SPARTAN LAND LOTS AND HELOT RENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The history of Spartans and helots is a tale of two nations. Nowhere else in Greece was there such a chasm between the landowning inhabitants of the central place and the rentpaying countryfolk round about. Whether or not this division was based on an original conquest in Laconia – as it certainly was in Messenia since its annexation by the Spartans – it was as a conquered people that all the helots were treated. They had to provide the labour force without which society could not endure – that is, Spartan society, for the communities of the helots themselves did not constitute another society, at least not in the eyes of the Greeks. For the helots were deprived of that most precious thing that characterized free men: a political life of their own. Instead, they sustained the polis of their Spartan lords and were for that matter despised and feared, because they were also numerous. The history of the Spartans is relatively well known (in fact it is the best known history of all Greek states except Athens), but that of the helots remains almost totally blank. Yet more can be discovered of that lost history than has been found so far. Because the helots were economically so tied to their masters the material vicissitudes of the latter had to have consequences for them as well. In the centre of the Spartan-helot nexus there were plots of land to be worked and rents to be paid. Recently our understanding of the Spartan land system has been considerably improved (see below). It is my aim to show that the nature of the rents paid by the helots can also be clarified still further. Of course, much will have to remain hypothetical because solid facts are scanty. Terms like 'presumably', 'possibly', 'probably', and the like keep turning up in discussions on Sparta. And unavoidably so, when we try to balance reason with the little evidence we have. Still, by combining the pieces of information on lands and rents we

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may find the outlines of some long term structures pertaining to helot as opposed to Spartan history.

Only four statements in our sources have a direct bearing on the nature of the rent or *apophora*. First, we have the famous lines of Tyrtaeus, dating from around 640 BC, in which the poet conjured up before his compatriots' eyes the prize of their war effort in Messenia: "Like asses toiling under heavy burden they will bring their masters under bitter compulsion half of all fruits their ploughed lands yield."[1] Then there is a fragment of Myron (third century BC) which says: "Leaving the land to them they (the Spartans) fixed the share (*moira*) which they (the Messenians) forever (*aei*) had to hand over to them" (Myron *FGH* 106 F2). Next comes an interesting statement from Plutarch's *Laconian Institutions* according to which "it was forbidden by curse (*aparaton*) for someone to exact more (from his helots) than was his due; thus they would serve more eagerly being able to make a little profit, while the Spartans themselves would not become greedy" (Plut. *Inst.Lac.* 41 [=*Mor.* 239E]). Finally in his *Life of Lycurgus* Plutarch gives the most detailed information saying that after the distribution of land brought about by Lycurgus every Spartan citizen had a *klēros* large enough to yield an *apophora* of 70 *medimnoi* of barley for a man and 12 more for his wife, together with an amount of wine and olive oil in proportion with the barley.[2]

It is clear that of these four statements the first and the last one are mutually exclusive: Tyrtaeus envisages a system of share-cropping at a rate of 50%, while Plutarch in his *Lycurgus* is speaking of a fixed rent in kind. Since Tyrtaeus is by far the oldest source and his testimony as such is reliable (as we shall see below) the evidence given by Plutarch must either be related to another and later stage than the one represented by Tyrtaeus, or be rejected as unhistorical. The other two testimonies, Myron and the passage from the *Laconian Institutions*, can be combined with both a system of share-cropping and with one of fixed payments in kind. If the latter turned out to be historical fiction we would be left with only Tyrtaeus' halves as the fixed share (Myron) and the sacred limit (Plutarch) that determined the helots' yearly rents. If, on the other hand, Plutarch's information concerning fixed payments in kind contains some truth we are faced with a change in the nature of the *apohora* that in its turn could shed some light on the position of the helots.

Plutarch's picture of lands and rents in his *Lycurgus* is of course highly suspect. It is part of a propagandist scheme portraying Lycurgan Sparta as

[1] Tyrt. F6 W; cf. Paus. IV 14.4-5; Ael. *VH* VI 1.
[2] Plut. *Lyc.* 8.4. For the 'fluid fruits,' see n.48 below.

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the ideal state of equal citizens. This equality pertained to the land system in particular. But even if 'Lycurgus' (i.e. the Spartan authorities in the seventh century BC?) divided all or part of the land equally under all citizens (and such a partition would not seem improbable at least in the case of conquered Messenia) this situation could never have lasted longer than one or a couple of generations at the most, considering the divisive effects of Spartan inheritance laws and, naturally, of demography. The notion of equal and indivisible land lots passing over intact from one generation to another and thus providing for equal incomes from their rents for all Spartans is totally unhistorical and can by now be definitely laid to rest.[3] Plutarch's suggestion that all Spartan citizens received an equal rent of 70 (and 12) *medimnoi* barley (apart from oil and wine), and that this was a situation that characterized 'Lycurgan' Sparta (in other words should have lasted for some time during the archaic and early classical period), no doubt is simply wrong. However, the idea that a fixed rent was instituted at some time need not be rejected out of hand. As we shall see there are more indications to that effect. A fixed amount of rent may well at some time have become the upper limit for the payments that an individual Spartan was allowed to extract from his helots, leaving a whole range of possible payments below that limit. We do not know where Plutarch got his information concerning the fixed rents, but a third-century source seems likely.[4] In that case it might be assumed that at least by the early third century BC. the Spartans were accustomed to receive fixed rents in kind, a situation that was in some circles idealized and transformed into the utopian scheme ascribed to 'Lycurgus.' We must allow, then, for a strong possibility of change in the system of rents somewhere between Tyrtaeus and the third century BC. Before that system can be considered in more detail, however, a few words must be said about Spartan land organization.

[3] See also Plato *Leg.* 648D; Isoc. *Archidamus* 20; Polyb. VI 45.3; Just. III 3.3. Cf. Cartledge 1979: 165-170; Cozzoli 1979: 27; above all Hodkinson 1986: 378-406 and 1989: 79-121. For more general treatments of inheritance and land-tenure in Greece pointing in the same direction: Finley 1968; Lane Fox 1985.

[4] Hodkinson 1986: 382 suggests Hermippus of Smyrna; it was certainly not Aristotle (on whom Plutarch draws elsewhere), since that author was far too critical of Sparta's 'Lycurgan' institutions. Ducat 1990: 56-59 rejects Plutarch's testimony altogether, regarding it as Hellenistic fiction. But if such a fiction goes back to the third century BC we cannot dismiss the possibility that by that time some form of fixed rents did exist in Laconia or could at least be remembered to have existed in 'Lycurgan' days.

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SPARTAN *KLAROI* AND OTHER LANDS

Recent articles by Stephen Hodkinson have given insight into some fundamental aspects of the organization of landed property in Sparta.[5] No plots of land in Sparta were indivisible or inalienable. Sons inherited as well as daughters, the latter inheriting half a son's portion, as was the situation in Cretan Gortyn. The inevitable effect of such inheritance laws was fragmentation, even more so than in states such as Athens where only sons and no daughters could inherit the land.[6] But fragmentation in itself does not automatically entail impoverishment. Precisely the inheritance rights of women could have the effect of staving that off to some extent. For heirs of small pieces of land could acquire extra land by marriage, enough perhaps to continue their patrilines as full Spartan citizens. This meant that, paradoxically, although Spartan land possessions were even more fragmented than they were in states like Athens, the overall pattern of property was more stable here, actually producing fewer heirs with little or no income to sustain their citizen status than might have been the case without inheritance rights for women. On the other hand, the laws of inheritance and of demography combined in the long run always work for differentiation in property patterns. Even if the whole system of landholdings in Sparta started at some time from a state of perfect equality, in the course of just a few generations a marked inequality must have resulted – unless some other factor(s) intervened. In the later classical period at least, such intervention did not occur and Spartan society witnessed an ever greater concentration of property in the hands of the rich and a steady impoverishment of many others, even leading to loss of citizenship.

The latter situation, critized in the fourth century by Aristotle in his *Politics*, was the result of the free working of demographic laws and inheritance rules. For instance, Aristotle's well-known observation that two fifths of the land in Laconia was in the possession of women, has been convincingly explained by Hodkinson in just these terms.[7] It would be a mistake, however, to assume that female ownership of some 40% of the land had been a normal feature of Spartan society for a long time before. Aristotle makes his observation in a context of remarks about the degener-

[5] See Hodkinson 1986: 378-394 (rejection of traditional views) and 394-404 (property rights of Spartan women); further Hodkinson 1989: 80-93 (the workings of the Spartan system of inheritances for both sons and daughters).

[6] For this difference between Athens and Sparta see also Sallares 1991: 208; 217.

[7] Aristotle, *Pol.* 1270a 23-24; Hodkinson 1986: 400.

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ation of Spartan institutions. It is precisely this suggestion of a system being undermined, of rules no longer observed, that deserves a closer look.

