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PART IV

HELOTS, SPARTANS AND BARBARIANS: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND REPRESENTATIONS

Chapter 7

THE HELOTS: COMPARATIVE APPROACHES, ANCIENT AND MODERN

Nino Luraghi

A comparative approach to the Helots is as old as our earliest sources on the phenomenon. Oligarchic Athenians, who thought that Sparta was the place where society functioned as it should, found that the Spartans were dealing in the best way with slavery, too. According to the Old Oligarch (1.11), in Sparta slaves feared their masters, unlike in Athens, where the political dominance of the poor undermined the visual recognition of social status; for Critias (88 B 37 Diels-Kranz), author of pamphlets on the Spartan constitution, at Sparta the free were more free, and the slaves more slave, than anywhere else.¹ Later theorists like Plato and Aristotle, observing Sparta from the vantage point of the fall of the Peloponnesian League and the loss of Messenia, were more inclined to see Helotage as a hidden Achilles' heel of the Spartan system. At the same time, they approached the issue from a less overtly ideological and polemical and more classificatory and genuinely comparative angle, and as a result they juxtaposed Sparta to other cities and regions that had similar systems of unfree labor, namely Heraclea Pontica, Thessaly, and Crete. This approach was pursued further by Hellenistic scholars, from an increasingly retrospective standpoint, as the systems themselves were progressively disappearing. Aristophanes of Byzantium seems to have put the Helots, together with other groups, such as the Penestai of Thessaly, in a special

category, 'between free and slave'.² Thinking back to Critias, one could say that ancient interpretations of Helotage had reached the opposite extreme.

The attitude of ancient writers to Helotage is part and parcel of their general approach to Sparta, whose social institutions were easily depicted and perceived as highly peculiar, possibly archaic or even non-Greek, and in any case in need of interpretation and explanation. A similar way of looking at Sparta is already evident in Herodotus, who in a few passages treats Spartan usages and customs with an ethnographic eye he usually reserves for the barbarians.³ This fundamental aspect of ancient perceptions of Sparta goes a long way in explaining a basic pattern of modern scholarship, namely its propensity to approach Sparta from a comparative angle, looking for comparanda especially among 'primitive' cultures.⁴

In another sense, however, modern historians' approach to ancient Sparta in general and to Helotage in particular is different from that of their ancient predecessors: namely, in their tendency to attribute a decisive role to economy in shaping social structure and practice. For this reason, Helotage tends to be crucial to modern interpretations of Spartan social history. A consequence of this crucial role can be recognized in the fact that modern attempts at reconstructing the origins and functioning of Helotage have generated so many divergent propositions. The Helots were either public slaves or private property of their masters; they were either sharecroppers or they paid a fixed amount of produce to their masters; they could or could not be sold; they were either the descendants of the earlier inhabitants of the lands appropriated by the Spartiates or by the Lacedaemonians, or they were the result of a process of regulation of unfree dependent statuses. Every single one of the statements listed above has been supported by scholars with references to ancient sources. It is fair to say that at least some of these alternatives can be discarded with a reasonable degree of likelihood, but it has to be recognized that on no single one of them has a strong consensus been reached in current scholarship.⁵ The main obstacle towards the emergence of such a consensus derives directly from the nature of our sources: not only from their sheer scarcity and general lack of interest in economic phenomena, but also from the fascination that the Spartan mirage exerted upon ancient authors and from their propensity to use Sparta as a means of advancing their own political agenda, no matter how utopian.⁶ The recognition that ancient sources are both incomplete and unreliable creates a tricky field for scholarship, where every historical reconstruction requires a strong measure of conjecture and, in the worst case, one scholar's tentative interpretation is another scholar's arbitrary speculation. The recourse to

historical comparison presents itself as an attractive way to overcome this impasse and to gauge the limits of plausible hypotheses.

In theory, a comparative approach to Helotage could be pursued by two different research strategies. Helotage can be taken as one case study, e.g. in the investigation of systems of dependent labor or social exclusion, with the goal of formulating or demonstrating general propositions regarding such systems; or research on similar phenomena in other historical contexts can be used in order to formulate interpretive models for Helotage itself.⁷ While ancient approaches tend to approximate the first strategy, it is the second kind of comparison that appears more attractive to modern students of Sparta, precisely because of the problems with the evidence outlined above. But for the same reason, the approach is fraught with pitfalls: comparative evidence, as it is sometimes called, is not really evidence on the historical phenomenon at hand, and the kind of conclusions that can be formulated on its basis are of necessity particularly tentative. Comparison generates models, which then need to be assessed in terms of consistency and of general and specific plausibility. It has to be recognized that comparative history puts a heavy strain on the skills and competence of scholars trained in a scholarly world based on a strict division of labor.

On the other hand, the unease often felt by ancient historians for comparative approaches and the generalizations that they require, while not always a mere expression of methodological conservatism, should not be allowed to prevail.⁸ True, especially when it comes to social relationships and social practice, historians of ancient Greece find themselves confronted with the task of reconstructing a big picture of which they possess only a few bits and pieces, and the risk of ending up with a comprehensive image predominantly composed of traits taken from other cultures and historical contexts is always present. This, however, only means that extreme caution has to be employed when making convergent use of contextual and comparative evidence, not that historical comparison in itself should be seen with suspicion. Implicitly or explicitly, social history is nearly always comparative: when the social configuration under study is not openly compared to other social configurations, most of the time the enquirer is tacitly comparing it with the social relationships s/he is familiar with.

One final obstacle in the way of a comparative approach to Helotage is constituted by a fundamental trait of the world of the Greek poleis, namely its diversity. Greek historians are very conscious of this and accordingly have trained themselves to mistrust even short-range analogies between poleis.⁹ However, frequent protest against generalizations regarding Greek political institutions and social practice needs to be put in perspective, before it ends up undermining the very concept of Greek history as a

meaningful category of enquiry. Obviously, there was a high degree of diversity among Greek poleis. The question, however, is whether overall the difference between Athens and Sparta, or Argos, or Larissa in Thessaly, was of a comparable nature and order of magnitude to that between any of these poleis and, say, Roman Trier or late-medieval Florence. Again, as with cross-cultural comparison, the point is that comparing does not mean equating. Intra-cultural comparison can function as a very helpful way of delimiting the field of plausible models and interpretations.¹⁰ It also has the advantage of looking at Helotage with the eyes of ancient observers.

The present contribution pursues a two-fold goal. On the one hand, it intends to present and discuss comparative approaches to Helotage as formulated explicitly and occasionally applied implicitly by ancient and modern interpreters. On the other, it seeks to assess the explanatory power of such approaches, trying to identify stronger and weaker arguments and pointing to what appear to be promising avenues for further research. The starting point will be a scrutiny of ancient attempts at defining the place of Helotage among Greek practices of enslavement and unfree labor. Then, discussion will move on to the origins of Helotage in the framework of early Greek social and economic history. Next, the problem of defining Helotage within general categories of status and economic exploitation will be introduced, as a necessary premise for a discussion of cross-cultural comparative approaches. In conclusion, some suggestions for a future agenda of Helot studies will be presented.

1. Intra-cultural comparisons: Sparta, Crete, Thessaly, Chios

After the ideologically-charged references of fifth-century Athenian oligarchs, a comparative approach to Helotage seems to emerge in the fourth century. In a famous discussion of the origins of slavery among the Greeks, Theopompus (*FGH* 115 F 122) contrasted on the one hand the Chians, who had been the first to employ as slaves barbarians bought for money, and on the other Thessalians and Spartans, who had introduced slavery even earlier, subduing those Greeks who used to live in the territories they conquered.¹¹ Interestingly, Chios, Sparta, and Thessaly were also reputed to have extraordinarily many slaves: according to Thucydides, Chios was actually second only to Sparta in number of slaves (8.40.2), while the high number of the Penestai of Thessaly seems to have been proverbial (*Xen. Hell.* 6.1.11).

The sense that Helotage was an example of a special way of organizing slave labor, comparable to other cases in the Greek world, is also clearly present in Plato and Aristotle. Unfortunately for us, however, neither of them saw much reason to elaborate in detail about the characteristics that

made Helotage special: both were more interested in pointing, in rather general terms, to what they saw as the drawbacks of the system. In a discussion of how best to deal with slavery, the Athenian speaker of Plato's *Laws* (6.776c–778a) refers, rather elliptically, to the controversy surrounding Helotage, and to a lesser extent the Mariandynoi of Heraclea Pontica and the Penestai of the Thessalians. For the rest of the discussion, the two points that seem to be relevant are that, for them to be docile, slaves should ideally not all speak the same language, nor be treated too harshly. Only the first point is applied explicitly to Helotage, for the 'frequent revolts' of the Messenians are brought up as an example of what happens when slaves are linguistically homogeneous. Plato probably felt that the Spartans' harshness towards the Helots did not need to be mentioned explicitly.¹² Aristotle has similar remarks in a passage of *Politics* that shows clear echoes of Plato (*Pol.* 2.6.2–3, 1269a34–b7). At the beginning of a discussion of the qualities of Spartan institutions, Aristotle considers how they address the problem of providing for the freedom from material needs and concerns that is necessary for the citizens of a well-ordered polis. The problem is, he continues rather abruptly, that the Penestai of the Thessalians, just like the Helots, often revolted against their masters. The same did not happen to the Cretans, Aristotle points out, possibly because all the cities on Crete have the same form of slavery, and therefore none of them has any interest in supporting a revolt in a neighboring city, while the Spartans are surrounded by enemies.¹³ Similarly, says Aristotle, among the Thessalians the Penestai originally revolted in conjunction with wars against the neighboring populations of the Perrhaebians, Magnetes, and Achaeans. As is always the case with historical examples in *Politics*, the passage is extremely concise and allusive. In particular, Aristotle does not feel the need to spend a single word explaining Helotage and Penesteia, and what was common to the two systems. Also, one has a strong impression that Crete is brought into the picture in part at least in order to address a potential objection to Plato's discussion of the same topic, which did not include Crete.¹⁴

