite the island of Kythera, probably by the bay of modern Neapolis, ‘so that the helots might have a place to which they could desert’ (Thuc. 7.26; cf. Gomme et al. 1945–81, iv.399–400). The fort was abandoned in winter 413/12 (8.4); but in just two and a half years it attracted a sizeable number of deserters, since Xenophon (*Hell.* 1.2.18) states that in winter 410/09 ‘the Lakedaimonians let go under treaty the helots who had revolted and fled from Malea to Koryphasion [sc. Pylos in western Messenia]’. The Malea fort was obviously close to a region of helot-worked estates. The nearby plain of Neapolis is one obvious candidate for the location of these estates; another is the large plain of high-quality Neogene soils south of modern Molaoi. Certain scholars have argued that the owners of these helot-worked estates in this region were *perioikoi* (Hampl 1937, 24; G. Shipley 1997, 203). The issue of whether *perioikoi* could possess helots, however, is a vexed one which has divided modern scholarship: the sources permit no clear-cut conclusion.⁴⁶ Even if one grants the possibility of *perioikic* ownership, it is noteworthy that there is no definite archaeological evidence for the presence of a significant classical *perioikic* settlement in the Neapolis plain (G. Shipley 1992, 220) and the plain of Molaoi also lacked *perioikic* sites east of the coastal settlements of Kyparissia and Biandina (*ibid* 219). Hence the helot-worked farms in these two regions may well have been Spartiate-owned, or perhaps amixed patchwork of Spartiate and *perioikic* holdings. If so, they will have constituted a significant addition to the area of Spartiate land-ownership, since the cultivated area of the plain of Molaoi on its own totalled over 9,000ha, including adjacent non-plains land, in the 1971 Agriculture-Livestock Census.⁴⁷

Clearly, the modern figures cited above provide only a generic indication of the amount of land available for Spartiate farms in antiquity; but together they suggest an area significantly larger than Jameson's 21,000ha and surely closer to the maximum of 50,000ha suggested by Bölte.

Messenia

The case of Messenia, as noted earlier, presents similar differences of opinion concerning the geographical extent of Spartiate landholdings (see *Fig. 5*). Many scholars believe that Spartiate estates worked by helots were restricted to the two eastern plains: the upper Messenian plain known in antiquity as Stenyklaros and the lower plain by the Messenian gulf, known as Makaria. According to this view, non-perioikic land elsewhere in central and western Messenia was not divided into private arable estates but used for pastoralism and other activities.⁴⁸ Other scholars, however, envisage Spartiate holdings as being spread over a much wider area of the region's territory (Jardé 1925, 112–13; Figueira 1984, 102–3). This latter view is supported – as we have seen – by the considerations urged above regarding the character of Spartiate-helot agriculture.

The two eastern plains, separated by Mt Ithome, were undoubtedly the central focus of Spartiate landholdings. Their acquisition had been the objective of the original Spartan conquest (*Tyrtaios*, fr. 5 West). Spartiate estates occupied the whole of the upper Stenyklaros plain and the western part of the lower Makaria plain. A fragment of Euripides (*ap. Strabo* 8.5.6; 366c), which indicates that the River Pamisos (which flows north–south through the lower plain) formed the border between Lakonikē and Messenia, is normally interpreted as signifying that the river divided Spartiate territory to the west from the territories of perioikic settlements along the eastern edge of the plain and the eastern coast of the Messenian Gulf (Ernst Meyer 1978, 253–4). In his poem referring to the original Spartan conquest, *Tyrtaios* refers to ‘Messene, good to plough and good to sow’; but we should not regard the eastern plains as devoted solely to arable culture. As we saw earlier, Euripides calls the same region ‘rich in produce, watered with countless streams, furnished with good pasture for both cattle and sheep’. His evidence indicates a mixed arable and pastoral regime and his description of the watery landscape nicely fits the Makaria plain and the ‘Five Rivers’ region around the northwestern head of the Messenian Gulf. As a modern agricultural economist has commented, ‘the floodplains and coastal lowlands must have served as grazing grounds for large animals’ (van Wersch 1972, 181), not least the horses mentioned in the passage from [Plato], *Alkibiades I* quoted earlier.