In a stable population with a high death rate for young children and a correspondingly high birth rate of on average 5.5 children per family it is in less than 40% of the families that at least one son will survive his father; in about 25% two or more sons will survive; in slightly less than 25% it is only one or more daughters that inherit, and in nearly 15% there are no heirs at all.[8] Consequently in each generation more than half of all landholdings is either divided between heirs or assigned to heiresses and their (prospective) husbands, or to further relations in case the deceased leave no children at all. So concentration and/or fragmentation of property affect more than 60% of all land lots at the change of one generation to the next. Hodkinson presents a table showing family composition distribution in a model population. On the basis of his figures one can assess the percentage of, for example, inheritances in which a son receives less than one third of the parental property at slightly more than 10 percent.[9] In most cases one may assume that such an inheritance would be insufficient for the heir to keep up the standard of living of his father; unless he married a bride with enough land of her own to make up for the deficit the prospects for the heir being able to sustain his father's status looked grim. Perhaps in half of the cases, say 5% or a little less, he did not succeed. Even so, a steady outflow of impoverished heirs in one out of twenty cases must in a stable (!) population have produced severe problems unless society had some means to remedy the situation.

The obvious remedies lay in the arranging of marriages between heiresses and landless or poor heirs and/or adoptions of 'supernumerary' sons by citizens without offspring of themselves. In many societies such leveling mechanisms must have been at work. In Sparta they were particularly strong. We know that in the fifth century the kings still had some jurisdiction as regards adoptions and claims to the hands of unbetrothed heiresses (Hdt. VI 57,3-4). We cannot be sure that the kings at this time still provided for any matching of landless grooms to well-endowed brides. This may well no longer have been the case, but we may be fairly certain that there had been a time that this was precisely what was expected of the

[8] I take these figures (slightly rounded off) from Sallares 1991: 206 (cf. also *ibid.*: 194.)

[9] Hodkinson 1989: 85. I have counted all the cases in which sons and daughters number respectively 3 & 1; 3 & 2; 3 & 3; 3 & 4; 2 & 3; 2 & 4; 4 & 0; 4 & 1; 4 & 2; 4 & 3; 4 & 4. The total percentage is roughly 10,7%. It should be pointed out that these model figures slightly deviate from the ones gives by Sallares (cf. n.6 above); this does not, however, affect the present argument.

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kings. The same holds true of adoptions.[10] Also, the peculiar Spartan practice of polyandry should be seen in this light (Plut. *Lyc.* 15.6-7; Polyb. XII 63.8). These features of Spartan society find their explanation in the system of age classes that had characterized this society from the beginning and that was still holding its ground in the fifth century, although by then it had got under strain. An age class system, as Sallares has recently stressed, tends to level out social inequalities based on wealth, to work against family ties and inheritances and to promote community-controlled arrangements of marriage and property (Sallares 1991: 176; 207; 454 with n.259). By the middle of the fifth century the arrangements of adoptions and marriages by the kings very probably were no longer 'leveling' tools and may even have been used to quite the opposite effect, providing for attractive marriages and adoptions for the friends of the kings and so enriching the already rich.[11] One could say that the egalitarian Spartan system based on age classes had been undermined since roughly the middle of the fifth century BC by the attractions of personal status and personal wealth. As a result old rules were disregarded or reinterpreted. The gradual change from the practice of bridewealth to that of dowry-giving should be seen in the same light; both are attested in Homer, but the latter is the normal practice in classical Athens; the former belongs more in particular to the world of age class systems, according to Sallares, the latter more to that of the emancipated citizens (Sallares 1991: 218-9). In Sparta dowries were once forbidden by 'Lycurgus,' but in the fourth century they had become normal.[12] By then they had become one of the means by which property was amassed in the hands of the few. So indeed the restraints of an old egalitarian system at least partly broke down in the fifth century: adoptions, marriages of heiresses, dowries, all these could now work in the interests of the rich. From about the same time, the middle of the fifth century, we also find the passion for horsebreeding (*hippotrophia*) attested in the sources.[13]

From about the end of the seventh century (the incorporation of Messenia) till, roughly, the middle of the fifth Spartan society must have been fairly stable and fairly egalitarian. Certainly property was everywhere fragmented, even constantly being divided further in some places while

[10] Hodkinson 1986: 395-6 points out that there is no evidence for such 'leveling' effect of the kings' authority in marriages; in the case of adoptions, however, he acknowledges this possibility (1989: 89).

[11] As suggested by Sallares 1991: 217.

[12] Plut. *Lyc.* 15.3-4 ('Lycurgan' marriage customs); Just. III 3.8; Ael. *VH* VI 6; Arist. *Pol.* 1270a 25 (on dowries and women's riches in the fourth century); cf. Plato, *Leg.* 742c; 774cd (every form of dowry forbidden in the 'Cretan City').

[13] See e.g. Buckler 1977: 260-1; Cozzoli 1979: 19 with n.2; Hodkinson 1989: 95-100.

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being concentrated again in others. And surely some Spartans were much richer than their compatriots (mainly by some lucky succession of inheritances), but their riches consisted almost exclusively of the produce of their lands and could hardly find any consumptive use in a state in which citizens were not allowed to show off their wealth. Certainly also some citizens suffered economic hardship and eventual degradation of status, perhaps creating a constant trickle of *hypomeiones* or 'inferiors' out of the citizenry. But we do not hear of any manpower problems in this period.[14] The praise of Sparta as a city ruled by *eunomia* from both Herodotus (I 65.2) and Thucydides (I 18.1), although at a time in which the undermining of various 'Lycurgan' laws must already have been clear, can best be explained as the effect of an idealized image of archaic and early classical Sparta that so often impressed foreign visitors. In the main, up to the middle of the fifth century that image was not misleading, for the socially and economically divisive effects of heritage laws and demographic trends were probably still countered by the leveling mechanisms described above.[15]

In this light Plutarch's picture of the elders of each Spartan *phyle* examining the young born males and assigning land lots to them can of course never have been a historical reality.[16] Yet the examination of the babes is in itself perfectly credible. The role of the elders here might very well have been derived by Plutarch or his Hellenistic source from some tradition according to which the elders once had indeed a function in assigning land as well, not to the newly born, however, but to those attaining the age at which they should finally be admitted among the full citizens, i.e. the age of thirty, and who were still without an inheritance because their fathers were still alive and the property concerned was not enough to sustain two Equals. That circumstance can have occurred only in a minority of cases, since most men aged thirty in a population such as Sparta's (and indeed in practically all pre-industrial populations) had buried their fathers already. Yet it must have occurred often enough to create problems and to require intervention

[14] For Spartan population numbers see Figueira 1986: 165-213. I do not believe, however, that Sparta's problems were all caused by the great earthquake of 464 B.C., nor do I think that there ever were as many as 8000 or 9000 citizens. In my opinion the total citizen number was considerably lower and started to decline only near the end of the fifth century.

[15] Even if in purely demographic terms Spartan society was probably never stable, as Sallares 1991: 213-4 has pointed out, the effects of marriage arrangements, adoptions, polyandry and assignment of land lots from older Spartans to younger ones (see below) could have gone a very long way towards bringing about actual stability in patterns of property and citizen status. For the effects of the kings' authority in cases of heiresses and adoptions see also Cozzoli 1979: 6-7.

[16] Plut. *Lyc.* 16.1; cf. Cartledge 1979: 167; Cozzoli 1979: 27-9; Hodkinson 1986: 383.

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by the authorities. Perhaps the elders assigned to young men lots of land (or rather the income thereof) on a temporary basis, until at the age of sixty fathers were obliged to hand over their property to their sons, but this is of course wholly speculative.[17] In this case too, one may suspect another of those intrusions from the collective sphere into the personal one, which had disappeared by the fifth century, if not earlier.

Spartan *eunomia* had its foundation in the final conquest of Messenia and the resulting distribution of land among the Spartans. From Aristotle, referring to Tyrtaeus' lost poem Eunomia, we know that there was some *gēs anadasmos* or distribution of land in the seventh century.[18] On general grounds it is likely that this entailed a distribution of roughly equal land lots among all the citizens and that the economic foundation of the State of the *Homoioi* or Equals is to be found therein.[19] But we are largely left in the dark as regards the practical applications of this measure. Nevertheless, certain features can be surmised.

In the later fourth century BC a distinction was made in Laconia between so-called 'old portions' (*archaiai moirai*), the sale of which was forbidden by law, and other pieces of land apparently not falling under such a restriction.[20] According to Aristotle many other cities had laws too against the sale of 'the first lots' of their citizens.[21] If this distinction had any

[17] It could explain, perhaps, the *leschè* as a place of residence for the elders (Plut. *Lyc.* 16.1; 25.1), who would then have formed a social category on their own, apart from the *syssitia*. However, in the classical period at the latest the over-sixty were still members of their *syssitia* (cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 26.4), so any enforced transfer of property to sons at the age of thirty can only have taken place in the (early) archaic period, if not in a remoter past. Parallels for such a practice are many, ranging from the enforced *Altenteil* for the parents in many parts of medieval and early modern Europe, to the outright killing (or suicide) of the elders. On the island of Keos, for example, the killing of the elderly (by poison) was practiced still in the fourth century B.C. (see Sallares 1991: 451 n.225). The idea that a coward who lost his land and had to go begging thereby deprived his father of his sustenance (Tyrt. F10.3-6 W) suggests a situation in which the elder man had ceded his land to a grown-up son and so become dependent on him.