In this passage, Aristotle does not elaborate on precisely why Helot-like slaves should be particularly prone to revolt, but it seems clear that his concerns ran along the same lines as Plato's: in a different passage (*Pol.* 7.9.9, 1330a25–33), he states that slaves who work in the fields should ideally not all speak the same language, and that manumission should be set before them as a prize for good labor: both points amount to an implicit criticism of Helotage and similar systems.¹⁵ On the other hand, the connection between revolt and the presence of hostile neighbors seems to imply that, for Aristotle at any rate, the neighbors of the Spartans and of

the Thessalians did not have similar systems of slavery, for otherwise his argument about the lack of revolts on Crete would make no sense at all.¹⁶ This conclusion seems to be reinforced by a later passage (*Pol.* 2.7.8, 1272b18–21), where Aristotle states that the slaves of the Cretans do not revolt against their masters because Crete is an island. Again, the rather laconic formulation points to the difficulty for an external enemy to bring the slaves of the Cretans to revolt, and it is understood that such revolts do not happen in connection with wars between Cretan cities because they all have the same system of slavery and each of them is wary of planting among the slaves of another city seeds of subversion that could bear fruit among its own slaves – not to mention the risk of the enemy retaliating in the same way.¹⁷

Later sources add scattered details to the picture drawn by Aristotle, reinforcing the impression of a fundamentally consistent ancient perception of these systems of slavery as being similar in some essential ways in terms of structure and origin. Even though at least in the case of Sparta, and possibly in others, too, slaves of the Helotic sort were present also in the households of their masters,¹⁸ it is clear that these forms of slavery were seen essentially in terms of unfree peasantry.¹⁹ The key element of the similarity between them was the ethnic homogeneity of the slaves. Whenever the roots of this situation are made explicit, it turns out that the slaves were supposed to be the descendants of the previous inhabitants of the region.²⁰ Correspondingly, the names of Helots and Penestai were sometimes interpreted as ethnic names, deriving either from a mythic ancestor or from the name of a conquered city; the name Mariandynoi of Heracleia Pontica does not seem to have been explained in any other way.²¹ It may be relevant, though, that none of the collective names for slaves used on Crete was thought to be an ethnic name.²² Another commonality between Helots, Penestai, and Mariandynoi, and probably also the slaves of the Cretans, was the notion that their condition had been regulated at the origin by what Jean Ducat has called a ‘contract of servitude’, which in all cases included a prohibition of the masters’ selling them across the civic borders,²³ and arrangements regulating the extraction of their produce. As Ducat suggests, the ‘contract of servitude’ is probably the origin of the Hellenistic notion that Helots and other similar categories could be located ‘between slave and free’. Interestingly, in no single case is there reference in the sources to a total ban on the sale of unfree of this kind, and at least one source may be understood to imply that sale within the civic territory was positively allowed for all of them.²⁴

Whenever the ultimate origin of the ‘contract of servitude’ is discussed in the sources, it is described as part of an agreement at the conclusion of

a war in the distant past, in which the future slaves had been defeated and the future masters had conquered their land. Some of the texts that talk about the origins of Helots and Penestai say, sometimes using the very same words for both, that they were not slaves by birth, but rather, formerly free men who had been enslaved in war.²⁵ By blurring the difference between the first generation and their offspring, these sources create an interesting paradox, since in our eyes the point about Helots and Penestai is precisely the opposite, namely, that they were all without exception born slaves, unlike normal slaves of the Greeks, who were to a significant extent formerly free individuals who had been enslaved and sold. In the case of Crete, submission in war is associated explicitly with the *aphamiōtai*, one of the names for slaves known from the island (see above, n. 20), while another name, *klarōtai*, was thought to be etymologically connected to the verb ‘to apportion by lot’, and explained in relation to the distribution among the conquerors of slaves captured in war. The latter explanation went back to Ephorus.²⁶ It is important to notice, however, that unlike the cases of Sparta and Thessaly, ancient sources preserve no memory of the war(s) from which Cretan slavery supposedly resulted.

Whatever its historical roots, the idea of conquest in war seems to reflect the masters’ perception of this kind of slavery. Sources on the origins of Helotage associate it with a ‘war against the Helots’,²⁷ which was ritually reenacted every year by way of an official declaration of war on the Helots uttered by the ephors. As in Sparta, both in Thessaly and in Crete in the classical period the ruling elites were characterized by a militarist ideology.²⁸ In other words, the notion that the systems of slavery in these three places originated from war corresponded to the masters’ perception of themselves as victorious warriors. The connection, in the masters’ self-perception, between martial superiority and domination over the slaves comes to the fore nowhere as clearly and brutally as in the famous *skolion* of Hybreas the Cretan quoted by Athenaeus:

I have a great wealth: my spear, my sword and my fine shield, which protects my skin. With this I plough, with this I reap, with this I tread the sweet wine from the grapes, with this I am hailed master of the slave folk (δεσπότης μνῶας). Those who do not dare to carry a spear, a sword and a fine shield to protect their skin, all bow before me and fall at my knees, calling me master and great king (Athen. 15.695f–696a).²⁹

This may not be anybody’s favorite poem, but it conveys its meaning in an effective way: Hybreas is not talking about acquiring slaves,³⁰ he is explaining why they obey him. In a more gruesome way, the Spartans’ declaration of war expressed a similar perception. Just as in Sparta, in Thessaly and Crete, too, peculiarities of the respective systems of

exploitation of unfree labor appear to reflect peculiar aspects of the structure and ideology of the ruling elite. Tellingly, none of the supposed wars of enslavement had happened in the recent past, and in fact, of all of them only the Messenian Wars really had a history and were dated in a less than vague way.

The systemic connection, in terms of ideology as well as social and economic practice, between masters and slaves of the Helot sort suggests further lines of thought. If it is correct to assume that only slaves of the Spartiates were called Helots, this would mean that Helots were typically the slaves of fairly wealthy landowners, with estates sufficient to allow them to live by the rather demanding standards of the Spartiates.³¹ Similarly, Penestai are constantly mentioned in relation to large estates.³² In a world that had no real quantitative data, this situation, even more than their absolute numbers, may be responsible for the perception that Helots and Penestai were extraordinarily numerous. The situation appears to be different in Crete, where there is only weak indication of a distinction between rural slaves and chattel slaves bought on the market (see above, n. 18) and no reference to a particular abundance of slaves. On the other hand, although the idea that Helots were collective property of the Spartiates is not as popular among scholars as it once used to be, there is no denying that the ownership of Helots at Sparta had a strongly communitarian aspect, as for that matter private property among the Spartiates in general.³³ In this respect, it is Crete that may offer some parallel,³⁴ while there is no trace of analogies in terms of institutions or social practice from Thessaly. Unsurprisingly, it appears that the differences between these systems of unfree labor essentially mirror the differences in the political and social organization of the masters, just as much as their similarities mirror the sociological similarities between their master classes.

From the fourth century onwards, slavery on Chios is not discussed any more as an analog to Helotage. And yet, there is more than meets the eye to Thucydides' coupling of Sparta and Chios. His off-hand comment on the number of slaves is only one part of what turns out to be a rather sustained and thoughtful comparison between the political systems of the two cities. In a striking passage, Thucydides explains that the Chians, to his knowledge, were the only ones, together with the Spartans, who had been capable of dealing with prosperity in a wise manner, strengthening the good order of their city in parallel with its economic growth (8.24.4). The result had been an extremely careful, unadventurous, and ultimately successful political course. But the analogies do not end here. Like the Spartans, the Chians resorted to extreme harshness in order to keep control of their exceptionally numerous slaves, with the result that, when in 412 BCE the

Athenians landed with their troops on the island in order to bring Chios back into the fold of the League, the slaves deserted en masse and brought to the Athenians their knowledge of the topography of the island (8.40.2).³⁵ The parallel with the Athenian actions in Pylos and Kythera and related unrest among the Helots³⁶ is unmistakable. The Chians' fear of their slaves was proverbial: in the first years of the fourth century, the Athenian general Iphicrates was supposedly able to force them into submission just by being heard ordering the Lesbians to make shields in order to arm the slaves of the Chians (Polyaenus 3.9.23). Attempts at arousing revolt among the slaves of the Chians are documented from the Hellenistic period, too (Plutarch, *Mor.* 245b–c).

The numerous slaves of the Chians were clearly employed in agriculture, and especially in the main agricultural activity of the island, the production of wine. Many of them must have lived far from the city, on farmsteads or in small settlements, in a situation that cannot have been very different from that of most Helots.³⁷ As one would expect, unrest among them appears to have been endemic, and groups of fugitive slaves had the habit of taking to the mountains and from there ravaging the estates of their masters.³⁸ A rather detailed narrative fragment from the work of the Hellenistic Syracusan writer Nymphodorus (*FGH* 572 F 4), reported as usual by Athenaeus and allegedly based on oral tradition from Chios, offers a striking picture of what purports to be a major episode of this kind. A fugitive slave called Drimacus was so successful that he was able to gather a small army of slaves around himself. After a period of guerrilla warfare, involving various defeats of the Chian troops, Drimacus proposed an agreement that recognized the existence of his maroon community³⁹ and granted it regulated access to the resources amassed by the Chians, in exchange for stopping raids and not accepting runaway slaves except for those who could prove maltreatment by their masters. In due course, the maroon community and its leader were eliminated, but Drimacus remained as a sort of tutelary deity, receiving a hero cult under the name of Propitious Hero. To him the Chians turned, when they had troubles with their slaves.⁴⁰ Even if we consider this an aetiological story rather than a reflection, however distorted, of historical events, the sheer fact that the Chians had a cult whose function it was to mediate between them and their slaves remains striking.