Conversely, although the regions of central and western Messenia no doubt also witnessed much pastoral activity, to dismiss them as merely grazing and hunting land is to ignore their immense arable potential. Van Wersch’s modern study (1972, 186) has noted ‘the suitability for grain production of the sizeable plateau lands and the rolling hill country’ of inland Messenia. The region contains many promising arable environments: well-drained, gently-sloping alluvial slopes; fertile Pliocene terraces with terraceable slopes and flattish valleys; upland kampos and dissected Pliocene hill lands characterised by moderately fertile, non-calcareous soils; also regions of dissected kampos and ridges, more marginal cropland, to which barley, however, with its lower moisture

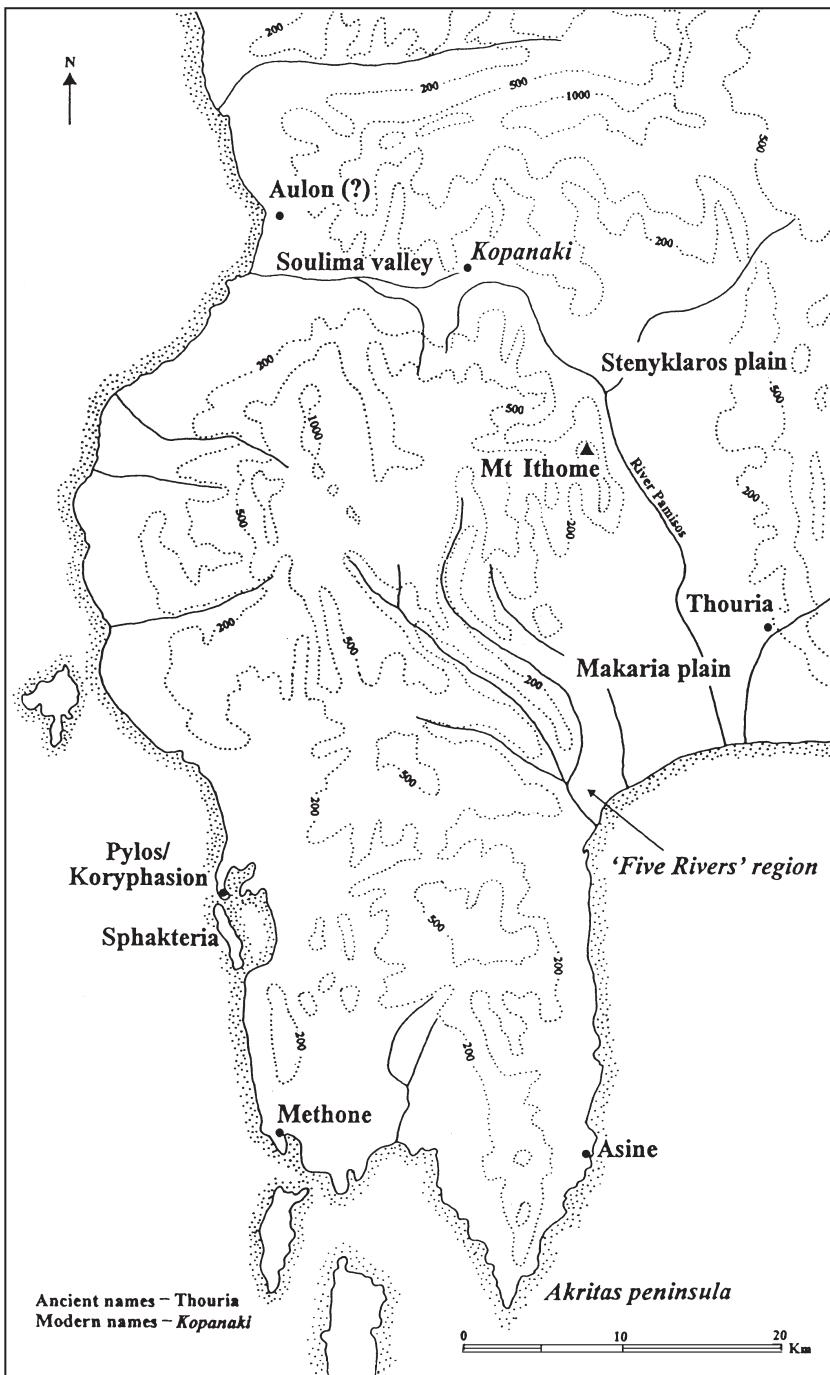


Fig. 5. Messenia.

