

THE *ARCHAIA MOIRA*: A SUGGESTION

In discussions of the complex and controversial problem of Spartan land-tenure,¹ the mysterious ‘*ἀρχαία μοῖρα*’ (*archaia moira*) has assumed an importance out of all proportion to its prominence in the sources, for the actual phrase only occurs once in extant literature. It owes its importance to the fact that the reference to it has been used to support the theory that there were two categories of land in Sparta, a theory which in turn is held to explain how, when all Spartans supposedly owned equal estates, there could nevertheless be rich ones and poor ones, as authors such as Herodotos, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Aristotle make clear. The answer, it is claimed, is that although all Spartans possessed an equal share of one category of land, they could own more or less of the other category.²

The only actual reference to the ‘*archaia moira*’ occurs in one of the excerpts described in the MSS. as ‘from the [works] of Herakleides about constitutions’ (‘ἐκ τῶν Ἡρακλείδου περὶ πολιτειῶν’), and in itself would, perhaps, have attracted little attention, but for the fact that it is thought to derive from the lost Aristotelian ‘*Constitution of the Lakedaimonians*’ (*Λακεδαιμονίων Πολιτεία*: fr.611.12 Rose).³ It states that ‘to sell land is considered disgraceful by the Lakedaimonians, but from the *archaia moira* is not permitted’ (πωλεῖν δὲ γῆν Λακεδαιμονίοις αἰσχρὸν νενόμισται, τῆς δ’ ἀρχαίας μοίρας οὐδὲ ἔξεστι). This is further supposed to tie in with an obscure passage in the essay ‘Ancient Lakedaimonian Practices’ (*Παλαιὰ τῶν Λακεδαιμονίων Ἐπιτηδεύματα*: *Moralia* 238e), attributed to Plutarch, which seems to derive from the same source and which tells us that ‘from the *moira* assigned of old it was not permitted to sell’ (τῆς ἀρχῆθεν διατεταγμένης μοίρας πωλεῖν δ’ οὐκ ἐχῆν).

Further evidence that there were two categories of land is said to be, firstly, Polybios’ statement that among the Spartans ‘all citizens must have an equal share of the “*politikē chōra*”’ (πάντας τοὺς πολίτας ἴσον ἔχειν δεῖ τῆς πολιτικῆς χώρας: 6.45.3). This is held to imply that there was other land which was not ‘*politikē*’. Secondly, in his life of King Agis IV (5.4), Plutarch seems to distinguish between ‘land’ (γῆ) and ‘lot’ (κλήρος), when he says that by Agis’ time, there were no more than 700 Spartiates left, of whom perhaps 100 were those ‘possessing land and lot’ (γῆν κεκτημένοι καὶ κλήρος).

The first thing to note about all this is that all the evidence is dubious in one way or another. To begin with, it is not absolutely certain which Herakleides was the author of the one surviving reference to the *archaia moira*, although it is very probable that he was the statesman and scholar Herakleides Lembos, who lived in Alexandria

¹ F. W. Walbank famously described the problem as ‘one of the most vexed in the obscure field of Spartan institutions’ (*Historical Commentary on Polybius*, [Oxford, 1957], 728). Many of the problems have, I think, now been solved by Stephen Hodkinson, ‘Land Tenure and Inheritance in Classical Sparta’, *CQ* (new series) 36 (1986), 378ff.

² E.g. L. Pareti, *Storia di Sparta arcaica* (Florence, 1917), 197ff.; V. Ehrenberg, *Hermes* 59 (1924), 45ff.; K. M. T. Chrimes (Atkinson), *Ancient Sparta* (Manchester, 1948), 425; H. Michell, *Sparta* (Cambridge, 1952), 220; W. G. Forrest, *A History of Sparta 950–192 B.C.* (London, 1968), 135; P. Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia* (London, 1979), 166, and *Agasilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London, 1987), 168; E. David, *Sparta between Empire and Revolution 404–243 B.C.* (New York, 1981), 46ff.; D. M. MacDowell, *Spartan Law* (Edinburgh, 1986), 93f.