The little we know about Chios and its slave population complicates in an interesting way ancient and modern views of Helot-like slave systems in the Greek world. The notion that such systems' instability was but the visible expression of the ethnic solidarity among the slaves sits uneasily with the fact that, while Chios, with a slave population made of chattel

slaves presumably of disparate origins, comes a close second to Sparta in terms of the record of slave revolts and general unrest, revolts of the Penestai are not really prominent in the historical record – there is not a single one documented from the time when our sources start⁴¹ – and Aristotle even had to come up with a special explanation for the lack of revolts on Crete. It seems hard to resist the conclusion that ideological blinkers misled our ancient authors, leading them in the long run to emphasize ethnicity over other factors, such as settlement pattern. Or more specifically, that they fell prey to the genetic fallacy, and their attention was so strongly captured by what they thought to be the origins of these systems that they failed to devote close consideration to their functioning.⁴² Here, too, modern scholarship has mostly followed their lead – which explains the extraordinary interest lavished on the origins of Helotage.

2. Models of origins: the enslavement wars vs. the omnipresence of serfs

Ideally, any explanation of how Helotage and analogous systems of unfree labor came about in archaic Greece should be formulated with an eye to its implications for general theories of the social and institutional development of labor relations in the archaic Greek world at large. In simple terms, this means that different interpretations of the origins of Helotage need to be compatible with one of a number of different and often mutually incompatible views of the nature, origin, and diffusion of slavery and dependent labor in the Greek world between the eighth and the sixth century BCE. Except for those scholars who do not think that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* depict social relations that existed at some point of the Dark Ages or of the early archaic period, Homeric slavery is one of the main elements of the equation.⁴³ Close to the other end of the chronological spectrum, Solon's Athens constitutes the more significant case study and touchstone – not a rigid parameter, however, since even here it would be overoptimistic to state that a consensus has been reached among scholars.⁴⁴

As long as scholars envisioned the movements of populations within the Greek world in the Iron Age along the lines of the ancient migration narratives, it must have seemed easy to draw the conclusion that unfree peasants found in various regions in the classical age were simply the descendants of the original inhabitants of those regions, reduced to dependent status when the currently dominant group had migrated into their region. In other words, the Dorian invasion seemed a ready-made explanation for Helotage. Some caution might have been recommended by the fact that this ready-made explanation is actually rather rare in the ancient sources, and in fact some scholars flatly rejected it even when they

did not question the historicity of the Dorian invasion itself.⁴⁵ In any case, today even scholars who like to cling to the general outlines of the ancient migration tales have to recognize that the lowly populated landscape of Iron Age Greece is not a good scenario for the arrival of large masses of conquerors and the enslavement of equally large masses of previous inhabitants. The general pattern of a plummet in the number and extension of settlements at the end of the Bronze Age, with a slow recovery that really picked up pace only in the eighth century, reinforces the skepticism generated by the recognition of the artificial nature of the ancient migration narratives.⁴⁶

This means that current theories on the origins of Helotage and similar systems on the one hand, and on the diffusion of chattel slavery on the other, focus on the earlier part of the archaic period, and in particular on the seventh century, as the moment at which wealthier landowners in the Greek world came to need additional workforce to till their estates. In a recent contribution that investigates the general economic conditions that may explain the emergence of large-scale slavery in the ancient world, Walter Scheidel points to the shortage of labor relative to the exploitable resources and general availability of slaves as two fundamental preconditions.⁴⁷ The second condition can be postulated with some confidence based on general considerations relating to what we know of the eighth and seventh centuries. As forcefully pointed out by Tracey Rihll, the capturing of slaves, in the framework of military expeditions, but just as often as a by-product of an archaic trading activity of which piracy was a recognized aspect, was clearly a component of the economic expansion of archaic Greece recently emphasized by Ian Morris.⁴⁸ According to Scheidel, the relative shortage of labor, and corresponding pressure to employ slaves, was generated by the high demands that political activity posed on the citizens. From a less polis-centered angle, one could probably add, as an equally if not more important factor, competition for status among archaic aristocrats, which needed to be fuelled by increase in their personal patrimonies.⁴⁹

In this framework, Helotage and its relatives are seen by Scheidel as a different response to the same conditions that called for the recourse to chattel slavery.⁵⁰ While some poleis, of which Athens is the best known example, turned to an intensified use of the latter, others 'averted labor shortages by subjugating and collectively enslaving neighboring populations'. This conclusion is based especially on a recent study by Hans van Wees, arguing that the systems of dependent labor found in Sparta, Thessaly, and Crete were the result of wars of conquest that took place during the archaic age.⁵¹ In each case, according to Van Wees, enslavement

and territorial conquest went hand in hand, and the conquered ended up working the land that they had formerly inhabited and owned. In favor of this model, one might note that the majority of the poleis or groups of poleis to which it is applied by Van Wees were not particularly involved in overseas trade and colonization, and therefore had less easy access to the main sources of slave supply according to Rihl's thesis. Crete would be somewhat of an exception,⁵² and the case of Corinth, a trading city that had as ready an access to chattel slaves as any other in the Greek world, has been put forward only tentatively by Van Wees himself.⁵³

A radical alternative to this two-pronged theory on the rise of unfree labor in archaic Greece is offered, in the tradition of Moses Finley, by the works of Benedetto Bravo. Following Finley, Bravo sees the expansion of chattel slavery, explicitly in the Athenian case, but by implication all over the Greek world, as a reaction to the wealthier Greeks' loss of control over an indigenous workforce they had been used to exploiting for centuries. Bravo summarizes his views as follows:

In my opinion, besides chattel-slaves, probably not very numerous (but not negligible, either), there existed, in every archaic Greek society, a numerous and important group of dependent peasants. Their origin could vary; what mattered was their position and social function: hereditarily fixed on individual plots of wealthy men's estates, with a house, wife and children, they were – according to my hypothesis – more or less autonomous in managing the plot entrusted to them; their main obligation (certainly not the only one) consisted in providing to the owner a fixed quota from the produce of the plot they managed. In legal terms, these peasants, too, were slaves (δμῶες, δοῦλοι, οἰκέται), even though their condition was different from that of slaves who were not settled on a plot and could be bought and sold like cattle (Bravo 1996, 533–4).

According to Bravo, the transition from the archaic to the classical polis was marked by the inclusion of such groups into the citizen body, and Sparta is the most illustrious example of a polis in which such transition did not take place.⁵⁴ Solon's and then Cleisthenes' reforms represent the two stages of the abolition of dependent peasantry in Attica.⁵⁵ Wisely, Bravo avoids the problem of the origins of this system of dependent labor, which is a realistic choice given the little we know about Greek society before the sixth century. At the same time, he essentially follows a Marxist tradition, also present in Finley's work, in seeing this kind of unfree labor as a form of production that was economically less developed, and therefore presumably older, than chattel slavery. The weight of what seems to be the evidence of the Athenian case is decisive here.

A strikingly similar reconstruction has been formulated recently by John

Bintliff based on archaeological evidence, especially but not exclusively on the evidence for the density of population in the Greek countryside from the Dark Age to the classical period. The convergence is all the more noteworthy, since Bravo operates exclusively with literary evidence. Bintliff summarizes his model as follows:

I shall begin by rejecting my own 1982 model whereby a society of free peasants fell into the power of wealthy landowners in archaic times, through borrowing the means to open up the abandoned countryside. It now looks far more likely that throughout the Dark Age a class of dependent peasants was tied to the upper classes and provided essential agricultural labor for their sustenance, as well as minor surpluses for traded goods and elite feasting (Bintliff 2006, 328).

What is common to these two lines of interpretation, and the reason why they have been singled out here, is that both locate the emergence of Helotage in an organic way within broader developments in archaic society and economy. In different ways, both de-emphasize the difference between poleis that later had Helot-like systems and poleis where chattel slavery was by far the main form of unfree labor. They also presuppose a broad structural similarity in the economies of the various Greek poleis, which is consistent with the general similarity in their political systems and ecological locations and with the generally recognized dominance of agriculture across the board in the archaic Greek economy, as in every pre-modern economy.⁵⁶ At the same time, though, both are open to objections.

As seen most clearly in Bintliff's work, the dependent peasants theory addresses mostly the question of the mode of production, i.e. of explaining who worked the land of the major landowners, but is rather less specific on the issue of legal and social status. Moreover, the division in orders that Bravo assumes requires postulating widespread emancipation across the Greek world in the late archaic period, since only very few cities appear to have kept during the classical period systems of unfree labor that could be regarded as the descendants of the rural serfdom he envisions. We would expect to find in the sources some trace of such a process, and Bravo's attempt at countering the objection by suggesting a radical break in collective memory associated with the emancipation process rather strains imagination. In the same vein, one would need to imagine specific reasons why the system came to a crisis in the late seventh-early sixth century, in the Athenian case. After all, Solon's references seem to point to a sharp escalation in the level of conflict. A further problem is the total absence of the dependent population in the Homeric and Hesiodic poems, where on the contrary chattel slaves appear to be present, although not in very large numbers.⁵⁷

The collective subjugation theory, as formulated by Van Wees and accepted by Scheidel, runs into a different set of problems. The most obvious seems to be the connection of enslavement and territorial conquest, which tellingly Van Wees all but gives up in the case of Crete, where there is no evidence whatsoever to support it.⁵⁸ On the other hand, in order for it to function in the framework of Scheidel's general interpretation, this theory needs to postulate only the enslavement of neighbors through war: territorial expansion, which is after all attested in a less than vague way only in the case of Sparta, is not strictly necessary. However, if we admit that the subjugation of people and land did not go hand in hand in every single case, we have the additional problem of explaining the difference between the Spartan case, where expansion in Messenia is a fact, and the others. Finally, the chronology that Van Wees works out ends up pushing the emergence of Helotage all the way back to the Dorian migration, whose traditional dates Van Wees is inclined to take seriously.⁵⁹ This is hardly reconcilable with the scenario sketched by Scheidel, which would require a late-eighth- or more probably a seventh-century date for the wave of enslavement.