[18] Aristotle, *Pol.* 1306b 36-39. I refrain from mentioning the vast literature on the subject. That there was some distribution of land after the First or (more probably) the Second Messenian War seems plausible and is usually accepted by modern historians (for instance – at least not ruled out – by Hodkinson 1986: 389).

[19] The situation could be compared with the founding of a colony: equality of land lots was the ideal at the start of many colonizing enterprises, although inequality always asserted itself very soon after the beginning – cf. (e.g.) Lepore 1973: 15-47, esp. 25-7.

[20] Heracl. Lemb. 373.12, in: Dilts 1971 (= Aristotle F612.12 Rose); cf.Plut. *Inst. Lac.* 22 (= *Mor.* 238f).

[21] Aristotle, *Pol.* 1266b 18-24; 1319a 10-11. Much has been made of this by modern historians believing in the inalienability of land in ancient Greece. However, even if formal sale were forbidden for these plots, they could always be alienated (and fragmented) by inheritance and/or donation.

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significance it probably meant that by the second half of the fourth century, if not earlier, the traditional shyness of Spartans to sell pieces of land that they had inherited from their fathers and that were looked upon as belonging to the common stock of *klēroi* for all citizens was fading and needed confirmation. Since as a consequence of both partitions and accumulations of inheritances there could in the fourth century hardly have been any 'original' 'old portion' left, this term, if it had any real meaning, should by then have referred to some recognizable category of land. One could think of a regional distinction between this category and freeholdings elsewhere. In that case the *archaiai moirai* of the fourth century very probably were to be found in the central Eurotas valley (and until the Spartans lost it in 370 in the Messenian Pamisos valley as well), while other holdings or estates were situated roughly in areas roundabout, particularly in southern Laconia. The areas of these 'old portions', then, were the areas where in the later seventh century the call for a (re)distribution of lands that we hear from Tyrtaeus had been met. The conquest of Messenia enabled the Spartans to partition plots of land among all their citizens and at the same time redistribute old land in Laconia, while leaving some areas with freeholdings outside this scheme. The latter were probably in the possession of the richer among the Spartans: the aristocrats (if one can use the term) and the kings.[22]

The location of the 'old portions' not only in Messenia but also in central Laconia may illustrate the strong urge for a distribution that had in the seventh century eventually led to the Messenian conquest. In my opinion that urge was caused not so much by population pressures as by the egalitarian and leveling tendencies inherent in Spartan society from its very origins as a typical age class society. The demand for a distribution of land may then have been the reaction to a growing inequality in Spartan social relations. For we have to assume that in the seventh century, if not already in the eighth, Sparta had a military elite of Hippeis, horse-owners, just like some other archaic cities had.[23] Such a social distinction may have been

[22] For the Spartan elite or 'aristocracy' see, among others: Kiechle 1963: 133-146; 188-9; Toynbee 1969: 266-9; Buckler 1977: 261-3; Hodkinson 1989: 80; 95-100. For southern Laconia as the area of their 'freeholdings': Kiechle 1963: 193; 204-219; Toynbee 1969: 230-4. The territory of the 'old portions' can very well have been what Polybius (VI 45.3) had in mind when he spoke of the *politikē chōra* but the term is far from clear and Polybius is certainly no reliable guide on archaic Sparta.

[23] The *Hippeis* are first attested in Hdt. I 67.5 in the context of the wars between Sparta and Tegea towards the middle of the sixth century. There already they appear to be a special age group, and no doubt the same elite hoplite (!) force as they are later said to be, for instance in the battle of Mantinea in 418 B.C. (Thuc. V 72.4). Their name, like that of the Euboan *Hippeis* and *Hippobotai* (cf. Hdt. V 77.3) or the Theban *Hèniochoi kai*

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felt as a threat to the values of the traditional age class society. The conquest of Messenia and the ensuing distribution of lands and helots among all citizens had the effect of making all Spartans small 'aristocrats' with serfs at their disposal and the material means and leisure to equip and train themselves as hoplites. In the organisation of the Spartan hoplite army that followed, the former *Hippeis* could now be reduced to a corps among other hoplites, albeit an elite corps still, but, typically, an elite open for all young citizens of some specific age classes.[24] In general, Spartan society after the conquest of Messenia, exerted a constant pressure on the rich to conform and to disregard material wealth (until in the course of the fifth century that pressure would at last relax). The existence of more or less 'aristocratic' freeholdings, therefore, could arguably have provoked the egalitarian reaction of the traditional age class society that would through the conquest of Messenia establish a newly equal and typically 'Spartan' Sparta.

The origins of such freeholdings and of a certain distinction between 'rich' and 'poor' among the Spartans before the Messenian conquest lie in the dark. Those Dorian warriors that established the Spartan state in Laconia in the tenth century BC may indeed have divided the land equally among themselves without being able in the long run to prevent inequality rising from all the natural causes (demographic trends, inheritance patterns) that we have considered above, even if they had applied the known leveling mechanisms to the full. Especially the demand for metal armour and horses could from the late eighth century on have stimulated a growing social and economic distinction. On the other hand, the possibility should not be dismissed that the early Spartans for some centuries did not divide the land among themselves at all. They might have lived in Laconia as a warrior band, or better: a warrior tribe, among a peasant population, demanding their 'rations' every year, just like in Mycenaean times some central palace organization would have done, and feeding its members in the manner of the Cretan *andreia* from collective stocks.[25] In that case the breakdown of

Parabatai (Diod. XII 70.1) evokes a past in which they were 'knights', probably not cavalry, but an elite of early hoplites using their horses for transport to and from the battlefields just like the Homeric aristocrats had used their chariots (after whom the Theban corps was still named).

[24] For the selection of the *Hippeis* and their character as a special age group see Xen. *Lac.Pol.* 4.1-6. The context strongly suggests that they were selected from the 20 to 30 years old. Hdt. I 67.5 already indicates an age group of young adults.

[25] Links between the Mycenaean palace organization on the one hand and later phenomena like Cretan serfdom, Athenian hektemoroi, or Laconian helotry have been suggested before, see (with further references) Meiksins Wood 1988: 83-89 (also Levi 1967: 53-9).

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this early society of Equals – again possibly connected with the introduction of armour and horses – would have led first to the establishment of private ownership of land lots and then through the demands for redistribution of land and the conquest of Messenia to the establishment of a new 'Lycurgan' Sparta.

But whatever its prehistory, the Spartan state and its relations with the helot population become visible to us only in the later years of the seventh century. Then they are unmistakably founded in the private ownership of land lots tilled by serfs and divided among all the citizens so as to provide for every member the means of partaking in the state's militarized and collectivist life. An 'elite' there also was, with extra holdings apart from the partitioned land lots, but she was largely submerged in the general egalitarian society. The land lots were considered 'equal' from the beginning (possibly assessed as such, as we shall see, on equal numbers of helot families working these lots) but in practice they very soon differed in size and quality. Nevertheless, some social and political mechanisms worked to a considerable extent against emerging inequalities until well into the fifth century. The number of people losing their citizen status because of impoverishment cannot have been very large in this period. Poor though he might be compared with some of the *prōtoi* of his society, the average Spartan might call himself the 'equal' of all his compatriots except, naturally, of the kings. This then was the system on the side of the masters. We must now turn to their slaves.

THE HELOTS AND THE SYSTEM OF SHARE-CROPPING

The helots never were degraded formally to the position of slaves of their respective masters though they remained enslaved as a nation to the collectivity of the Spartan state.[26] Individually they were more like serfs tilling the soil with their families. But they could also be called upon to fulfill other duties for their lords or for the Spartan state at large. Only the Spartan authorities could decide upon setting helots free – or killing those of them that seemed dangerous. Thus they were still slaves after all and individual Spartans could treat them on a par with dogs or horses, lending them out to neighbours and friends as servants in hunting parties or the like.[27] This latter information from Xenophon and Aristotle illustrates the

[26] For discussion of the legal status of the helots see Lotze 1959: 26-47; Oliva 1971: 48-54; Ducat 1974: 1451-1455; idem 1978: 13-24; Cartledge 1979: 160-5; idem 1987: 166-77; MacDowell 1986: 31-42.

[27] Xen. *Lac.Pol.* 6.3; also Aristotle, *Pol.* 1263a 35-9; cf. Plut. *Inst.Lac.* 23 (= *Mor.* 238f).

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fact that helots were bound individually to one master. That situation is also implied in other statements in our sources, in particular the testimony of Myron telling us that Spartans could be punished for letting their helots grow fat.[28] This is important information. For it follows that in partitions of lands among Spartans the helots working those lands always had to go with one or another of the parties concerned. They could not stay on 'their' land serving a couple of masters at the same time. They could not be treated as property either and be divided likewise as a matter of course. I suspect that in the case of inheritance they were treated separately from the land and were assigned to new owners according to some ratio of master to serfs, unless the former refused to accept them or had them 'sent away' (see below) because the land was not enough to sustain them. From this it follows that the material fortunes of a helot family were closely connected with those of its Spartan lord or mistress.