³ See M. R. Dilts, *Heraklides Lembos Excerpta Politiarum* (GRBS Monographs 5, 1971). The discovery of the ‘*Athenian Constitution*’ confirmed that ‘Herakleides’ was excerpting from the lost Aristotelian *politeiai*.

during the second century B.C., and, among other things, negotiated the peace between Ptolemy VI and Antiochus IV in 169.⁴ Whoever he was, however, he was a careless excerptor. For example, in one of his excerpts from the *Athenian Constitution* he confuses Ephialtes and Kimon, and he seems for the most part to have been interested in trivia.⁵

The excerpts from the *Lakedaimonian Constitution*, however, seem generally reliable,⁶ although, at first sight, the one about the *archaia moira* appears to conflict with what Aristotle himself says in the *Politics* (1270a19–21) about the rules governing the alienation of land in Sparta. Aristotle simply says that ‘to buy or sell one’s property he [sc. Lykourgos?] made not honourable, rightly so, but he granted the right to those who wished to give and bequeath it’ (ὠνεῖσθαι μὲν γὰρ, ἣ πωλεῖν τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν, ἐποίησεν οὐ καλόν, ὀρθῶς ποιήσας, διδόναι δὲ καὶ καταλείπειν ἔχουσίαν ἔδωκε τοῖς βουλομένοις).

This in itself may not matter much—there are, after all, discrepancies between the Aristotelian ‘Athenian Constitution’ and the *Politics*, and yet no one, presumably, would now deny that the former is the work of that name attributed to Aristotle in antiquity. It is, moreover, possible to reconcile what the *Politics* says with the purported fragment of the *Lakedaimonian Constitution*. One can, for example, argue that Aristotle wrote the passage in the *Politics* before the research which went into the treatise on the constitution brought the existence of the ‘*archaia moira*’ to light,⁷ or that he wrote it after the *rhêtra* of Epitadeus had made the alienation of the *klêros* legal.⁸ Alternatively, for those who doubt the historicity of such a *rhêtra*, it is possible either that the *Politics* only discusses the legally alienable category of land,⁹ or that for the sake of brevity it merely stresses the dishonour attaching to the purchase or sale of any kind of land.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the fact remains that Aristotle certainly does not mention the *archaia moira*, and is apparently only aware of one category of land.

The passage from *Ancient Lakedaimonian Practices* is equally difficult. It begins by referring to the tradition, which also appears in the *Politics* (1270a34–5), that in early times the Spartans sometimes granted citizenship to foreigners. Thus it starts by claiming that ‘some said that among foreigners the man who submitted to such training [sc. the system of training the young], shared the citizenship, according to Lykourgos’ wish’ (ἐνιοι δ’ ἔφασαν ὅτι τῶν ξένων ὃς ἂν ὑπομείνῃ τὴν τοιαύτην ἀσκήσιν, τῆς πολιτείας κατὰ τὸ βούλημα τοῦ Λυκούργου μετεῖχε). But then it adds, quite inconsequentially, the remark about the ban on selling ‘from the *moira* assigned of old’.

Clearly the last remark derives from the same source as the statement by Herakleides Lembos, but it does not really fit the previous sentence, which has nothing to do with buying and selling, and this makes the whole passage, as it stands, suspect. It seems to be saying that whereas in other respects anyone who went through the *agôgê* (this is clearly the meaning of ‘ἀσκήσις’ here: cf. Thuc. 2.39.2), could share Spartan citizenship, he could not sell the ‘*moira* assigned of old’. But ‘*moira*’ of what, and are we to understand that ordinary Spartans *could* sell it?

As for the other alleged evidence that there were two categories of land, the statement by Polybios that ‘all [Spartan] citizens must own an equal share of the *politikê chôra*’ does not in fact imply that there was land which was not ‘*politikê*’, for

⁴ H. Bloch, ‘Herakleides Lembos and his Epitome of Aristotle’s *politeiai*’, *TAPA* 71 (1940), 27ff. ⁵ Dilts, op. cit., 8–9. ⁶ C. von Holzinger, *Philologus* 52 (1894), 58ff.

⁷ J. J. Keaney, ‘Hignett’s *HAC* and the Authorship of the *Athênaiôn Politeia*’, *LCM* 5 (1980), 53. ⁸ E.g. Michell, op. cit., 221; MacDowell, op. cit., 103.

⁹ Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, 166.

¹⁰ Hodgkinson, op. cit., 388.