As with so many other aspects of Helotage, ancient evidence only takes us so far. Ultimately, it is historical comparison that offers the best way to assess the comparative plausibility of modern reconstructions.

3. Parameters for a comparison

A comparative approach to Helotage that looks beyond the borders of ancient Greek history involves complex problems of method. The first and most obvious of such problems is how to delimit the field of relevant historical comparanda. Generally speaking, there is no doubt that Helotage should be classified as a system of unfree labor. However, it is difficult to define more precisely the place of Helotage within this very broad category. Discussion by scholars has so far focused mostly on locating Helotage in relation to the ideal types of slavery and serfdom.⁶⁰ Even though this approach may be less helpful than it has sometimes been thought to be, it offers a convenient starting point from which to embark on a discussion of what could be a more complex way of connecting to each other the parameters for comparison.

Geoffrey de Ste. Croix famously introduced as a criterion for distinguishing slavery from serfdom documents emanating from the League of Nations, describing the two statuses for the purposes of international legislation.⁶¹ This approach has been criticized, not always with good arguments and occasionally for not doing what it did not intend to do, that is, provide a historical definition of ancient Greek phenomena.

In any case, more historically-oriented and nuanced definitions, based on the consideration of a wide corpus of cases, have been worked out in recent research. According to Michael Bush, the main differences between slavery and serfdom can be summarized as follows. Slaves are historically defined as chattels of their masters, while serfs were in a double regime of dependency, owing obligations of different sorts to their masters and also to the political rule of the community, whatever the nature of the latter.⁶² Slaves were typically aliens, uprooted and relocated from a different, often far-off place, while serfs were home-grown and self reproducing, normally the offspring of serfs. The slave tended to exist outside the society s/he had to serve, while the serf was a native and enjoyed some level of social integration. Serfs had rights of property and exerted some control over their own labor. They typically did not work full-time for their masters, unlike the slaves who mostly did. Slaves were perceived as objects, serfs were officially accepted not only as individuals, but also as families. Slaves often worked in gangs, serfs usually in family teams. Crucially, serfs normally enjoyed security of tenure, whatever legal expression such situation found.⁶³

Lack of specific evidence makes it surprisingly difficult to locate the Helots within this system of differences. Ancient sources make it reasonably clear, although mostly by implication, that individual Helots were the property of individual Spartans. They do not seem to have been in a direct relationship to the Spartan polis as such, or at any rate to have owed obligations to it.⁶⁴ The 'contract of servitude' included a ban on sale abroad, and, by implication, it permitted sale within the Spartan territory (see above, n. 23). This said, some of the most crucial parameters of the dichotomy are controversial in the case of the Helots, most prominently security of tenure: the Spartiates could buy and sell their land,⁶⁵ but there is no indication that the Helots were attached to it. At any rate, given that Helots appear to have served the Spartiates also as domestic slaves, one wonders how the security of tenure could have worked in practice.⁶⁶

The real problem is that Bush's typology is descriptive, not predictive: the appearance of one or two aspects of one of the ideal types is not enough to conclude that the case at hand corresponds wholly to the type, i.e. that it also possesses the other aspects. In view of this, one may be tempted to conclude that the ideal types of slavery and serfdom are simply not helpful in trying to classify Helotage.⁶⁷ Another way of dealing with this impasse is to avoid using 'slaves' and 'serfs' as rigid types, so as to eschew a purely classificatory debate, and to separate more rigorously explanation from classification. A flexible approach, one that looks at different parameters for comparison, may be profitable: we may want to

separate the institutional aspect of Helotage, i.e. the question of the legal status of the Helots, from its sociological aspect, and from the analysis and classification of Helotage as a mode of production. Clearly all these aspects are related to one another in any historical system of exploitation of unfree labor, but there is no fixed and predictable correlation between any two of them.⁶⁸ In other words, individuals whose status cannot be legally called slavery may in certain historical contexts be exposed to most of the aspects of the social condition of slaves – for instance, they can be bought and sold,⁶⁹ while individuals who participate in a system of labor exploitation that corresponds to standard definitions of serfdom may be legally slaves, and treated as such in terms of social practice.⁷⁰

Slavery as a social phenomenon has been analyzed and defined most persuasively in the work of Orlando Patterson. Building especially on the studies of Claude Meillassoux⁷¹ and generalizing some of their conclusions, Patterson isolates three constitutive elements of slavery as a kind of power relation: namely, violence, natal alienation, and humiliation.⁷² In different forms and in different measures, these elements appear in a number of other asymmetric power relations across history, and of course, especially frequently in the case of unfree statuses that do not correspond completely to Patterson's type of slavery. Such statuses may be compared to slavery in formal or structural terms but, more interestingly, they may be seen to interact and interfere with slavery in certain historical contexts, generating phenomena of convergence and hybrid forms of dependence.⁷³ Such phenomena seem to occur typically when slavery and other forms of dependence become potentially equivalent and interchangeable ways of organizing unfree labor, which, in pre-modern economies, essentially means agricultural labor.

While there is no doubt that slavery is a very specific kind of power relation, slave labor in agriculture could be organized in ways that are analogous to the organization of free peasant labor. In pre-modern and early modern economies, landowners employed two basic ways of organizing the extraction of labor for their fields: in one, the peasants worked under complete control of the landowners and were rewarded for their work; in the other, the peasants themselves had the initiative, essentially working a portion of land as tenants, and the landowner received a fixed rent or a share of the produce. Both systems occurred under different legal circumstances, with peasants tied by different levels of dependence. In a sense, the medieval manorial system combined the two, with tenants paying a part of their rents in the form of direct labor on the land of the demesne.⁷⁴ If we consider only the relation between labor and landowner, the difference between plantation slavery, with slaves working

in gangs under close supervision, and wage labor as it existed in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century agrarian capitalism is elided – one could say that, in purely economic terms, the two systems are more similar to one another than either one of them is to agrarian tenancy.⁷⁵ This is not to say that in historical or sociological terms the difference between slavery and free wage labor is irrelevant. However, the paradoxical implications of isolating parameters, besides bespeaking the caution required in any comparison, suggest interesting avenues of thought. It is more than a curiosity that scholars agree in connecting plantation slavery to the existence of a market economy.⁷⁶ Considering a specific historical context, it is striking to observe that in modern Africa the transitions from serfdom to slavery and back, to use Meillassoux's terminology, went hand in hand with the expansion and contraction of the market for the produce of unfree labor: if the market narrowed, the slaves were sent into serfdom; if it was extended to cover all their products – and in particular the means of subsistence – it opened up the way to wage labor.⁷⁷

As mentioned above, tenancy arrangements typically involve the landlord receiving a fixed rent or a fixed proportion of the produce, a system called sharecropping. An important difference between these two systems and wage labor resides in how the risk of crop failure is shared between the workers and the landowner and in what neo-classical economists call the transaction costs: that is, essentially in the costs incurred by the landowner in order to enforce the conditions of the contract.⁷⁸ Wage labor typically allowed maximizing productivity but involved higher transaction costs,⁷⁹ whereas rent and sharecropping arrangements minimized transaction costs and the input of the landowner.⁸⁰ Accordingly, wage labor is an unattractive choice for absentee landowners, because they need to invest significant resources in supervision, the risk being totally on their side. In order to be attractive, fixed rents need to offer better conditions, because the tenant takes all the risk in case of crop failure.⁸¹ Of course, in the case of unfree labor these variables may be deemed to become irrelevant, since after all the landowner or master has unrestrained control over the amount of produce that is given to the unfree or on the height of the rent or proportion of the crop extracted. However, that is not really the case, because on the one hand a master, while certainly controlling means of persuasion that are not available to an employer,⁸² has exactly the same problem of making sure that no part of the produce is subtracted by the (unfree) workers; while enforcing a very high level of exploitation, in the form of a high rent, tends as a consequence to curtail the biological self-reproduction of the workforce.⁸³

Ancient sources have preserved only a few scattered references to how

Helot labor was organized, and most of them do not inspire much confidence. At an early date, Spartans (or Spartiates?) appear to have imposed a sharecropping arrangement which involved surrendering one half of the produce of the land, but it is unclear who the sharecroppers were. Given the date of the testimony, the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus (fr. 6 West), active in the seventh century, the reference may be to some earlier form of dependence rather than to Helotage. Among later authors, Myron of Priene (third century BCE) speaks of a 'share' (*FGrH* 106 F 2), while Plutarch (*Life of Lysurgus* 24.2) seems to have thought that Helots had to give the Spartans a fixed rent in kind, and that exacting a higher share brought a curse upon the greedy master (*Mor.* 239d). For different reasons, all the evidence inspires some diffidence, and Jean Ducat may well be right that we know nothing of the economic form of the exploitation of the Helots.⁸⁴ At the very least, it is interesting that the idea of a fixed rent came up at all, while the alternative, i.e. the Helots working under an arrangement that involved surrendering the whole of their produce and receiving from their masters their livelihood, is never mentioned by any author, as it was, for instance, in the case of the Penestai.⁸⁵ With all due caution, it seems legitimate to conclude that the regime of exploitation of the Helots not only, as Ducat observed, fell short of Meillassoux's 'totalitarian exploitation', but also, that one of its goals was probably to minimize the masters' organizational input, even if that involved giving up the possibility of maximizing the product.⁸⁶

In terms of the sociology of the power relationship at the base of Helotage, we may be slightly luckier. All the elements that are constitutive of slavery as a relation of domination, according to Patterson's definition, appear in the case of the Helots. As noted above, the extreme brutality of the Spartiates is a leitmotif in the evidence from the outset. Ancient sources have also preserved fairly abundant references to Spartan social practices that amount to a ritual humiliation of the Helots. Also here, some scholars prefer to deconstruct the evidence into irrelevance, but their skepticism appears to be excessive.⁸⁷ Finally, natal alienation was not present in the sense that Helots had been enslaved abroad and deported, but we have no reason to think, and some to exclude, that they had custodial power in their offspring.⁸⁸

Even though the evidence does not encourage firm conclusions, it appears that the sociological and the economic sides of the relation of human exploitation that constitutes Helotage point in different typological directions, which explains the problems experienced by scholars in applying the alternative slave/serf.⁸⁹ We might be tempted to call Helotage a hybrid phenomenon, but a look at other historical examples shows that the case

of Helotage is less baffling than it might seem, and its origins and function can be reconstructed without evoking the rhetoric of Spartan uniqueness that the Spartans themselves liked to promote.⁹⁰ Here, cross-cultural comparison helps in a decisive way in defining the limits of plausible hypotheses.