So it would be wrong to suppose that the helots were 'bound to the soil'; instead, they were bound foremost to their masters. There is some uncertainty as to whether the helots lived in villages or hamlets together like most other Mediterranean peasants or scattered over the estates of their lords. On a priori grounds it would seem that they did indeed conform to the normal pattern and lived in villages of their own, in physical separation from the plots of land they had to work. I can see no real objection to this assumption. It makes the relations of helots, lands and lords easier for us to understand, even to visualize. The institution of the *Krypteia* for example would thus also function as curfew-enforcing patrols, shutting up the helots in their hamlets for the night.[29]

The first statement we have on the rents paid by the helots is Tyrtaeus' mention of half of the crop. Such a share of fifty percent has parallels

[28] Myron *FGH* 106 F2 (on this see below n.33); further Tyrt. F7 W (on the obligation for helots to mourn their dead master); Thuc. I 103.1 (he who catches a Messenian that should have left the land after the capitulation of Ithome may keep him as his slave) probably refers to helots and not to personal slaves (contra: MacDowell 1986: 38). In any case, one Spartan was supposed to rule several helots, cf. Hdt. IX 10.1; 28.2; 29.1 (also infra); Xen. *Hell.* III 3.4-11).

[29] For uncertainty regarding helot residence see Cartledge 1979: 163-4; Osborne 1987: 122. The normal pattern was certainly living in villages, despite doubts expressed by Pecirka 1973: 113-47, esp. 118-9, but cf. Meiksins Wood 1988: 102-3. The passage in Xen. *Hell.* III 3.5, referred to by Cartledge, does not prove anything, since the helots and other non-Spartiatai one could according to the informer on Kinadon's conspiracy encounter in the countryside were clearly understood to be working there, just as the Spartan lords mentioned by him in the countryside must have been thought to be on inspection or some other business and did of course not live in the country: Spartans lived at Sparta, so helots could very well live in their own villages. All the testimonies on the *Krypteia* have been recently assembled by Lévy 1988: 245-252.

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elsewhere in the ancient world as well as in later times and should not at all be doubted.[30] More problematic, however, is the question whether such a share had already been extracted from the Laconian helots before the conquest of Messenia. We can be sure that after the incorporation of the latter into the Spartan state all helots (most of whom were Messenians by then) were treated in the same way and nowhere in our sources is there any hint of two different categories of serfs and/or rents. We are probably justified then to assume that already from the beginnings of Sparta its warrior class had forced the Laconian peasant population annually to hand over half of their produce. If so, we should assume further that this applied to any so-called freeholdings as well. Certainly after the establishment of 'Lycurgan' Sparta towards the end of the seventh century BC there can have been no room left for any richer members of society to treat their helots in a markedly different way from the others. In fact there was hardly any difference between this category of land and the lots that probably had been distributed, in central Laconia and Messenia, after the Messenian Wars except that the plots of land in the latter areas were considered as the basic means of sustenance for all citizens, the selling of which was in a later period not only frowned upon but officially forbidden (see above).

Claiming half of all movable goods seems to have been common in wars of booty or conquest in archaic Greece. Twice we hear of this practice in the Iliad. In the picture of the beleagured city on the Shield of Achilles the attackers are said to be in two minds, whether to destroy the city altogether or to divide its possessions equally between themselves and the inhabitants left in place. The same thought strikes Hector's mind, whether it would not be better to give Helen and all her things back to the Greeks and divide all the Trojans' possessions into equal halves between the city and its foes. It looks like an archaic 'norm' for bringing a war to an end without one of the parties being totally annihilated.[31] An annual yield of half of their produce by the Laconian helots to the warriors in their midst might very well have been the starting point from which the whole system of lands and rents in

[30] Percentages of rents in share-cropping vary, but fifty seems to have been fairly normal, cf. De Neeve 1981: 64; 217 n.123; De Ste Croix 1981: 216 (calling fifty percent 'common'); Sallares 1991: 208-9; 456-7 n.292.

[31] See *Il.* XVIII 509-12; XXII 114-121. Van Wees 1991: 187 speaks of "a standard form of conditional surrender." Perhaps one might compare the story in Diod. IX 12.1 about the people of Mytilene offering their leader Pittacus half of the territory of conquered Sigeion (the possession of which he had secured by his victory in single combat over the Athenian Phrynon); the righteous man refused and had instead all his fellow citizens share in it. Perhaps this 'half' in fact referred to the total acquisition of land by the victorious Mytilenaeans.

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Sparta developed. At some unknown date some Spartans probably acquired private property in the south, thereby creating unrest among their fellow warriors. Thereupon the Spartans crossed the mountains into Messenia to enforce the regime of perpetual booty there also. Behind the traditions of repeated and long drawn out wars in the late eighth and the greater part of the seventh century we may perhaps presume the occurrence of yearly invasions when the harvests had ripened. Every spring or early summer the Spartans gathered together in their *apella* or army assembly, mustered their young men that came of age and entered the ranks for the first time, brought their sacrifes to Zeus the Leader and his Divine Twins, cheered both their kings and set out for war. In late summer they were back. Before the army was disbanded another assembly was held, involving another cheering, this time of leaders in peace, the ephors, whose first act was, however, to perpetuate the state of war, albeit no longer fought in earnest, on all the helots of the land.[32] In the course of these wars the demand for *gēs anadasmos* among all Spartans finally resulted in the 'Lycurgan' distribution of lands to be worked by helots in both Messenia and Laconia.

If such were its origins, this system had something in common with the practices of war. Moreover, as we shall see, at least in the case of the subdued Messenians the enforced share of fifty percent lay so heavily on them that their new lords had to give back parts of it in order not to let them starve. From all this it follows that the curse referred to by Plutarch in his *Laconian Institutions* forbidding individual Spartans to extract more from their helots than a certain share can hardly be connected with this system. For it does not make sense when such a regime was on the one hand traditional practice, known also among other Greeks, while, on the other, it already caused many Spartan landlords to restitute parts of their income to the serfs. The evidence from Myron's lost *Messenian History*, however, should indeed be linked with Sparta's final subjugation of Messenia. For the 'share' (*moira*) that the Spartans fixed 'after leaving the land to them' must refer to the rent of half the crops mentioned already by Tyrtaeus. Furthermore, in the same fragment Myron informs us that Spartans could be punished, as we have seen, for allowing their helots to grow fat.[33] This can only mean that the helots were in large part depend-

[32] Plut. *Lyc.* 28.7 (= Aristotle F538 Rose). The explanation given by Aristotle is to my mind anachronistic; I hope to come back on the subject elsewhere.

[33] Myron *FGH* 106 F2: (the Spartans) 'set a punishment for those who owned them *(tois ketktēmenois)*, if they did not cut short those who were growing fat (*tous hadroumenous*). Ducat 1990: 57 points out that *moira*, the term used by Myron, is vaguer than *apophora*: while the latter "est un mot technique, charactéristique d'un statut servile précis," *moira* "peut même avoir un sens différent, et désigner une proportion et non un montant." The

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ent on their masters for their sustenance. Clearly, having lost half of their produce they had to turn to their masters for help to feed themselves and their families, and it was in Spartan power either to let the 'asses toiling under heavy burden' go about hungry or sufficiently fed.

In share-cropping it was in fact normal practice that the landowner provided his tenants with seed corn and sometimes even with draught animals or farm utensils.[34] Share-cropping at a rate of fifty percent could be profitable for a tenant if the plot he worked was not too small and the land fertile (Sallares 1991: 208-9). Messenia was, by Greek standards, very fertile indeed. But precisely this may have caused rapid population growth since the early eighth century BC, for there is no reason to suppose that in this respect Messenia, which already in Mycenaean times had a very dense population, would have deviated from the general Greek pattern of demographic increase since the eighth century.[35] By the time of the Spartan conquest therefore the Pamisos valley may have been inhabited by a population of small farmers working fragmented and scattered pieces of land. Imposing on these people a share-cropping regime of fifty percent meant tying a strick around their necks: since it was in their power to provide or withhold seed corn and extra food the masters held their serfs at their mercy.

It has been argued recently by Figueira that the Messenians needed extra supplies after paying their rents and that it was from the Spartan *syssitia* that parts of these rents were restituted to them (Figueira 1984: 87-109). For various reasons this seems to me highly implausible. The syssitia did indeed receive more food than their members could consume, but from that they needed to feed the Spartan youths present at their meals, the helots attending there, and even the occasional visitor, while part also had to be kept in store. The contributions to the syssitia, moreover, consisted of meal, not corn, and it is hard to see mules laden with meal-filled sacks or amphorae crossing Taygetus to bring food to the helots. Instead, any recycling must have been done on the spot, when the landowner was there to inspect the harvest and to see to it that seed corn was laid aside. Admittedly extra food supplies may have been given to helot families all the year through, and it may have consisted not only of barley but also of oil, wine, or le-

terminology, then, seems to support the distinction between rents in a fixed percentage (Tyrtaeus, Myron) and rents in fixed amounts (Plutarch).