requirements, is well adapted.⁴⁹ Settlement evidence from eras as diverse as the Middle and Late Helladic, Roman, medieval, early and late modern periods indicates the capacity of these non-plains regions to support a broad scatter of villages and hamlets.⁵⁰ Even in 1971, after much recent population loss and land abandonment, the combined cultivated area of the Eparchiai Pylias and Triphylias, which together cover the bulk of southern and western Messenia, amounted to over 70,000 ha.⁵¹

There is good reason to believe that in our period too the fertile regions of central and western Messenia were utilised for mixed farming and supported a healthy settled population. Despite the paucity of archaeological study of archaic and classical Messenia, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that agrarian exploitation went beyond specialised herding operations – which typically leave little trace in the archaeological record. The site catalogue of the Minnesota Messenia Expedition records a significant number of archaic and classical sites, despite the Expedition's primary concentration on Bronze Age remains.⁵² Similarly, the recent survey in western Messenia by the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project suggests that during the archaic and classical periods this region, although not densely populated, contained significant clusters of nucleated settlements.⁵³ A late archaic and early classical habitation site excavated at Kopanaki in the Soulima valley contained a range of domestic pottery (including food preparation, cooking and storage items) comparable to those found in the Laconia Survey area, which suggests the rounded exploitation of local farmland.⁵⁴ Finally, the evidence of archaic and classical tomb cult at several locations in inland Messenia attests an attachment of inhabitants to their local territories indicative of a settled farming life.⁵⁵ It is unlikely that much of this archaeological evidence relates to the *perioikoi*, since there are only three attested classical perioikic settlements in central and western Messenia: Asine (modern Korone) and Methone at the south-east and south-west points of the Akritas peninsula, respectively, and Aulon near the northern border with Elis.⁵⁶ Hence the probability is that most of the attested settlements were inhabited by helots farming Spartiate estates. In addition, Thucydides' reference (4.26) to helot boat owners who sailed from various parts of the Peloponnese suggests that there were helots inhabiting the coastal areas of Messenia as of other regions under Spartan control.

We can conclude that Spartiate landholdings were dispersed over the vast bulk of Messenian territory. A huge swathe of Messenian territory was available for Spartiate agricultural exploitation, stretching eastwards from the Stenyklaros and Makaria plains across to the west coast, northwards to include the Soulima valley and southwards down the Akritas peninsula as far as Methone and Asine. If we add the 30,000 ha of cultivated land, recorded for the modern Eparchia Messinis (which covers the Stenyklaros plain, the Makaria plain west of the River Pamisos and adjacent terrace and rolling hill land to the west) in the 1971 Agriculture-Livestock census, to the more than 70,000 ha from the

Eparchiai Pylias and Triphylias, the overall total of available land comes to over 100,000 ha.⁵⁷ Deduction of land around the few attested perioikic sites and of extraneous territory in northern Triphylia brings this figure close to other modern estimates, such as Figueira's figure of 92,500 ha (which was derived from the 1961 census, when the region had a slightly higher overall cultivated area) and Roebuck's estimate of 87,500 ha for the cultivated area of the region during its independence after 369 (1945, 162 n. 91).

We may envisage the area of Spartiate-helot landholdings then as totalling somewhat less than 50,000 ha in Lakonia and approximately 90,000 ha in Messenia. These relative proportions accord with Thucydides' comment (1.101) that most of the helot population was Messenian and with other evidence for the critical significance of Messenia. Although these figures are only approximate guides, they provide an order of magnitude whose implications for the size of citizen estates will be pursued in chapter 12.