4. Cross-cultural comparisons

There is a relatively uncontroversial aspect of Helotage regarding which comparison with other historical contexts allows significant insights into the actual nature of Helotic dependence, and that is its distribution on the ground.⁹¹ Even in the absence of precise data, nobody would object to the notion that the land closest to Sparta in Laconia and the Messenian plains (i.e. the Makaria plain west of the river Pamisos, the Stenyklaros plain, and the Soulima valley) were the locations of the Spartiates' estates. While the former area was within relatively easy reach of Sparta, the three main plains of Messenia were significantly far away, and separated from Sparta by one of the most impervious mountain ranges of Greece, the Taygetos. Here, comparison with the experience of serf villages in modern Russia and of slave villages in pre-colonial Central Africa suggests highly interesting insights. Even in the absence of unequivocal evidence for the settlement pattern of the Helots in both areas, we would expect differences in the degree of involvement of the Spartiate landowners in their estates in each of them, with significant consequences for the condition experienced by the Helots in either area. In the case of Messenia, archaeological evidence seems to point, both in Helotic and in perioikic areas, to a pattern of nucleated settlement without small scattered farmsteads,⁹² which in its turn suggests a significant level of independent social organization among the Helots, without which their communities could not have functioned. One only needs to think of the administration of justice: Helots living, say, in the Soulima valley must have been able to punish petty crime without recourse to Spartiate justice. Social differentiation would have been an inevitable consequence of this situation. We would expect the emergence of an elite among the Helots, of which the written sources actually preserve traces.⁹³ It is also worth observing that neither of the two other major systems of dependence that were assimilated to Helotage in antiquity, those of Crete and Thessaly, had a comparable territorial structure: none of the poleis of Crete or Thessaly controlled a territory comparable for complexity and extension to that of Sparta, and this may explain why those systems appear to have been more stable than Helotage.⁹⁴

The comparison with Russian serfdom, recently pioneered by Stephen Hodkinson, is illuminating in other ways, too. Like Helotage, Russian serfdom was a major system of unfree peasant labor that was not alimanted

by slave trade. Its origin is rather instructive. From the sixteenth to the seventeenth century, the status of Russian peasants vis-à-vis the ruling elite proceeded towards more and more radical dependence, involving for the peasants the progressive loss of the right to move away from the land they tilled, until they finally became chattels that their masters could sell – or win and lose at cards. At the same time, slaves, who in the sixteenth century formed as much as 10% of the Russian population, progressively disappeared, until slavery was de facto abolished in 1723 and slaves became liable to poll tax and merged with the peasants, who meanwhile had been enserfed.⁹⁵ The transformation of dependent labor in modern Russia is an extremely complex phenomenon, and many aspects of it are controversial. Of particular interest for the study of Helotage is the fact that the unfree status that resulted has provoked among scholars a discussion on whether the appropriate definition for modern Russian serfdom should not be 'slavery'.⁹⁶ To be sure, this discussion may be more important for its ideological implications than it is for what it tells us about the historical phenomenon at hand. At any rate, what the history of Russian serfdom shows to the student of ancient forms of unfree labor is how historical developments can create forms that are rather different from the ideal types of slavery and serfdom, or from their legal definitions.

Above and beyond this caveat, the Russian case offers more food for thought. Peter Kolchin points out how the consolidation of forms of dependence that produced Russian serfdom was mirrored by changes affecting the nobility, which became the only class that had the right to exploit serf labor,⁹⁷ while at the same time developing into a clearly-defined service class whose male members were expected to serve in the civil administration and in the army according to a clearly-defined ranking system. Keeping in mind that the Spartiates, in comparison with Russian nobles, are likely to have represented a slightly higher proportion of the total population of Laconia and Messenia, the parallel is extremely suggestive. It reinforces the impression of an ideological and functional connection between Helotage and the peculiar set of privileges and obligations of the Spartan *homoioi*, and suggests the likelihood that such a connection may point to the *homoioi* and the Helots being the product of parallel historical developments.⁹⁸

Broadening the comparison, the complex mixture of traits that appears to characterize the Helots becomes less and less puzzling. Patterson has pointed to intriguing similarities between Helotage and slavery in medieval Korea that reinforce Hodkinson's views on the likely social structure of the Helots: in the Koryo period (918–1392 CE) Korea appears characterized by a strong presence of slaves,⁹⁹ in the absence of a slave trade that could

bring in outsiders. Slaves appear to have been a virtually self-reproducing component of society, possibly originating from the enslavement of prisoners of war before the beginning of the Koryo period, and then supported by an influx of free commoners who lost their status for various reasons.¹⁰⁰ As Hodkinson thinks was the case in Messenia, it appears that the Korean masters' tendency to absenteeism created a high level of social stratification among the slaves, some of whom could even become slave owners themselves.¹⁰¹

One further line of thought suggested by Patterson based on cross-cultural comparison focuses on the convergence of slavery and other forms of dependent peasantry in Late Antiquity,¹⁰² along lines structurally similar to what has been observed in modern Russia. As Patterson suggests, Helotage could be the product of an analogous process, one in which chattel slaves and poor peasants merged in a class of unfree peasants under the pressure of the dominant group.¹⁰³ The relative abundance of historical parallels points to the comparative plausibility of this scenario. One of its advantages is that it allows avoiding an element that cross-cultural comparison shows to be quite implausible, i.e. the notion that Helotage was the product of mass enslavement *in situ* of a previously free population by invaders. Patterson himself had observed in his earlier work that such a phenomenon would be unparalleled,¹⁰⁴ and the comparison with Central America after the Spanish conquest brought forth by Van Wees¹⁰⁵ does not really affect this point, for a number of reasons. First of all, as Van Wees himself recognizes, in most cases the Spaniards simply superimposed themselves on, and progressively replaced, the local elites as beneficiaries of a very efficient system of exploitation of dependent labor that was already in place,¹⁰⁶ and when they increased their demands at the cost of the subsistence of the indigenous population, the response was extensive resistance and rebellion.¹⁰⁷ In part this can be seen as a result of the fact that the *conquistadores*, unlike any of the potential Greek cases discussed by Van Wees, were creating a series of brand new conquest states, not adding territory and dependent populations to what they possessed already. Tellingly, very soon the labor regime in the conquered territories evolved towards forms that resembled more those that already existed in the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, envisioning the Spanish *conquista* as a simple unilateral process, with the indigenous population completely passive in front of the *conquistadores*, is characteristic of an outdated view that historians of Mesoamerica regard with skepticism.¹⁰⁹ Finally, one should not overlook the conditions in which the *conquista* took place, which make of it a very unlikely parallel for territorial conquest in the archaic Peloponnese. The invaders with their early modern technologies faced

populations who, in technological terms, were living in the Stone Age. Perhaps even more importantly, the indigenous populations in the first years of the *conquista* were literally decimated by epidemic diseases brought by the *conquistadores*, with losses of the order of two thirds according to conservative estimates.¹¹⁰ For all these reasons, the Spanish *conquista* does not offer a viable historical parallel for the process of conquest and enserfment that is supposed to have originated Helotage.

Patterson's 'convergence path hypothesis', as he calls it,¹¹¹ is clearly compatible with Scheidel's views on the rise of unfree labor in archaic Greece. It also makes sense of the evidence in a satisfactory way. The lines of Tyrtaeus alluded to above (fr. 6 and 7 West) suggest the existence, in the seventh century, of a class of dependent peasants, tied to their lords by a sharecropping contract in a situation of very strong social asymmetry – so strong that the lords are called 'masters'. We may recall that in the case of Athens, the pressure of wealthy landowners on peasants and the attempt to enslave them, in part probably by the means of debt slavery, is documented quite explicitly by Solon for the early sixth century. On the other hand, it would be odd if chattel slavery had not existed in early archaic Laconia and Messenia, and the fact that we do not seem to find chattel slaves in the Spartiates' service during the fifth and fourth centuries¹¹² would also be explained by Patterson's hypothesis. Finally, Patterson's hypothesis would relieve Greek historians of the need to postulate widespread enserfment wars in the archaic period based on flimsy and often late evidence – or, in the case of Crete, on no evidence at all.¹¹³ The fact that chattel slavery was the dominant form of dependence in the Greek world would explain why the relation of domination at the heart of Helotage and similar forms of dependence tended to assume characters normally associated with chattel slavery in other historical contexts. In Patterson's own terms, Helotage would be a recombinant form of slavery and serfdom. The convergence clearly went so far as to cancel most practical differences, to the extent that even in legal texts such as the Gortyn Code no juridical distinction is made within the group of the unfree.¹¹⁴

5. Further thoughts

If Greek history is not often pursued in a comparative perspective, the study of slavery mostly is.¹¹⁵ For the scholar interested in such a perspective, scholarship from other fields offers food for thought within relatively easy reach. The present investigation has only started broaching a set of problems, pointing to recent research that convincingly shows how historical comparison, ancient and modern, can contribute to a better understanding of Helotage. It seems appropriate to conclude this brief

survey by pointing to some lines of thought that might be of particular interest.