[34] De Neeve 1981: 11; 180 n.66; De Ste. Croix 1981: 217 (on the *instrumentum* for Roman *coloni*).

[35] Sallares 1991: 434 n.78 (on Mycenaean Messenia); 91-7 and 122-9 (on population growth in the eighth century).

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gumes. In all cases however it was at the discretion of the individual Spartan owner of the land, the master of the helots.

We have no means of knowing the minimum size of a piece of land worked by one helot family for that family to sustain itself and to provide income for the landowner as well. Nor do we know the absolute minimum required for a Spartan citizen to safeguard his citizen status. All we can do is make reasonable guesses. If 15 Laconian *medimnoi* is the bare minimum for a family of four to live on, a yield of 25 to 30 such *medimnoi* looks like an overall minimum for a helot family's plot of land, making allowance for seed corn at a rate of 1:4 and assuming that the Spartan master provided the seed from his half of the total produce.[36] Lands yielding less would have compelled the owner to restitute more than only the seed corn to his serf and would become correspondingly less profitable for him. Since a Spartan citizen had to pay as contribution to his *syssition* nearly 17 Laconian *medimnoi* of barley together with some quantities of wine, cheese and figs we may assess the total of income required at perhaps 30 to 35 Laconian *medimnoi*.[37] On the basis of plots yielding some 25 to 30 *medimnoi* six to seven of these would have been the bare minimum for a Spartan citizen then, since his net income from each of these would be, in the above example, five *medimnoi* or a little more. We may assume, though, that the average property of a Spartan was larger than this, for an income

[36] The Laconian *medimnos* contained 73 to 74 liters (compared with 52.5 for the Attic *medimnos*). Sallares 1991: 79 assumes a consumption of five (Attic) *medimnoi* of barley *per caput per annum*, which would mean for a family of four some 20 Attic or about 15 Laconian *medimnoi*. For the seed corn ratio of 1:4 see De Neeve 1981: 179 n.57; Sallares 1991: 372ff.

[37] For the contributions to the *syssitia* see Dicaearchus F72 Wehrli and Plut. *Lyc.* 12.2, and for discussion: Cartledge 1979: 170-5; Figueira 1984: 88-95. Since Dicaearchus speaks of 1.5 Attic (!) *medimnoi* per month, the one monthly *medimnos* mentioned by Plutarch must be the Laconian *medimnos* (Foxhall & Forbes 1982, esp. 58-8 assume wrongly that Plutarch meant Attic medimnoi). I reckon the ratio of grain to meal as slightly less than 2:3, so the 12 *medimnoi* of barley meal would be the equivalent of some 16.5 or 17 *medimnoi* of barley corn. As for the wine and the other items of their contributions, many Spartans no doubt had their own wine produced on parts of their estates, but we cannot assume that this was the case for everyone. I think we may reckon with some barter going on, perhaps between Spartan landowners, but surely between Spartans and Perioikoi. A Spartan landowner would have all the grain he kept as net income from his rents transported to Sparta, where it could be partly ground and partly stored (whether privately or in the stores of the syssitia – these are possibly referred to in Hdt. III 26.2), in the latter case to be used as barter. Besides, a Spartan citizen had to maintain his wife, children below the age of seven (or twelve), and possibly one or more Helot servants around his house. All in all 30 to 35 Laconian *medimnoi* look as the absolute minimum required. In oligarchic Orchomenos the minimum property for full citizens was assessed at 45 (Attic?) *medimnoi* (Aristotle F566 Rose, referred to by Sallares 1991: 438 n.102).

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of 30 to 35 Laconian *medimnoi* would still be uncomfortably close to the edge of poverty, not to mention the dangers from possible division of the plots among several heirs. As to the helots, on the other hand, there is no compelling reason to assume that the plots one family worked in the Eurotas or Pamisos valleys yielded much more than the 25 or so *medimnoi* suggested above. Helots here would mostly be living on subsistence level, needing in many cases extra supplies from their masters. Further, fragmentation must have been a normal feature of land ownership in Spartan Laconia and Messenia practically from the beginning, so that one helot could be ordered by his master to work various scattered pieces of land. Whether a given helot family would live relatively well or be brought to the brink of starvation would in the end depend on the vicissitudes of their master's estate.

So what happened to the helots in the period of 'Lycurgan' egalitarianism (late seventh to middle of fifth century)? Lands, as we have seen, were constantly divided on the one side and concentrated on the other, but the overall pattern of property will have remained fairly stable. But a relative stability at the level of the Spartan masters did not preclude upheavals among the helots. If, for instance, a particular piece of land that had been worked by just one helot family as the only plot they 'had', came to be partitioned between two Spartan heirs, one of these had to take over the helot family with half of the land. Or, alternatively, the helot family was broken up, which could be the case if there was already one grown-up son, but which seems unlikely in case of a family with very young children or no children at all. So we have to assume that very often at partitions of heritages one of the heirs got land without helots, while another got both land and helot labourers. In the first instance the land would have to be tilled by other helots already working for that Spartan master, so that these latter not only had to work more land but also saw their produce and their own income (i.e. half of that produce) increased. 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. Of course one can think of various 'solutions': members of the family could be sent away by their lord to another master (the 'lending' of helots, mentioned by Xenophon, could conceivably have acquired a permanent character in some circumstances); family members could be sustained by other helots, slightly better off, living in the same helot village; or helots might be officially 'sent away' to live in the outlying districts away from the lands of the 'old portions' (see also below). Perhaps among helots too marriages could be arranged or children adopted – of course by permission of the masters involved – to provide for

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the sustenance of those who would otherwise starve. Finally someone might even run away and try his luck at brigandage. We will never know how often such 'solutions' were in fact tried, but we may confidently infer that it was the helots who suffered first when in the course of time 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. It was in the interest of the landowner to get rid of superfluous serfs whom he might have to resupply from his income. Certainly this was the case when the landowner was running the risk, by further diminution of the family property, of losing citizen status either for himself or for his son(s). In clinging to their status of Equals, Spartans would not be too scrupulous to apply the 'remedies' at their disposal: ousting some of their helots from their lands and squeezing those that had to remain.

Where marriages and inheritances among the Spartans brought accumulation of property some helot families might fare better. When the land of their master increased, more of the increased produce would remain theirs. But this relatively lucky situation had its obvious limits. Land and labour could not grow too wide apart and sooner or later the master had to procure more serfs, either on some 'lending' basis or otherwise. Thus to some extent fragmentation and concentration of Spartan lands tended to level out their effects as regards the helot labour population. But not quite. Where a Spartan's property diminished it would naturally be the helots who felt any material effects first, having to provide for their master's status as long as possible. Where, on the other hand, lands accumulated the owner might at some stage decide no longer to use part of his property for agriculture. We have to remind ourselves that riches in 'Lycurgan' Sparta could hardly find an outlet. But one of the few ways left to show off wealth was horse-breeding. In archaic and classical Greece the breeding of horses was pure luxury, at the expense, inevitably, of productive agriculture or pasturage (Sallares 1991: 311; 382-4). Spartan *hippotrophia* became in the fifth century a pastime of the rich (above, n.13). We may assume that it was realized, at least partly, on lands that had been used for agriculture before and that consequently could no longer feed all the helots who had once been working it.

Thus Spartan society from the late seventh to well into the fifth century may have been fairly stable, but this stability hardly pertained to the helots. The constant divisions and reallocations of property must have led in a number of cases to movements of helots not only among the scattered plots of one owner, but also from the plots belonging to one master or mistress to those of another. It was precisely this shuffling and reshuffling of lands and serfs that enabled the upper class of Spartans to stabilize their property

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relations to some extent. This situation – which in itself also suggests that the helots did not live on the plots they worked, but, as we have seen, in hamlets or villages apart – must have been aggravated further by demographic growth, unless that was, of course, checked forcibly. If the helots conformed to the overall Greek pattern we might expect a slow but steady increase of their numbers after the rise of the eighth century till well into the fourth. The Spartans, on the other hand, would have experienced a population rise in the eighth and seventh centuries connected with the doubling of territory and consequent rise of income at their disposal, but after the establishment of the 'Lycurgan' state of Equals that rise must have come to an end very soon. Instead, the demographic tendency in an egalitarian age-class society was to check further population growth, primarily by the enforced postponement of marriage (cf. Sallares 1991: 91; 213). So from the late seventh century Spartan numbers halted, while those of the helots probably slightly rose, until in the fifth and fourth centuries other factors would cause the Spartan citizen population to decline rapidly thereby increasing the demographic gap between the two nations vastly and dramatically. Of Spartan measures to check helot numbers virtually nothing is known in the period before the Great Revolt of the fifth century. Presumably, therefore, demographic pressures added to the uncertainties of partitions and combinations of plots of land helots depended on for their living. Helot and especially Messenian unrest very probably had a demographic side to it. We do not know any details, let alone exact numbers, yet we can guess that the movements of Messenians leaving their homeland, sometimes with the connivance of the Spartan authorities, to Rhègion, Zanklè-Messènè or, later, to Naupaktos, find part of their explanation here.[38]

The general picture, then, of the social relations within the Spartan state in the two hundred years or so following the final subjugation of Messenia is one of relative stability on the Spartan side and of a much more dubious and precarious balance on the side of the helots. It is a picture that is reflected, finally, in a mid-fifth century testimony on Spartan and helot numbers, which has the merit not of exact demographic information but of the image of harmony that the Spartan state by that time was still able to present to the world outside. According to Herodotus every Spartan hoplite in the campaign of Plataeae in 479 BC was accompanied by seven helots as servants and as light-armed troops. Since there were 5000 Spartans in the army this amounted to 35 000 helots on the battlefield (Hdt. IX 10.1; 28.2;

[38] See for helot (Messenian) emigration and partial return after 370: Asheri 1983: 27-42.