Notes

¹ The section on the organisation of agricultural tribute is a reworking of my discussion in Hodkinson 1992a. In this chapter I shall discuss the listed issues primarily from the angle of the Spartiate property owners. I hope to approach them from the helots' viewpoint in a subsequent study.

² Standard opinion is that there were five citizen villages: the four central villages at Sparta itself (Pitane, Mesoa, Limnai and Kynosoura) plus Amyklai, 5km to the south. Kennell (1995, 162–9), however, has recently challenged the Amyklaians' status as Spartiate citizens in classical times.

³ On the end of helotage, Ducat 1990a, 193–9.

⁴ Helot agricultural labour: Arist. *Pol.* 1271b40–1272a2; Livy 34.27.9; Plut. *Lyk.* 24.3; Aelian, *VH* 13.19; Slaves on wealthy estates: [Plato], *Alk.* I 122d; cf. Plut. *Comp. Lyk.-Num.* 2.4. Modern discussions: Kahrstedt 1919, 288–9; Ducat 1978, 14–15, 38–9; 1990a, 53–5; MacDowell 1986, 37–9.

⁵ As Ducat (1990a, 21 n. 9) notes, *oiketai* doubtless here signifies either helots or, if there were also chattel slaves in Sparta, the ensemble comprising these and the helots together.

⁶ After the battle of Marathon: Paus. 7.15.7; after Arginusai: Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.24; Aristop. *Frogs* 694, with Schol. (Hellanicos, *FGrH* 323aF25). Chios: L. Robert 1938, 118–26.

⁷ Although the label is normally regarded as Spartan-inspired, one purpose may be to ease Athenian difficulties in abetting the subjugation of people whose claims to freedom they had previously accepted. On the fifth-century Athenians' role in the creation of the 'Messianic' identity, Figueira 1999.

⁸ Even Ducat, however, concedes that no source alleges that the helots were enslaved by agreement (1990a, 73).

⁹ So too is the evidence of the Tainaron manumission inscriptions from the late fifth and fourth centuries (*IG* v.1.1228–33). With the exception of *IG* v.1.1231, which concerns an Epeirote owner, presumably of a chattel slave, there are no firm grounds

for deciding whether the manumittees were slaves or helots and their owners Spartiates or *perioikoi* (cf. Ducat 1990b).

¹⁰ Cf. Finley 1985, 63. The fact that some helots were taken off the land from time to time, to serve in a Spartiate's household, for example, does not invalidate the general proposition in the text.

¹¹ Singor does, it is true, suggest that some impoverished helots were procured by Spartiates whose holdings had increased without a proportionate increase in their helot cultivators; but that would barely alleviate the degree of disruption described above. He also raises the question of helot residence, suggesting that they lived in villages rather than in isolated farmsteads and implying that their residential separation from the land went with their not being bound to the soil. As commentators have noted, the textual evidence is ambiguous concerning helot residence, though recent archaeological research (see n. 17, below) suggests that settlement in western Messenia, arguably helot-farmed territory, was in village-like groupings rather than in dispersed, isolated dwellings. However, the issues of helot residence and cultivation rights are not the same; helot village residence need not imply insecurity of tenure.

¹² The significance of this episode is not affected by evidence that the sum of five minas was a standard price paid by chattel slaves for their liberation in the third century (Ducat 1990a, 64).

¹³ Cf. Wrightson and Levine 1979, 96; R.M. Smith 1984, 308–9; Osborne 1988, 308–9.

¹⁴ Xen. *Lak. Pol.* 1.8–9; Philo *On Special Laws* 3.4.22; Cartledge 1981, esp. 99, 103; Lane Fox 1985, 222–3; Hodkinson 1989, 90–3.

¹⁵ There is no evidence that when Spartiates were degraded to Inferior status through (*inter alia*) failure to produce their mess contributions they ceased to own land. Given the private nature of Spartiate land tenure, it is unlikely that the polis intervened to take away their remaining holdings. The fact that Inferiors continued to serve in the army (Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.7) implies that they retained their former means of support.