Looking at ancient and modern comparative approaches to Helotage naturally leads to a comparison of comparisons, as it were. Ancient views appear to have been dominated by an ethnic perspective: from Theopompus, Plato and Aristotle to their Hellenistic successors, the key problem seems to have been how ethnically to define Helots, Penestai and so forth. Once that problem was solved, all the rest was unproblematic: the Helots revolted because they were ethnically homogeneous, and worse, because they were a once-free ethnic group, and Greeks, on top of that. Their tendency to revolt was simply a function of their ethnic identity as formerly free men. On the other hand, any detailed discussion of the actual functioning of these systems of unfree labor, of how the masters organized the extraction of produce, control and repression, was prevented by the pervasive silence on things economic and the scarce interest in slavery that characterize Greek literature. After all, the few sources we have on the economic aspects of Helotage originate themselves from ideologically-charged motivations, namely from the ancient fascination with the Spartan mirage, and not from any interest in sharecropping or agricultural contracts.

Modern scholarship on Helotage often appears unconsciously to follow ancient prejudices, explaining Helotage in terms of its presumed ethnic origins rather than of its function and organization. The fact that the comparison between Sparta and Chios has not been pursued any further after Thucydides pointed to it, is in itself instructive: by and large, modern scholars have been more impressed by Theopompus. But the broader comparative framework in which Helotage has been seen in the scholarship of the last decade opens up new lines of thought – or allows for a new take on old ones. To be sure, modern comparative approaches to slavery, mostly originating from Marxist theory, have initially focused on its social and economic sides. However, with the turn towards a comparative sociology of slavery in the last quarter of the last century, scholars have become more sensitive to the pervasive role of ethnicity in many slave systems. Ethnic diversity appears often to be an important component of the ideology of slavery, a key factor in the justification of such a radical form of exploitation of human beings.¹¹⁶ The more difficult it is for the masters to explain the inferiority of the slaves in culturally plausible terms, the more difficult it is ultimately to sustain slavery, and ethnic difference is historically one of the most common notions evoked for this purpose.

On the other hand, ethnic difference is not the only possible underpinning for slavery, as shown for example by the ideology of slavery and then serfdom in modern Russia, which attempted to create social

distance between masters and unfree by applying to the latter all sorts of negative moral stereotypes.¹¹⁷ Similarly, once the *nobi*, the slave population of Korea, who appear to have been of largely alien origins, became a virtually self-reproducing group, ethnically indistinguishable from the masters, a robust system of moral stereotypes was developed in order to support the persistence of slavery, depicting the slaves as criminals, treacherous, and generally base.¹¹⁸

If we observe Helotage and Greek slavery from this comparative angle, the presence or absence of ethnicity as a mechanism of exclusion in the ideologies of slave systems suggests intriguing insights. The ritualized contempt of the Spartiates for the Helots, which reassured the masters of their superiority just as much as it attempted to persuade the slaves of their inferiority, was a phenomenon of the same order as the moral stereotyping of Russian serfs and Korean *nobi*. By contrast, ethnic stereotyping seems to have played no role in the Spartan ideology of Helotage.¹¹⁹ Judging by the name they used for the Helots (see Barnes below), the Spartans did not consider them ethnically alien. It seems quite understandable that Helotage and related systems could originate in Greece during the archaic period, in a cultural context in which, by and large, mechanisms of exclusion were supported by wealth and status rather than by perceived ethnic difference.¹²⁰ As soon as the alternative Greek-*barbaros* became the main axis along which the ideology of slavery was articulated, Helotage and its cognates became much more difficult to justify – hence the criticism of the Spartans for enslaving fellow Greeks.¹²¹ It is precisely this ideological alignment that generated bizarre notions such as Posidonius' explanation of the voluntary self-enslavement of the Mariandynoi (*FGrH* 87 F 8), who supposedly recognized their own ethnic inferiority. A comparison with the criticism and final abolition of serfdom in modern Russia and the arguments of the abolitionist movement in America clearly shows the much higher cultural plausibility of domination over cultural aliens. From this angle, the obstinacy of the Spartans in clinging to their variant of the peculiar institution becomes all the more striking and points to how deeply Helotage was rooted in Spartan ideology.¹²²

In conclusion, a comparative approach to Helotage may offer only limited hopes of progress in one of the most central fields of the comparative study of slavery, namely its economic logic. In this field, a slightly modified version of Scheidel's very general approach, connecting the emergence of slavery in the Greek world with the increasing demands put on the upper class by competition for status and by the intense political participation required by the polis, may be the best we can hope for. On the other hand, a consideration of Helotage in the broad comparative field

of systems of unfree labor seems to offer the possibility of formulating a reasonably coherent socio-historical interpretation of it, one that does not require postulating unparalleled developments in the Greek world in general or in Sparta in particular. On a more specific level, the kind of insights that can derive from comparison seem best exemplified by Hodkinson's recent work on the social structure of the Helots. Here, one aspect that is peculiar to Greek history, the systematic incorporation of material evidence, may be the way forward. The results of the Laconia Survey have revealed new evidence to scholars, and even though this new evidence is difficult to interpret, its use has already changed dramatically the parameters for our understanding of Helotage, showing, among other things, a radical restructuring in the exploitation of land in the immediate vicinity of Sparta during the sixth century, amounting to a veritable colonization movement, which points, at the very least, to some significant change in the deployment, and perhaps even in the nature, of unfree labor in late-archaic Laconia.¹²³

Finally, if there is one specific, if rather modest, conclusion that the present discussion seems to suggest, it is that the study of Helotage and related forms of exploitation of unfree labor in ancient Greece has been impaired rather than furthered by scholars' habit of keeping such forms of exploitation separate from what is considered the 'standard' form of human exploitation in the Greek world, namely chattel slavery. Here, as in so many other aspects of Spartan history, there is more work to be done to break free from the traditional image of Sparta that the Spartans themselves crafted, and oligarchs all around the Greek world elaborated and promoted – what we are used to calling the 'Spartan mirage'.

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APPENDIX: A note on the etymology of Εἰλωτες

Timothy Barnes

No consensus exists on the etymology of the term Εἰλωτες (secondarily Εἰλωται, found in Herodotus). Ancient explanations fall into two categories. One version, found in the *Etymologicum Magnum*, sees a connection with the verb εἶλον ‘seize, capture’; this is impossible, as everyone agrees. A modern reformulation along these lines was made by Solmsen (1901, 251), who argued for a connection with ἄλσικομαι ‘be defeated’.¹²⁴ Solmsen’s hypothetical Greek pre-form **e-melō-t-* (with secondary aspiration) would be very difficult to analyze morphologically, as Chantraine rightly observes – and, even worse, would not give a Laconian εἰλωτ- anyway, but rather **i̯λωτ-*¹²⁵ (and there is no reason to believe that the word is not Laconian in origin). Further, the ‘prothetic’ *e-* of Solmsen’s construct is not justifiable on current understanding of that phenomenon.¹²⁶ Solmsen’s suggestion is therefore to be discarded. A second ancient explanation connects the word with the town Ἔλος (lit., ‘swamp’), so that it will have originally designated the inhabitants of that town; this too is linguistically impossible, as a correct formation to such a noun would be ἐλεστάς in Laconian (for the relation cf. e.g. κῆδος ‘connection by marriage’: κηδεστής ‘in-law’), and it is extremely difficult to see how this might be remade as εἰλως. Chantraine in his discussion remarked that designations for ‘slave’ are often etymologically opaque cross-linguistically. One thinks of the various cases where ethnic designations come into play (English *slave* itself, Italian *schiaavo*, etc., apparently originally ‘Slav’; Old English *wealh* meaning both ‘slave’ and ‘Briton’; Pahlavi *kurdīg* seems to mean both ‘Kurdish’ and to have denoted a class of serfs (Nyberg s.v.); likewise the archaic and literary Sumerian term *šubur* (= Akkadian (*w*)*ardum* ‘slave’, von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* 1464f.) is thought to be related to the name of a region (‘Subartu’), but the resemblance seems fortuitous). A similar origin for Εἰλωτες would fit the (historically unlikely) hypothesis that this group consisted of formerly free inhabitants of the region. However, there is no reason to believe that the word ever designated an ethnic group or indeed ever meant anything other than what it means historically.

Under such circumstances of etymological aporia, it is desirable to start completely afresh. If we begin from the very likely assumption that the word is Laconian in origin, the most immediate pre-form cannot be anything but **seilōt-* (Laconian knows no ‘spurious’ diphthong, above,

n. 125), with an initial *s-* which will show up as the attested initial *spiritus asper* and a real diphthong which will be represented in Laconian (and from there, in any other dialect) by <EI>. Such a form can in fact be explained easily and only at the cost of hypothesizing the existence in proto-Greek of a word for which there is evidence in another branch of the IE family, namely Germanic. Germanic has a set of words for ‘rope’ or ‘bond’ of the right shape to be relevant for our Greek etymological zetema: Old Norse *seil*, Old English *sāl*, Old High German *seil*, all < **soilo-* or **sailo-*; we also find a m. Old Norse *sili* ‘rope’ < **seilio-* or **silio-*. The apparent **seilōt-* we would like to explain can easily have been created from a base noun **seilo-*¹²⁷ according to a clear derivational chain. The noun δεσμώτης provides the key parallel. Since there is no verb **δεσμώω*, δεσμώτης should represent a denominal derivative (in other words, it must be based on an underlying noun); the only viable way of doing this is to see in it a t-stem substantivization of an underlying predicate instrumental **desmō* ‘with a bond’, which has been expanded in *-ā-* along with a host of other such words denoting membership in a generic group.¹²⁸ The process may be represented thus:

**desmō* ‘with a bond, in bonds’ → **desmō-t-* ‘bondsman, prisoner’ → **desmōt-ā-* ‘member of the group of **desmōtes*’ (and hence simply ‘prisoner’)

In precisely the same way we may set up:

**seilō* ‘with a bond, in bonds’ → **seilō-t-* ‘bondsman, slave’ (→ Hdt. εἰλώτης)

Sanskrit, too, employs this root in *sevaka-* ‘slave’ < **saiṇa-ka-*, and for the semantics one will compare further Old Persian *ba^adaka-* (> Pahlavi *bandag*) ‘slave’, derived from **banda-* ‘bond’ (> Pahlavi *band*; Avestan *banda-*). One may conclude that the word **seilōt-* > **eilōt-* was simply the inherited Laconian designation for ‘slave’ or ‘prisoner of war’, which – perhaps initially employed as a term of abuse – came to acquire its specialized reference as Laconian institutions themselves were developing in their peculiar way.