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29.1). There can be no doubt that Herodotus believed this to be true as he mentions the number emphatically, but it cannot be doubted either that he was mistaken. There is no parallel for such a huge disparity between hoplites and light-armed skirmishers in a Greek army. In the battle itself the light-armed helots could have played only a minor role at best, while the strain caused by their presence on the supply and the logistics of the army would have been enormous. Instead of taking Herodotus to the letter (which is unwise in the case of army numbers) one can easily detect where this picture must have originated. On his visit to Sparta Herodotus will have asked many questions; among these surely was, how many Spartans there had been in the great victory at Plataeae. But a question about numbers in Sparta was not a foreigner's business to ask.[39] The answer for Herodotus was, one presumes, "All." Herodotus concluded that the five army regiments (*lochoi*) had been present at full strength, assessing them at the round number of 1000 men each; similarly 'all' Perioikoi had been there, making for another 5000, since it could be guessed that Spartan troops and Perioikoi equalled each other at full scale mobilizations. Then, how many helots could there have been? Again the answer probably was: "All." To find out what that meant, however, Herodotus had no army organization to go by. Someone, perhaps his Spartan friend Archias, or even the authorities themselves, must have told him that the normal number of helots one citizen could count on was seven.[40] It was a picture that Herodotus was willing to accept. For us it still conveys some information. Officially at least Spartan citizens were still considered equal, each one of them having seven helots at his disposal. Of course, this cannot have been true. But the differentiation in property which must have been fairly obvious already by the middle of the fifth century was deliberately suppressed in favour of the egalitarian image. Further, the number of helots assigned to each of the *Homoioi* was seven. To say that the number seven may "represent the ratio of the Helot to Spartan populations as a whole" does imply an assessment of population numbers in the Spartan state, which, in my opinion, the Spartans were not capable of making.[41] The number seven, therefore, must be either dismissed as pure guessing on the part of Herodotus' informants

[39] Cf. Thuc. V 68.2 on *tēs politeias to krupton*. When someone asked king Archidamus, how many Spartans there were, he replied: "Enough, stranger, to hold bad people at bay" (Plut. *Lyc.* 20.4).

[40] For Archias see Herodotus III 55.2. Discussion of the Spartan army organization is so complicated as to be better left out here.

[41] Cartledge 1979: 175 (rejecting the number of 35 000 helots in the army): "if Herodotus' seven-to-one proportion has any validity, it seems more likely to represent the ratio of the Helot to Spartan populations as a whole."

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(which seems unlikely by itself), or it derived its validity from some tradition concerning Spartan-helot relations. Such a tradition could have originated in the memory of the 'Lycurgan' distributions of land. The 'old portions', then, had been assessed not by size or by produce but by the number of helot families working for one citizen. The memory of that equal distribution must have been preserved, even if by the fifth century the 'old portions' no doubt varied already considerably in size and labour force. The total number of helots must probably always have surpassed that ratio since those among them working on the freeholdings cannot have been included from the start. Needless to say, this must remain hypothetical. But it is, I believe, not at all incompatible with the features of Spartan society that we have traced so far.[42]

THE HELOTS AND THE FIXED-RENT SYSTEM

Plutarch, as we have seen, does not know the system of share-cropping in Sparta but speaks instead of fixed rents in kind. We may infer that the latter had indeed at some date replaced the old share-cropping. For apart from Plutarch's statement on the amounts of rent in his *Life of Lycurgus* we have his information in the *Laconian Institutions* on the curse forbidding Spartan landowners to surpass a certain limit in extracting their rents. Such a prohibition would make sense when amounts in kind were fixed by 'law', not when share-cropping forced the owner to repay at least the seed corn to his tenants. Moreover, we know that in the third century at least 6000 helots in Laconia were able to buy their freedom at a price of five *minae* each, which means that many helots by that time were able to save some money, something that can much more easily be explained by a system of fixed rents than by share-cropping at a rate of fifty percent.[43] In general, share-cropping obliges the landowner to interfere frequently with his tenants, and to supervise the labour done, especially at harvest times. Fixed rents in kind, on the other hand, relieve the owner of most interference and allow more independence to the tenants.[44] In the latter system the helots

[42] Polybius VI 45.3 thought that the equality of property in the ancestral Spartan constitution was based on equality in the size (!) of the land lots; Plutarch, *Lyc.* 8.3-4, a little more realistically, supposes equality according to produce. This is also recommended by Plato (*Leg.* 745d) who envisages *klēroi* of varying size and fertility but yielding aproximately the same produce. Reckoning the produce indirectly by the number of the helot serfs would be a more simple and primitive method of obtaining 'equality.'

[43] Plut. *Cleom.* 23.1; the number of 6000 raises some suspicion, though, since exactly that number had been emancipated in the crisis of 370: Xen. *Hell.* VI 5.28-29.

[44] For these systems (*métayage* and *fermage*) cf. De Neeve 1981: 11-12.

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would have more opportunities to earn some money, that is to say *part* of the helots, certainly not all of them. For the peculiar character of the Spartan-helot relations entailed that these limits to the rents were not applied to each helot individually but collectively to all helots belonging to one master. This is clearly implied by Plutarch where he says that 70 and 12 *medimnoi* constitute the *apophora* due to each citizen, an amount that must be the total of rents from all a citizen's helots and at the same time a limit that he could not in good conscience surpass. Plutarch believed that all Spartans received that income equally, which is an unrealistic supposition. Instead, the fixed rents – whether exactly the 82 *medimnoi* mentioned by Plutarch, or some other amount – formed the upper limit for the total of rents a Spartan was entitled to. That is to say: the total amount of rents from those lands that were considered to somehow continue the 'Lycurgan' distribution: the 'old portions' in central Laconia and Messenia. There some Spartans received these amounts fully while others had to satisfy themselves with less. The owner of many lands and tenants could let his helots go off with a relatively light burden; the owner of only a few plots had to squeeze his to the utmost. The helots possessing money in the late third century belonged to the first category; how many there were of the second we cannot tell.

In fact, we cannot even be sure that the amounts mentioned by Plutarch are reliable. Seventy *medimnoi* and again twelve for the owner's wife smack of symbolic numbers and suggest invention. The mention of 12 *medimnoi* for the mistress of the house, above the normal rent, is very strange indeed. Perhaps Plutarch (or his Hellenistic source) simply makes a mistake and we should understand these twelve to be included in the total amount of seventy *medimnoi*. On the other hand, the twelve could have been added to the number of seventy, more or less as an afterthought, to maximize the total amount in favour of the more wealthy citizens, once the number of seventy had been fixed. We do not know, of course, but I prefer the second possibility. In any case, the number seventy attracts attention. Surely, it is one of those symbolic or ritual numbers that abound in so many of our sources from the ancient world. That by itself, however, does not make this particular one incredible. If at some time before the third century the Spartan authorities decided to introduce a system of fixed rents bound to the same upper limit for all citizens, precisely this number or another multiple of *seven* might have sprung to their minds. For although we can never be certain as to the origins of Plutarch's information on the fixed rents, the obvious connection between seventy *medimnoi* as a maximum for each citizen and seven helots as the traditional number of serfs 'Lycurgus' had once assigned to each Spartan can hardly be fortuitous. When the

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amount of rent was fixed at seventy *medimnoi* (to which twelve more were added, one may assume, in a sort of rider) I suspect that the 'Lycurgan' norm was at least still remembered. At first Sparta had tried to ensure equality among her citizens by assigning an equal number of helots to each of them; at a later stage, equality was again supposed to depend on the helots, now by having those of one master pay collectively a fixed amount from their produce and making that amount an unsurpassible limit by law.