¹⁶ Cf. the statement of Archemachos of Euboia (*ap.* Athen. 264b), *fl.* first half of the third century BC, that many Penestai were richer than their Thessalian masters. Although 'many' is no doubt an exaggeration and the passage is distorted by an over-favourable image of the institution (Ducat 1990a, 70–1), the phenomenon should not be entirely dismissed.

¹⁷ This evidence comes from the results of recent intensive survey by the Pylos Regional Archaeological Project (Davis et al. 1997, 455–7; A.B. Harrison and Spencer 1998, 158–62; Alcock et al. in prep.); from the mean size of sites noted in the older University of Minnesota Messenia Expedition and in more localised survey in the hinterland of Nichoria (Alcock forthcoming; cf. McDonald and Rapp (eds.) 1972, 264–321; Lukermann and Moody 1978); and from the evidence of the large late archaic and early classical house (some 30 x 17 metres) discovered at Kopanaki in the Soulima valley in northern Messenia (Kaltas 1983).

¹⁸ The original text μονομοιτῶν Εἰλάτων ἄρχοντες has been plausibly emended to read μνωνόμοι· τῶν Εἰλάτων ἄρχοντες. Despite Wilamowitz's view (1924, 273), followed by Talbert (1989, 30 n. 51), that this passage relates solely to Crete since the term *mnōia* is otherwise found only there, the mention of helots must indicate that the reference is to Sparta, as Gschmitzter (1964–76, ii.81 and n. 117) and Ducat (1990a, 63) have noted.

¹⁹ Greek texts and translations (which I have largely followed below) of the main sources are conveniently presented by MacDowell 1986, 32–3.

²⁰ e.g. Aeschines 1.97; Plut. *Theseus* 23.3. It was the regular word in classical Athens for the payments which a slave working independently delivered to his master.

²¹ As seen in ch. 3, the hellenistic writer Myron of Priene (*FGH* 106F2, *ap.* Athen. 657d) refers to the helot tribute by the term *moira*. Although this term is less suggestive of a fixed amount than of a ‘portion’, it would be unwise to press this point too hard, since the main idea conveyed by the word may be that the tribute was in kind rather than cash (Ducat 1990a, 57).

²² Cf. Kessler 1910, 38–40; Lotze 1959, 29; 1971, 69–70; Jones 1967, 9; Cartledge 1985a, 43; Ducat 1990a, 57–9. As Singor (1993, 53) has noted, fixed rents were a levelling measure. However, they were not, as he suggests, a fifth-century measure designed to counteract growing inequalities, but part of the egalitarian measures of Agis and Kleomenes.

²³ Chrimes (1949, 290–1) argues that the ‘masters’ in the passage are the Messenian aristocracy. Den Boer (1954, 73–4) interprets it as a warning to the Spartans of their fate if defeated. These hypotheses have been refuted by several scholars: e.g. Diesner 1953/4, 220 n. 7; Kiechle 1959, 13, 62–6; Lotze 1959, 33; Oliva 1971, 109; Figueira 1984, 104 n. 54; Ducat 1990a, 60.

²⁴ e.g. Busolt and Swoboda 1920–26, ii.641; Lotze 1959, 28; Jones 1967, 9; Figueira 1984, 103–4.

²⁵ Cf. the emendations listed in Prato (ed.) 1968, 27; West (ed.) 1972, 153; Gentili and Prato (eds.) 1979, 23.

²⁶ Ducat’s suggestion that this servile vocabulary is added on, perhaps in a figurative sense, to an essentially mild form of subjection seems implausibly forced.

²⁷ Ducat’s picture of early fifth-century Messenia is of ‘un peuple en guerre quasi permanente avec Sparte’ (1990a, 141). But this view is achieved only by separating the battles of the Isthmos and Stenyklaros from their most probable context within the 460s revolt and by over-reliance upon the reported argument of Aristagoras (Hdt. 5.49, a piece of advocacy, not a dispassionate statement) that the Spartans should suspend their wars against the equally-matched Messenians in order to campaign against Persia. As Whitby notes, although the dramatic context of Herodotus’ passage is the year 499, the argument probably reflects the fighting of the 460s; it does not provide evidence of continual conflict in the later sixth century.