Notes

¹ On the interpretation of the passage of the Old Oligarch, see Ducat 1990, 27–8 and Klees 1991, 33–5. Critias' dictum is quoted approvingly, but without mentioning its author, by Plutarch, *Life of Lysurgus* 28.11.

² Poll. 3.83. Pollux's definition is the starting point of a classic study by Moses I. Finley, see Finley 1981, 116–32. On the meaning of the formula and its relation to Critias' aphorism, see Ducat 1994b, 24–5. For a detailed presentation of comparisons between Helots and other sorts of unfree groups in Greek sources, see especially Ducat 1990, 31–51.

³ This peculiarity of Herodotus' approach to Sparta has been observed and discussed many times; the relevant passages are collected by Munson (2001, 96–7 and n. 161). For an investigation of a specific aspect, with references to earlier bibliography, see Millender 2002.

⁴ For early examples, see Nilsson 1912, Ferguson 1918, and especially Jeanmaire 1939, and the discussion of early comparative approaches to Sparta by Lupi (2002, 307–11). It is striking to observe the relative abundance of comparative studies devoted to Sparta and the virtual absence of a comparative perspective in studies about Athens, whose uniqueness scholars easily take for granted.

⁵ For a tour d'horizon of current research on the Helots, see Luraghi and Alcock 2003, with full references to the relevant evidence and earlier bibliography.

⁶ This is not the place to start a discussion of the famous 'Spartan mirage'. Tigerstedt (1965) offers the most detailed discussion of ancient attitudes to Sparta. For a study of the first phase of the 'mirage', the fourth century, which turns out to be much more controversial than often thought, see Hodkinson 2005. Views of Helotage in the fifth and fourth centuries are discussed by Klees (1991 and 1992).

⁷ On the logic of comparative approaches and the corresponding research strategies, see Skocpol and Somers 1980. For an agenda for a comparative study of ancient slavery, see Patterson 2008, 33–4.

⁸ For a lucid discussion of the use of generalizations in ancient history, see Finley 1975, 60–74.

⁹ See e.g. the cautious discussion of Cretan institutions in Chaniotis 2005.

¹⁰ On these problems, see the debate between Hansen and Hodkinson in this volume (chs. 11–13). The importance of intra-cultural comparison is underlined by Cartledge 2001, 133.

¹¹ This passage offers the starting point to P. Vidal-Naquet's investigation of slavery in ancient Greek historiography; see Vidal-Naquet 1972, republished in Vidal-Naquet 1986, 168–88. From the wording, it is clear that Theopompus was going to argue that the Chians were the true inventors of slavery. He may also be claiming as his discovery the fact that Spartans and Thessalians had enslaved the previous inhabitants of their lands. The idea that slavery had not always existed among the Greeks goes back at least to the second half of the fifth century, see Hdt. 6.137.3.

¹² For a discussion of this passage, see Ducat (1990, 83–7), who very plausibly suggests that Helotage is also seen as a negative model as regards the treatment of slaves. The hard plight of the Helots was common currency at least since Theopompus (*FGrH* 115 F 13 *ap.* Athen. 6.272a), and the Old Oligarch's comment on the slaves' fear of their masters at Sparta probably reflects the same notion. True or not (see

Paradiso 2004 and Harvey 2004), the story of the preemptive massacre of 2,000 Helots in Thucydides (4.80.3–4) is representative of a widespread perception.

¹³ Aristotle uses *perioikoi* as a general term for slaves of the Cretans, in all likelihood because he is aware of the various different names used for them on Crete (see Lotze 1959, 8–9, and below).

¹⁴ The contrast between Crete and Sparta in terms of slave revolts is repeated in *Pol.* 2.7.8, 1272b18–19. Interestingly, Crete appears to have been overlooked by Theopompus (but see below, n. 23 on Strabo 12.3.4).

¹⁵ A similar passage occurs in the first book of *Oeconomica* (*Oec.* 1.5, 1344b18), a Peripatetic treatise that has been transmitted in the corpus of Aristotle's works. The danger posed by ethnic homogeneity among the slaves seems to have been a commonplace in antiquity, as among owners of slaves throughout history; see Varro (*De agricultura* 1.18.5) on the necessity to avoid having many slaves *eiusdem nationis*, and Patterson 1970, 320–1.

¹⁶ This could have implications for the problem of the existence of similar systems of unfree labor elsewhere in the Peloponnese, and especially at Argos, Sparta's arch-enemy. Aristotle knew enough about the history of the Peloponnese in the late archaic period (e.g. he refers to the battle of Sepeia, *Pol.* 5.2.8, 1303a7–9) to realize the potential relevance of this for his line of argument – if he had ever heard of such systems existing in Sparta's neighbors. On the problem of the existence of a Helotage-like system in Argos, see Lotze 1959, 53–4 and now Bearzot 2005 with further bibliography (both skeptical).

¹⁷ See Klees 1992, 17. Aristotle, like other writers of his age, speaks of a 'Cretan constitution' as if it were a unitary entity; for a criticism of this view, see especially Perlman 1992 and 2005.

¹⁸ Sparta: Hodkinson 1997 and Paradiso 1997. For the other cases, sources tend to be insufficient (Thessaly: Ducat 1994a, 87–91) or ambiguous (Crete: Athen. 6.263e contrasts slaves 'in the city' called *chrysônētoi* and slaves 'in the fields' called *aphamiōtai*, while the Gortyn Law does not distinguish categories of unfree, as shown long ago by Lipsius 1909; for a recent restatement Link 2001. Accordingly, we cannot tell for sure of what sort were the unfree who appear to be present in the household).

¹⁹ Ducat 1994a, 88.

²⁰ On Helots and Penestai, see e.g. the fragment of Theopompus mentioned above, p. 264 and n. 11. On the slaves of the Cretans as previous inhabitants subdued in war, see Athen. 6.263e–f (a passage of uncertain origin, but probably not part of the citation from Callistratus that immediately precedes it, *FGrH* 348 F 4; see Lotze 1959, 4 n. 1); the Hellenistic grammarian Hermon (or Hermonax), *ap.* Athen. 6.267c, explained *mnōtai* as 'locally-born slaves', presumably with similar implications (see Lotze 1959, 4–5).

²¹ On the actual origin of the name 'Helots', see T. Barnes' appendix below. The sources on the Mariandynoi have been collected and discussed by Asheri (1972, 17–23); it appears that the name indicated an Anatolian population living outside the territory of Heraclea, not only the slaves of the Heracleans (see e.g. Hdt. 7.72).

²² Some ancient authors did interpret some of the Cretan names for Helot-type slaves in a way that made it possible to explain their origins along the same lines as Helots and Penestai; see below on Ephorus and the *klarōtai*. To the extent that modern

scholars have been able to explain those names, they seem all to refer to these slaves' function as peasants; see van Effenterre 1982, 36–7 and Bile 1986, 138.

²³ On the 'contract of servitude', see Ducat 1990, 72–6 and 1994b, 23–7, and the observations of Paradiso 2007, 24–5. For the case of the Mariandynoi and its peculiar description in Posidonius *FGrH* 87 F 8, see especially Paradiso 2007. Strabo 12.3.4 (possibly, but not certainly, following Theopompus, see Paradiso 2007, 25–6) in all likelihood extends the ban on sale abroad to the slaves of the Cretans; see Ducat 1994a, 45–6 and Van Wees 2003, 58. Unsurprisingly, sale abroad was seen in general as a more radical form of alienation than sale within the community; see e.g. *ML*² 32, lines 37–41 and Finley 1981, 138.

²⁴ Strabo 12.3.4, if taken as suggested by Ducat 1994a, 45–6. For the interpretation of Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F 117, the most detailed description of the 'contract of servitude' of the Helots, see Luraghi 2002, 228–9.

²⁵ For the Helots, Harpokration s.v. *heilotein*; for the Penestai, Athen. 6.264a, *Suda* s.v., Paus. Att. s.v., Phot. s.v. Notice in particular the recurring formula *mē gontōi douloi*.

²⁶ Athen. 6.263e, quoting Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F 29; see Lotze 1959, 5–6. Considering Ephorus' complex views of the origins of Helotage (see Luraghi 2003, 124–7), it is a pity indeed that we do not know more about how he envisioned the process of enslavement on Crete.

²⁷ The expression 'War against the Helots' is first found in Ephorus (*FGrH* 70 F 117 *ap.* Strabo 8.5.4); Plutarch *Mor.* 247a–d and Polyaeus 7.49 speak of the Spartiates (sic) involved in a 'Helotic War' at the time of the foundation of Melos, surely meaning the same episode (Ducat 1990, 66 and n.3). For the yearly declaration of war, see Aristotle fr. 538 Rose *ap.* Plutarch *Life of Lysurgus* 28.7.

²⁸ On the militarist aspects of Cretan social ideology in the archaic and classical periods, see especially Gehrke 1997, 28–30, 66–7.

²⁹ Ducat 1990, 74 n. 15 provides an excellent discussion of the song of Hybreas, with references to various problems of dating and interpretation.

³⁰ *pace* Van Wees 2003, 61.