'*politikê chôra*' here does not mean 'state' land as opposed to 'private' land, but simply 'land of the citizens'. In other words, all Polybios is telling us is that all Spartan citizens had to own an equal share of land.¹¹

Finally, the passage from Plutarch's life of Agis IV not only comes from a chapter which is suspect for other reasons—it is here that Plutarch mentions the notorious '*rhêtra* of Epitadeus' which many scholars would dismiss as unhistorical¹²—but again is not easy to understand. Does Plutarch—or did his source?—really mean that 600 of the surviving 700 Spartiates now only possessed their 'lot', and only 100 possessed 'land' as well? In any case, there is no reason to believe that this derives from an Aristotelian source. It is more likely to derive from the tendentious account of Agis' reign by Phylarchos.¹³

There is, in any case, a fatal objection to using the supposed two categories of land to explain how there could be rich and poor among the supposedly 'equal' Spartans. The truth of the matter is that it makes nonsense of what Polybios and Plutarch say. Polybios, as we have just seen, is not saying that all Spartans must have an equal share of one category of land, the *politikê chôra*, with the implication that they can possess as much as they like of another category. What he is saying is, quite simply, that no Spartan citizen may possess more land than another, as is confirmed by the later passage (6.48.3) where he includes the 'equality of landed possessions' among his list of laws which made him regard Lykourgos as superhumanly wise.¹⁴

It makes worse than nonsense of the idyllic picture of Lycurgan Sparta painted by Plutarch. 'When Lykourgos was passing through the countryside just after the reaping,' he says (*Lyc.* 8.4), 'and saw the heaps of grain side by side and equal in size, he smiled and remarked to those nearby that the whole land of Lakonia looked as though it had just been shared out among a number of brothers.' Lykourgos' smile would have been pretty cynical if, just round the corner, wealthy Spartans were piling much higher heaps on their other estates. This explanation of the differences in wealth between Spartans is rather like saying that all British citizens have the same pension, when what one really means is that they all have the same *state* pension.

A recent commentator has thus concluded that the *archaia moira* 'must either have been subject to the same rules as the rest of Spartiate land'—in which case there hardly seems any point in talking about two categories of land—or 'comprised no more than a small fraction of Spartan estates'—he suggests 'house and garden land' in one of the villages that made up Sparta itself.¹⁵ But is it possible that it was not *land* at all?

That it was not is suggested by another use of the word '*moira*', in Myron of Priene. He is quoted by Athenaios (657d) as saying that the Spartans 'handing over the land to them [sc. the helots], appointed a *moira* which they were to render to them [sc. the Spartans] in perpetuity' (*παράδόντες αὐτοῖς τὴν χώραν ἔταξαν μοῖραν ἣν αὐτοῖς ἀνοίσουσιν αἰεὶ*). Here the '*moira*' is the portion of their produce the helots were obliged to make over to their Spartan landlords, and the verb Myron uses—'*ἔταξαν*'—is, of course cognate with the participle used to describe the '*moira*' in *Ancient Lakedaimonian Practices* (*διατεταγμένη*; Plut., *Mor.* 238e). This 'portion' of produce

¹¹ G. Busolt and H. Swoboda, *Griechische Staatskunde* (3rd ed., Munich, 1926) ii, 633ff.; Walbank, op. cit., 728; Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, 166; Hodkinson, op. cit., 385–6.

¹² Forrest, op. cit., 137; Cartledge, *Sparta and Lakonia*, 167–8; Hodkinson, op. cit., 386 & 389ff., esp. 391; E. Schütrumpf, *GRBS* 28 (1987), 441ff.

¹³ Cf. David, op. cit., 211 n. 86.

¹⁴ Hodkinson, op. cit., 385–6, and refs. in n. 11 above.

¹⁵ Hodkinson, op. cit., 404–5 and n. 120.

might surely have been called the 'ancient portion' (*archaia moira*)—after all, the earliest reference to it may be in Tyrtaios (fr. 6 West), and it is, presumably, even more 'ancient' than that.

Elsewhere it is called the 'apophora' ('tribute' or 'rent': e.g. Plut., *Lyc.* 8.4), and just after the passage in *Ancient Lakedaemonian Practices* in which the reference to the 'moira assigned of old' occurs, we are told (*Mor.* 239e) that there was a curse on any Spartan who tried to extract more than the *apophora* due. Here the *apophora* is described as 'set down in the past' (*ἄνωθεν ἱσταμένην*). This is again similar to the phrase 'assigned of old' (*ἀρχῇθεν διατεταγμένης*) and suggests that the author is talking about the same thing. A ban on selling the produce would clearly fit in with the curse, since it would remove one incentive for trying to exploit helots.