The question naturally arises, when and why this new system was introduced. Generally, a system of fixed rents as opposed to share-cropping better fits a property pattern of widely scattered plots of land, since the interference and supervision connected with share-cropping are made more difficult when property becomes more fragmented. On the face of it, then, the new organization may not have been entirely against the interests of the rich. On the other hand, fixing maximum amounts of rent is clearly a leveling measure aimed at preventing exorbitant incomes. Its spirit is egalitarian. What may have induced the Spartans in bringing about this measure is not difficult to surmise: personal wealth threatened to undermine the official 'equality' and had to be curbed. Those who enriched themselves above a certain limit were put under a curse; the limit itself had to be defined in fixed amounts instead of share of produce, because some Spartans had acquired far more land already than their fellows. To counter this the old age-class egalitarianism reasserted itself, perhaps for the last time – and ultimately in vain. When exactly this happened, we do not know, but probably not after the differentiation in property had become so marked as it surely was in the fourth century. Such a leveling measure can only have been introduced when both the egalitarian ideology and the factual equality of everyday life were still strong, yet the signs of growing inequality were there for everyone to see. The fifth century then would be more likely than the fourth, and the first half of that century perhaps more than the second. Mechanisms which aimed at leveling off the inequalities caused by demographic trends and inheritance rules had in the course of the fifth century fallen into desuetude or were even reapplied to opposite effects (see above) and dowry-giving and horse-breeding came to characterize the lifestyle of those more equal than others. Personal wealth could be seen as the main threat to traditional society. The whole ideology of 'austerity' is by its nature a defensive one; in the eyes of the Spartans it came to constitute the core of the laws of 'Lycurgus'. As such it is mostly a creation of the late archaic and early classical period when the old frugal life was perceived to be under threat. It was, then, when the memory of the 'Lycurgan' land distributions – in the form of equal assignments of helots to each Spartan warrior-citizen – was still alive (as appears from the passages

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in Herodotus, mentioned above), that, conceivably, the Spartans tried to reestablish equality among themselves on another and firmer basis.[45]

As a result of the new system of rents the appearances of equality among the citizens can at first have been strengthened to some extent, but the reality of growing inequality cannot have been nullified. For there was obviously no curse or limit on acquiring land. In this traditional society all citizens were forced again and again to conform to the established frugality in food, dress, housing and the like, but they could never be forced to be each other's equals in landed property, and in possession of horses, or gold and silver deposited abroad – not to mention the immaterial assets of name and fame. The system of fixed rents to a maximum of 82 Laconian *medimnoi*, moreover, still left the rich with some opportunities for ostentation. To begin with, the limit of income from rents was very high indeed, more than double the amount of what a Spartan needed to keep his citizen status. Given the official restrictions on luxury the man who yearly gathered the full amount might be in the comfortable position of being able to barter with his fellows and the *perioikoi* for wine or wheat (instead of barley), for dogs and game, perhaps stealthily to make some money. Those whose possessions had grown still more by inheritances or dowries, might feel tempted to try their hands at horse-breeding on lands they could afford to give such an unproductive destination. The very attempt at curbing personal wealth may well have stimulated such new forms, both lawful and unlawful, of spending and acquiring riches. In the end, inequality reigned supreme, as Aristotle rightly observed (see n.45). It was accompanied by a steady decline of the citizen population, which by itself was partly cause (one thinks of the ongoing losses on the battlefields starting with the Peloponnesian War) and partly effect (for instance by the often fateful strategies of those who wanted their property to go undivided to one heir), until by the later fourth century the traditional age-class society of 'Equals' was finally dissolved.

[45] The suppression of 'conspicuous consumption,' of showing off one's personal wealth, more than formal equality of possessions, is a recurrent theme in the ancient literature on 'Lycurgan' Sparta, cf. for example Thuc. I 6.4; Xen. *Lac.Pol.* 7.2-6; according to Plutarch it was more or less the raison d'être for Lycurgus' reforms: *Lyc.* 5.2; 8.1-4; 10.1-3; 13.3; 16.6-7; 24.2; 27.1-2; *Comp. Numa-Lyc.* 1.3; 2.3-6; *Agis*, 4; *Inst.Lac.* 18; 23; 37; 41; 42 (= *Mor.* 238d; f; 239c; de; e); consequently it was luxury and particularly the personal possession of gold and silver after the Peloponnesian War that brought about the destruction of Lycurgus' laws in Plutarch's view: *Lyc.* 29.10; 30.1; *Agis* 3.1; 5.1-4; 9.1. This had by his time become a common-place in historiography on Sparta. In the fourth century Xenophon (*Lac.Pol.* 14.2-3) and in more detail Aristotle described Spartan decline to the *philochrēmatia* on the part of its citizens and to the resulting inequality of property leading to extreme *oliganthrōpia* (*Pol.* 1270a 14-5; 29-41; 1270b 10; 1271a 4-5; 18; 1271b 10-17).

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The effects of the new system of rents on the helot tillers of the land must have been much more marked than those of the old share-cropping regime. Generally, the growing differentiation in income among the Spartan masters resulted in even more diverging fortunes among their serfs. Both the shrinking of property and its accumulation, which at least from the later fifth century were no longer hampered by the leveling mechanisms Spartan society had known in the past, had a direct bearing on the material vicissitudes of the helots. When the property within a given patriline was not large enough to yield a yearly rent of 82 *medimnoi* and still leave some sustenance for its serfs (and this might in all probability have been true in a majority of cases) the owner was virtually free to extract as much rent from his serfs as he could, since it was out of the question that he would actually surpass the official limit. So all masters below the level of the rich were free to squeeze their helots to a degree perhaps not known before. Certainly they would not have let their helots starve, since that was not in their interest, but the borderline between poverty and starvation among peasant serfs is a flexible one and could always be pushed a little farther down in the eyes of landowners in need. So, when property in a Spartan family diminished, the tendency to force the helots to pay more must have correspondingly increased. At the same time 'idle mouths' will have caught the master's unapproving eye. Sending them away under various pretences must have occurred. Still, after a few generations the property of the family was in a growing number of cases on the brink of falling below the income required to keep up the master's citizen status. Just to be able to spare the nearly 17 *medimnoi* needed for his syssition, a Spartan might then even take up the plough himself, doubtlessly after forcing out one or more of the helots who did the job before (and consumed precious parts of the produce).[46] In many cases this was in vain, for a number of Spartans did lose their full citizenship and became 'Inferiors,' who competed, so to speak, with their former helots for what was left of the family property. On its way down, then, a Spartan family will have uprooted a number of helots. Apart from the hardships of poverty and near-starvation it was this enforced mobility of many of the serfs that characterized their lot in the later fifth and fourth centuries. Most of them found their way to new masters, no doubt, in many cases even improving their fate. An unknown number fled into brigandage.[47] Many too were now at the disposal of the state.

Impoverishment of some Spartans went hand in hand with the enrichment of others. Where a family amassed more property the helots could to some

[46] This at least seems to be suggested for the fourth century by Aristotle, *Pol.* 1264a 10-11.
[47] For possible helot brigandage see Powell 1989: 186.

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extent give up fears of being squeezed. As long as the 82 *medimnoi* were respected as an upper limit for the total of rents due, any extension of the family property would diminish the average rent paid by its helots working their various plots. This at least we may assume for the helots on the 'old portions' in central Laconia and Messenia, for those on 'freehold' estates elsewhere could very well have been excluded from the official rules regarding rents (which would have made the rich surely more ready to accept those rules). Of course, a rich Spartan had other means of making more profit from his lands as well, for instance by giving parts of it over to viticulture or olive trees, since the fixed rents stipulated specific amounts for barley only and left the 'proportionate quantity of fluid fruits' more or less to the discretion of the owner.[48] But in Sparta the social barrier to such 'entrepreneurial' agriculture was of course enormous. Therefore I suspect that the great landowners went in for horse-breeding. That was socially more than acceptable, for it gave prestige without the stain of luxury or greed, and even added to the state's military forces.[49] At this point, however, the helots of these rich Spartans came to suffer also. For horse-breeding could not be introduced or, in the late fifth century, extended without at least some ousting of helot peasants from their plots, thereby increasing the number of those uprooted already.

Generally speaking, the effects of the fixed rents system, then, were much more pronounced than those of the share-cropping regime. On the one hand, a growing number of helots must have profited from the accumulation of property in the hands of fewer Spartans, for their average rents must have gone down. When Plutarch affirms that the upper limit to the *apophora* was introduced to give the helots some opportunity to make a little profit in order that they would do their work with more devotion, this statement is of course based on the observed effects. It does not reflect the aims of Spartan policy.[50] In Laconia alone thousands of helots thus

[48] *tōn hygrōn karpōn analogōs to plēthos* (Plut. *Lyc.* 8.4). Wine and olive oil must be understood here. Since the latter item is not mentioned among the contributions to the Spartan *syssitia* it presumably figured among the *epaikla* or extra gifts of food, provided by the richer members (cf. Molpis *FGH* 590 F2; Persaios *FGH* 584 F2; Sphairos *FGH* 585 F1; see also the meat from game provided by the hunting-parties of the rich: Xen. *Lac.Pol.* 5.3); for the prestige individual members of a *syssition* could win in this way, cf. Hodkinson 1983: 254. Even so, it is striking that olive oil played so small a part in the traditional Spartan diet, cf. Sallares 1991: 304-7. Perhaps this is another indication that the fixed amounts of rent mentioned by Plutarch were introduced at a time when the contributions of the citizens to their *syssitia* had already long been established.