²⁸ I hope to discuss the specific characteristics of Messenian helotage and community organisation, with especial reference to religious cult, in my proposed study mentioned in n. 1.

²⁹ Anton Powell (1988, 249) notes some scholars’ doubts. For citation of a range of societies in which 50% is the norm, Hodkinson 1992a, 129 n. 26.

³⁰ On helot population density, see later this chapter. The Spartiates appropriated the best lands, on whose fertility see Euripides, *ap.* Strabo 8.5.6; [Plato], *Alkibiades I* 122d; Plb. 5.19.7; Thiersch 1833, i.303–4.

³¹ Reid has questioned the superiority of sharecropping over pre-agreed rent as a means of risk *sharing*, but his critique relates to situations in which percentage shares and levels of rent are mutually and competitively determined by the ability of landlords and tenants to seek alternative labourers or masters or to opt for alternative contractual arrangements. Neither of these situations applied between Spartiates and helots.

³² Marshall (1890) defines the traditional neoclassical position. For the neoclassical revision, Cheung 1969; Reid 1973; 1975/6; 1977. For the Chayanovian interpretation, Herring 1984.

³³ The phrase is from Herring 1984; cf. also Sen 1981 and the essays in Byres (ed.) 1983 by Byres, Bhaduri and Caballero, with Lehmann 1984, 264. Note that in my discussion *productivity* is used as a measure of *efficiency* because, although the latter should technically and properly be defined by relating returns to costs, in land reform policy literature, which dominates modern economic debate of sharecropping, inefficiency usually means low returns per unit of land, i.e. low yields (Herring 1984, 145 n. 1).

³⁴ Kahrstedt 1919, 280–1, misinterpreting Plutarch's figure of 82 *medimnoi* in *Lyk.* 8.3–4 as the total barley production of the holding rather than just the helot tribute, calculated annual productivity at only 400 kg per ha, assessing Spartan productivity in terms of the least developed contemporary European agrarian systems. Jardé (1925, 11–12), criticising Kahrstedt's figure as excessively low, advocated the much higher figure of 1600 litres per ha (or 1,200kg, at a weight-volume ratio of 0.75 kg per litre: cf. Foxhall and Forbes 1982, 76). The statistics for yields between 1911 and 1950 assembled by Gallant (1991, 77; table 4.7) fall in between these extremes, with an average productivity of 627.7 kg per ha in Lakonia and 650.9 in the region of Kalamata in Messenia.

³⁵ Details and references in Oliva 1971, 53 n. 3.

³⁶ Cartledge accepts an estimate of 175–200,000, near the lower end of the range. For more detailed calculations of the extent of this subsistence pressure, ch. 12.

³⁷ Cf. the helots' sale of stolen booty after Plataia (Hdt. 9.80); the rewards of *argyronion* ('silver', in coins or bullion?) promised to them, and the insurance valuations of their boats, during the Sphakteria episode of 425 (Thuc. 4.26). Note the imported as well as local pottery among items of classical tomb cult at Nichoria (Coulson and Wilkie 1983, 334–5).

³⁸ I am glad to acknowledge my debt in the following remarks to unpublished work by Drs Richard Pope and Keith Wilkinson. See also Pope 1995; Wilkinson 1998.

³⁹ Wilkinson 1998, esp. 150 fig. 14.1, replacing Bintliff 1977, ii.371–450, esp. 445 map 3.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Bill Cavanagh for giving me access to the land evaluation chapter of vol. 1 of the Survey (Cavanagh et al. forthcoming, ch. 2) before publication.

⁴¹ In 403 Sellasia appears twice as a place where the ephors interrogated Athenian envoys before deciding whether to allow them into Sparta itself (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.13, 19). The former text is sometimes interpreted as indicating a state border; but the key words may well be interpolated (Krentz 1989, 184). Sellasia's use as a place to keep enemy ambassadors at arm's length during sensitive negotiations carries no implication of a rigid boundary between Sellasian and Spartiate landholdings.