Such a ban would also make sense in the light of the Spartan requirements for possession of citizen-rights, and thus fit the earlier passage in *Ancient Lakedaemonian Practices*, which, as we saw, is about foreigners' being admitted to the citizenship. According to Aristotle (*Politics* 1271a35–7, cf. 1272a13–16), if a man was unable to pay his dues to his mess, he lost his citizen-rights, so it was essential to try to prevent men from selling the produce from which these dues had to be drawn.

Admittedly, if Plutarch is right about the amount of produce required for the *apophora*, there would have been a considerable surplus after payment of the dues. According to him (*Lyc.* 8.4), the *apophora* included seventy *medimnoi* of barley for the landlord and twelve for his wife, but later (*Lyc.* 12.2) he says that the monthly contribution to the mess included only one *medimnos* of barley-meal, i.e. twelve *medimnoi* a year, and although Dikaiaichos (*ap.* Athenaios 4.138cf.) says it was $1\frac{1}{2}$ *medimnoi*—which is probably to be explained by the use of a different system of measures—neither figure gets anywhere near Plutarch's figure for the *apophora*.¹⁶ That the figures for the monthly dues are correct, is roughly confirmed by Herodotos and Thucydides. The former says (6.57.3) that if a king dined at home, he was sent two *choinikes* of barley-meal, which was presumably the daily-ration a man would get in the mess, and in this case the monthly amount would be about 1.25 *medimnoi*. Similarly Thucydides (4.16.1) says that the—presumably—daily rations allowed under the truce to the Spartans trapped on Sphakteria, were again two *choinikes* of barley-meal.

What Plutarch says about the *apophora*, however, is almost certainly not true. If true, it would mean that the *apophora* was a fixed amount, whereas it makes much more sense to believe that it was really a fixed proportion, perhaps half.¹⁷ It is thus possible that when the customs governing membership of the *phiditia* originated, the monthly dues took up a much higher proportion of the *apophora* than Plutarch's figures for the latter would suggest, in which case a ban on selling the *apophora* would make sense. In the case of poorer Spartans, of course, it would continue to make sense, though one would guess that the wealthier ones, as they acquired more land than was required for the *telos* by gift or bequest (cf. Aristotle, *Politics* 1270a21), managed to circumvent the rules.

If the 'archaia moira' was not land, but tribute in kind from the land, Herakleides Lembos must have misinterpreted or misrepresented what the Aristotelian *Lakedaemonian Constitution* actually said, if that was his source. Unfortunately the excerpts as they stand in the MSS. do not help to indicate what the context for the

¹⁶ An attempt has been made to explain how the surplus was used by T. J. Figueira, *TAPA* 114 (1984), 87ff. On rations see H. Forbes and L. Foxhall, *Chiron* 12 (1982), 41ff.

¹⁷ S. Hodkinson, 'Sharecropping and Sparta's Exploitation of the Helots,' in *ΦΙΛΟ-ΛΑΚΩΝ*, *Lakonian Studies in Honour of Hector Catling* (Oxford, 1992), 123ff.

remark about the *archaia moira* was.¹⁸ But although, as it stands, it seems to imply that the *archaia moira* was a category of land, this could well represent a telescoping of what the *Constitution* said, and that such a misunderstanding was possible is suggested by the passage from *Ancient Lakedaimonian Practices*.

In conclusion, it seems possible that the original passage in the Aristotelian *Lakedaimonian Constitution* had something to do with the definition of Spartan citizenship, and have said something about the admission of foreigners in ancient times. This could have led to the statement that they were given land, since giving or bequeathing it was allowed, but that there was a ban on selling the produce from the land.

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¹⁸ The immediately preceding excerpt (Dilts, 11) is about the honour paid to Terpander (cf. Plut., *Lyk.* 28.5), the one before that (Dilts, 10) a mish-mash of references to Lykourgos' having been responsible for bringing the Homeric poems to Sparta, reforming the constitution and creating the *krypteia* (cf. Plut., *Lyk.* 28.1–2); to the creation of the ephorate and the honours paid to dead kings. The succeeding excerpt (Dilts 13) is about the restrictions placed on women, the upbringing of the young, burial customs and eating habits!