[49] For *hippotrophia* cf. above n.13. For Spartan cavalry since 424 B.C.: Thuc. IV 55.1-2; Xen. *Lac.Pol.* 11.2; 12.2; 13.6; *Hell.* VI 4.10-11.

[50] Plut. *Inst.Lac.* 41 (= *Mor.* 239e): ... *hina ekeinoi kerdainontes hēdeōs hypēretōsin* ...

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acquired a stake in the established system in the fourth century. They were, no doubt, the ones who volunteered to fight for Sparta to the number of 6000 in 370/69, and more than a century later we hear of the same number of Laconian helots in possession of at least the required sum of 500 Attic drachmae with which they were then able to buy their freedom (Xen. *Hell.* VI 5.28-29; Plut. *Cleom.* 23.1). On the other hand, pauperization and enforced mobility were the lot of many, perhaps of the majority of serfs, even if in the end great numbers could transfer their loyalty from impoverished masters to wealthier ones. Both enrichment and impoverishment among the Spartans contributed to a surplus of labour that may have been further enlarged by ongoing demographic growth on the part of the helots themselves.

From an economic or demographic point of view helots or ex-helots who no longer tilled Spartan lands constituted a surplus population, the origins of which must have been connected with the workings of the Spartan land system. Probably there had always been helots in the areas outside the central Eurotas and Pamisos valleys working the 'freehold' estates of rich Spartans and at the same time keeping little plots of their own. Living in their communities they remained collectively enslaved to the Spartan state but could have enjoyed more personal freedom than the serfs on the 'Lycurgan' landlots nearer to Sparta itself. Helot villages in coastal areas could have partly lived from fishing as well.[51] When a Spartan family line became extinct, their 'old portions' would certainly have gone to other Spartans, and their helots too; but for 'freehold' property this is not self-evident. There helots could perhaps become 'masterless' and thus free peasants, albeit still liable to services to the Spartan state.[52] Those who became 'superfluous' to either rich or impoverished Spartan landowners may have got under pressure to join their fellows in these areas, perhaps

[51] Helots possessing boats: Thuc. IV 26.6; perhaps also the references to Messenian fishermen in the legendary stories about Bias in Diod. IX 13.1-2. According to another fragment of Myron (*FGH* 106 F1) some freed helots were called *desposionautai* (masters of seamen?). Perhaps the term could refer to helots living on the coast who were no longer assigned to any Spartan master (or never had been) and who as full time fishermen employed helot neighbours, who would most likely combine fishing with agricultural work for some Spartan master. Naturally these experienced people would be called upon by the Spartan state to serve on its war fleet since the outgoing fifth century.

[52] The fragment of Myron referred to above (n.51) mentions the following categories of freed helots: *aphetai*, *adespotoi*, *eruktēres*, *desposionautai*, *neodamōdeis*. Perhaps the *adespotoi* or 'masterless' could refer to those former helots who had gained personal freedom as a result of the extinction of the familyline of their masters. This is hardly conceivable on the plots near Sparta, which were to some extent supervised by the state, and in the Pamisos valley, but it could well be a real possibility in the outlying districts, as it was for instance in Cretan Gortyn.

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officially as 'sent-away' settlers.[53] When the freed helot soldiers of Brasidas were at first allowed to settle 'wherever they wanted' they probably were supposed to find places for themselves in the areas around the central valleys. There too, in general, the *neodamōdeis* must have lived, ex-helots from whatever origin who had been freed as a reward for services to the state. Their name does not in my opinion connote new membership of the Spartan *damos*, (which they clearly did not receive), but possibly the right to form new *damoi* or village communities of their own, not in possession of Spartan landowners and in locations where such villages apparently had not existed before. It is their presence in our sources since 421 that strongly suggests the growth of a helot population surplus above the labour force required by the Spartan masters of the land. Indeed, the cold-blooded murder of 2000 helots in 425 or 424 BC had such a surplus as one of its preconditions, and the same can be assumed for the enforced emigration of thousands of Messenians to Naupaktos after the Great Revolt of 464 BC.[54] From 424 we hear of helot hoplites serving in the Spartan army, soon after of *Neodamodeis* serving in even greater number and once of assignments of apparently unoccupied land to the latter in the border districts of Lepreon.[55]

It is often thought that the helots in Laconia were better off than their brethren in Messenia.[56] But there is no warrant for this assumption.[57] In my opinion, since the later fifth century it was above all the changing

[53] These might have been the *aphetai* mentioned by Myron (above, n.51 and 52). It goes without saying that these identifications must always remain speculative, since the terms are mentioned only by Myron. As to the *eruktēres* I am at a loss what they can have been.
[54] For Naupaktos, cf. Asheri 1983: 34 with n.17; the murder of 2000 helots: Thuc. IV 80.3-4.
[55] In 424 700 helots were sent as hoplites with Brasidas to Thrace (Thuc. IV 80.5); they were freed afterwards and in 421 together with 'the N*eodamodeis*' (now mentioned for the first time) they were settled on lands in Lepron on the border with Elis (Thuc. V 34.1-2); in all some 1000 men (Thuc. V 49.1), who fought again in the Spartan army at Mantinea in 418 (Thuc. V 67.1). For other mentions cf. Thuc. VII 19.3 and 58.3 (600 helots and *neodamodeis* sent to Sicily in 413); VIII 5.1 (300 *neodamodeis* sent to Dekeleia in 412). Thereafter only *neodamodeis* are mentioned, sometimes in big numbers: Xen. *Hell.* I 3.15 ('a few' in Byzantium in 408); III 1.4 (1000 sent with Thibron to Asia in 400); 4.2; 20 (again 2000 more with Agesilaos to Asia in 396); IV 3.15 (present with Agesilaos at the battle of Koroneia in 394); V 2.24; (a force of 2000 troops, *neodamodeis* and *perioikoi*, are sent to Chalkidike in 382); VI 5.24 (a force of 400 *neodamodeis* and Tegeate exiles in Oion in 370). Apparently the *neodamodeis* formed a standing reservoir of ex-helot manpower. If they lived in areas outside the central Eurotas and Pamisos valleys their settlements were probably more numerous in Messenia than in Laconia. In any case, they are not heard of any more after 370.
[56] E.g. Cartledge 1987: 174-5; Ducat 1990: 13-18 on the sources.
[57] So rightly Talbert 1989: 36-7; *all* helots could be called Messenians (Thuc. I 101.2).

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fortunes of their respective masters that caused helots either to suffer or to prosper to a degree not experienced before. For some of them life meant extreme poverty or brigandage, for others a modest or a fairly prosperous existence as tenant farmers; for some it ended miserably as they were caught and murdered by the secret forces of the state; for others again it brought the excitements of military service abroad, freedom and the possession of a few acres of their own. For them Laconia and Messenia were not equivalent to good luck and misery. While the *neodamodeis* were possibly settled chiefly in Messenia, the *krypteia* may have been more at home, in the literal sense, in Laconia. On the other hand, the Messenians had always preserved to some degree their identity as a people and were consequently more on the lurk for revolt.[58] The Spartan-helot relationship had started as the subjugation of the tillers of the soil to a warrior nation in their midst. It had then been extended to Messenia. In fact it had always remained the opposition of two nations: of victors and defeated. In the course of the fourth century the victors' power crumbled at last. The breaking away of Messenia in 370 virtually brought an end to the 'Lycurgan' state. Half or more of the 'old portions' were lost for ever. Any rules regarding sacred limits to the rents of the serfs presumably disappeared soon after. But the concentration of property in Laconia had gone so far that many helots must have enjoyed relatively low rents already, or, alternatively, larger tracts of land to till. Others may have gained plots of their own, while technically still slaves of the Spartan state. When the use of money was officially approved after the turn of the next century, its introduction among the helots can have had the effect of sharpening the economic differences among them. We cannot say how many helots were paupers as opposed to the alleged 6000 able to buy their freedom in 223 BC. But even the better off had to buy their freedom, for they were still a nation enslaved to a warrior state.[59] It was only after that state had been physically dissolved on the battlefield of Sellasia, in the murders and executions by the tyrant Nabis, and the Achaeans in the early second century, that helotage as such could finally disappear. Then Laconia could acquire the social structures common to the times, of rich and poor, of

[58] On the whole Talbert (1989) seems to me to have played down too much the fundamental opposition between Spartan masters and helot serfs or slaves (as had already been tried before by Roobaert 1977: 141-155; I side with Cartledge (1991), although I would not call the opposition a 'class struggle.'

[59] Piper 1984/86: 75-88 argues that after 370 the helots could individually buy their freedom, only to be enslaved again and collectively by Cleomenes III in his program of return to 'Lycurgan' values. There is, however, no evidence for such an assumption. For all we know, helots were still helots in the third century.

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landed proprietors and peasants, without the haughtiness, derision and terrorizing that had for centuries been the attitude of the Spartan warriors towards the 'asses' labouring on their land.

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