⁴² Cartledge 1979, 98; G. Shipley 1992, 214. Compare the period-specific maps in G. Shipley 1996, 268–70.

⁴³ On the location of perioikic Bryseai, at Agios Vasileios in the south-west of the Sparta basin, and Krokeiai, probably at Krikiles in the Helos plain, G. Shipley 1992, 217, 219; 1996, Sites GG101, JJ120.

⁴⁴ See the geomorphological maps in Bintliff 1977, ii.493; Cartledge 1979, 20.

⁴⁵ National Statistical Service of Greece 1978, i.216–18. This land lies in the Koinotites Ambelochoriou, Apidea, Asteriou, Glykovrisis, Gouvon, Myrteas, Peristeriou and Vlachiotis.

⁴⁶ In favour: Hampl 1937, 35–9; G. Shipley 1997, 203. Against: Ehrenberg 1924, 40; Kiechle 1963, 107–11; Cartledge 1979, 179; 1987, 178. Agnostic: Ducat 1990a, 189–91.

⁴⁷ National Statistical Service of Greece 1978, i.218.

⁴⁸ Roebuck 1941, 28–31; 1945, 151; Toynbee 1969, 189–90; Lotze 1971, 64–5; Ernst Meyer 1978, 253–5; Jameson 1992.

⁴⁹ Loy 1970; Van Wersch 1972, 180–3, with Pocket Maps 3.7, 11.20, 11.21. Graded as ‘land quality classes I–IV’, these soil types accounted for 64% of the area covered by the Minnesota Messenia Survey and formed the location for 94% of their archaic sites. (The survey area covered a wider region than inland Messenia, including high-quality land in southern Elis but also poor-quality terrain in Triphylia and the north-western Mani.)

⁵⁰ McDonald and Rapp (eds.) 1972, Pocket Maps 1.1, 5.8, 5.9, 8.13, 8.14, 8.18.

⁵¹ National Statistical Service of Greece 1978, i.422–6. These Eparchiai include upland and mountainous areas of the Tetrazion and Lykaion ranges which lie outside our area, but exclude much fertile Messenian territory immediately west of the eastern plains.

⁵² McDonald and Rapp (eds.) 1972, 310–21: Register B; also Pocket Maps 8–17.

⁵³ Cf. refs. in n. 17, above.

⁵⁴ Kaltsas 1983; R. Catling 1996, 34, 86. Catling would lower the excavator’s date for the pottery assemblage from c. 475–60 to the second half of the fifth century.

⁵⁵ *Praktika* 1960, 199; 1961, 170; Coldstream 1976, 10–11; Lukermann and Moody 1978, Appendix; Coulson and Wilkie 1983; Alcock 1991, nos 3, 5, 6, 23, 26; 28, 30.

⁵⁶ Asine: Hdt. 8.73; Thuc. 4.13; 6.93; cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.25. Methone: Thuc. 2.25; Diod. 11.84.5; 12.43.2. Aulon: Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.8. Aulon’s exact location is uncertain; its population included Aulonitai, helots and visiting Lakedaimonians. (The helots need not be native inhabitants; as Krentz 1995, 180 notes, they could be servants of a Spartan garrison.) Other ancient settlements around Messenia’s coast which some scholars have deemed perioikic are first attested only after the end of Spartan domination. Korone, on the east coast of the Akritas peninsula, was founded during the liberation of 370/69 (Paus. 4.34.5). Cartledge (1979, 193) suggests the same of Kolonides, further south (Paus. 4.34.8) – though classical and hellenistic graves have been found at one possible location for the site (Kastelia-Vounaria: McDonald and Rapp (eds.) 1972, 312–13 no. 507). On the west coast, Koryphasion (around the Bay of Pylos) and Kyparissia are first attested in 365, when they were taken by the Arkadians (Diod. 15.77.4). In 425 Koryphasion had been uninhabited (Thuc. 4.3, 9; cf. 13).

⁵⁷ National Statistical Service of Greece 1978, i.224.