³¹ On Helots and *perioikoi*, see the cautious discussion of Ducat (1990, 189–91), who inclines to think that 'slaves in those [*scil.* perioikic] cities were or could be called Helots'. However, especially the fact that *perioikoi* could join forces with the Helots against the Spartiates makes it very hard to believe that their slaves were considered homogeneous with the Helots; consider the case of the revolt after the earthquake in the sixties of the fifth century, Thuc. 1.101 and Luraghi 2008, 195–7. On the size of Spartiate estates, see Hodkinson (2000, 382–5) and the archaeological evidence discussed in Cavanagh and Mee 2005, 314.

³² On the connection between Penestai and large estates, see Ducat 1997. Note also Asheri (1972, 23 and n. 61), for the suggestion that the Mariandynoi may have worked (mostly? especially?) on the large estates of the aristocrats of Heraclea.

³³ On this, the essential has been said by Lotze 1959, 40–2; in a broader framework, see Hodkinson 2000, 199–201.

³⁴ Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F 149, Aristotle *Pol.* 2.7.4, 1272a17 ff., and, with reference to Lyttos, Dosiadas *FGrH* 458 F 2; on communitarian aspects of Cretan society see Gehrke 1997, 39–41 and Chaniotis 2004, 71–2.

³⁵ On Chios and Athens in the fifth century, see Quinn 1981, 33–3 and Barron 1986.

³⁶ See Thuc. 4.41.3, 53–5 and Luraghi 2008, 189–90.

³⁷ On slavery and economy in Chios, see Roebuck 1986, 82–3 and Lawall 1998, 78–95.

³⁸ Fuks 1968, 108.

³⁹ The analogy with the slave revolts in Jamaica is irresistible; see Finley (1998, 181–2) and, on the maroon wars, Patterson 1970. See also Langerwerf's paper in this volume.

⁴⁰ This very interesting episode may not have received the attention it deserves in research on Greek slavery; the most detailed treatment is Fuks 1968, who takes it for historical and argues for a date in the second quarter of the third century BCE. See now also Urbainczyk 2008, 30–1 and Langerwerf in this volume. From a different angle, Graf (1985, 121–5) convincingly analyzes it as an aetiological story explaining the origins of the hero cult for Drimacus.

⁴¹ Xen. *Hell.* 2.3.36 is not really an exception, especially because of the context: Theramenes accusing Critias of promoting democracy and of arming the Penestai against their masters does not amount to a revolt of Penestai; see the discussion of Ducat 1994a, 54–61, and especially 103–4.

⁴² The genetic fallacy, consisting in explaining *a priori* the functioning of a cultural artifact – symbol, institution or whatever else – in a given historical context in terms of its origin, is a familiar danger for historical sociology, see e.g. Skocpol and Somers 1980, 192.

⁴³ On the problem of the historicity of the Homeric society and of the period depicted in the poems, see Raaflaub (1997, 625–9) with further refs.

⁴⁴ For an updated survey of the main issues relating to labor and land in Solonian Athens, see Forsdyke 2006.

⁴⁵ See Nafissi 1991, 16 and n. 16, and add Niese 1906, 137–8.

⁴⁶ On the drop in population in Dark Age Greece and its growth during the archaic period, see Scheidel 2003, 121–6. For a very instructive survey of the archaeological evidence for the Dark Ages in one particular, and crucial, area of Greece, the Argolid and the Southern Peloponnese, see Eder 1998.

⁴⁷ See Scheidel 2008, 115–16.

⁴⁸ See esp. Rihl 1996; on slave trade in the Homeric poems, see Collombier 2002. On the economic expansion of archaic Greece, see Morris 2005 and 2007.

⁴⁹ On competition for status within archaic ruling elites and its consequences for their economic strategies, see Duploux 2006, 251–5 and Morris 2007, 237–8.

⁵⁰ See Scheidel 2008, 118.

⁵¹ Van Wees 2003. Van Wees also adds to the list of enserfers Sicyon at the time of the tyrant Cleisthenes (early sixth century BCE) and archaic Argos, and, with less confidence, Corinth, Epidaurus, and Elis. On Argos, see above, n. 16. Notice that in the end Van Wees accepts in various cases the ancient chronology for the enserfment wars that pushes them all the way into the age of the migrations (see Van Wees 2003, 51–3 on Laconia and especially 54–6 on Thessaly), creating a scenario that is in fact incompatible with Scheidel's views (see below).

⁵² However, after the seventh century even Crete appears to be increasingly closed onto itself; see Chaniotis 2004, 58–63.

⁵³ The case of Greek colonists supposedly enserfing indigenous populations (Van Wees 2003, 45–7) is different and requires some special comments. The only three cases documented in the sources are Heraclea Pontica (see above n. 21 and 23),

Byzantium, and Syracuse – very few indeed, considering the dozens of Greek colonial foundations around the Mediterranean. According to Phylarchus (*FGrH* 81 F 8 *ap.* Athen. 6.271b–c), the Byzantians ruled over (δεσπόσαι) the Bithynians like the Spartans over the Helots. But the Bithynians themselves lived in Asia Minor, not in the territory of Byzantium. In this case, the evidence seems more easily explained if we suppose that the Byzantians had slaves captured (mostly?) in Asia Minor and used ‘Bithynians’ as a collective name for them (see Barnes’ appendix on the ethnic origin of some words for ‘slave’). Considering that the Mariandynoi, too, were an indigenous population of Anatolia (see above, n. 21), one wonders if it would not be preferable to understand the Helot-like Mariandynoi along similar lines, especially in the light of the problems with Van Wees’ theory when seen from a comparative angle (see below).

⁵⁴ Bravo 1996, 538.

⁵⁵ Bravo 1996, 539–40.

⁵⁶ On the role of agriculture in pre-modern economies in general, see Crone 2003, 15–16.

⁵⁷ For brief discussions of slavery in the Homeric poems, see Garland 1995, 35–42 and Andreau and Descat 2006, 33–42. A much more detailed treatment is to be found in Wicket-Micknat 1983. On slavery in Hesiod, see Tandy and Neale 1996, 28.

⁵⁸ Van Wees 2003, 61.

⁵⁹ Van Wees 2003, 53.

⁶⁰ For discussions of Helotage in the general framework of Greek slavery, see Garland 1995, 100–4, and most recently Andreau and Descat 2006, 16–18. The classic discussion of dependent statuses in Greece is Finley 1981, 133–49. Helotage as serfdom: Cartledge 1988. In earlier research, Helotage was often compared to Medieval or Early Modern regimes of dependent labor; see e.g. Kahrstedt 1919, 285–9 (for the origin of Kahrstedt’s terminology, see Makkai 1975, 225–7). The current understanding of the nature of feudal dependence has changed the framework for this kind of comparison, see especially Whittaker 1988.

⁶¹ de Ste. Croix 1981, 134–6.

⁶² See e.g. the case of Russian serfs, who were obliged to pay taxes to the state and send recruits to the army, on top of their obligations to the landowners (Moon 1999, 79–86).

⁶³ This checklist is derived from Bush 1996, 2–4; note however that his approach to the dichotomy is in practice very flexible.

⁶⁴ Paul Cartledge’s insistence on cases of state liberation of Helots who fought for the Spartans (most recently Cartledge 2003, 17–20) is misplaced; state manumission of slaves who fought for their masters’ community has various parallels (Patterson 1982, 234–6 and 289–93), even from Greece itself: see the case of the slaves of the Athenians after the battle of Arginusae in 406 BCE (Hunt 2001, 359–66). Contrast the obligations of Russian peasants, above n. 62. As Susanne Ebbinghaus points out to me, the yearly declaration of war on the Helots (above, n. 27) shows that the Spartans cannot have used Helots in a military capacity in a regular way.

⁶⁵ But see the debate between Hodkinson 2000, 85–90 and Lupi 2003.

⁶⁶ On this, see the realistic discussion of Hodkinson 2008, 296–8 (= 2003, 258–60). On the extent to which Helot families were recognized as such by the Spartiates, see Luraghi 2002, 229.

⁶⁷ As suggested recently by Hodkinson 2008, 286–9 (= 2003, 249–51). For an instructive parallel, see the discussion on whether serfs in modern Russia should not

be called ‘slaves’, in Kolchin (1987, 42–3) with further bibliography. This debate has some interest for the study of Helotage, see below.

⁶⁸ For an illuminating discussion of the problems that result when these three aspects are not given separate attention, see Rotman 2004, 26–52.

⁶⁹ The most striking case being that of serfs in modern Russia; see Kolchin 1987, 41–2.

⁷⁰ See Wickham (2005, 261–2) on slave tenants in the early Middle Ages and on the disconnection between legal status and economic organization. For more examples of slave tenants, see Patterson 1982, 181.

⁷¹ See especially Meillassoux (1991, 99–115) on the slave as a total alien and a non-person and on slavery as a cultural equivalent of death.

⁷² See Patterson 1982, 3–11.

⁷³ See the discussion of the interference between slavery and serfdom from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages in Patterson (1991, 347–56), and below, n. 102.

⁷⁴ See e.g. Wickham 2005, 263; in practice, the manorial system itself took a number of different forms, see North and Thomas 1971, 781–2. The combination of tenancy and directed work on the master’s estate is not rare in history, even in what are regarded as genuine slave systems; see e.g. Lovejoy (2000, 212–13 and 2005, 16) on Central Africa.

⁷⁵ For a striking comparison of the living conditions of slaves in the South of the United States before the Civil War and of free wage-laborers in the ‘rice belt’ of Northern Italy in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, see R. Luraghi 1977.

⁷⁶ See in general North and Thomas 1971, 779; the same applies to the economic logic of Russian serfdom, Moon 1999, 70–1.

⁷⁷ See Meillassoux 1991, 285.

⁷⁸ On this taxonomy, derived from modern theory of agricultural contracts, see Hoffman (1984, 313–14) with further references. See also the table in Hodkinson 1992, 131.

⁷⁹ See in general Fenoaltea (2004, 635–6), and for a specific case Moon (1999, 205) on regimes of exploitation in modern Russia.

⁸⁰ On productivity in sharecropping systems, see Hodkinson (1992, 132) with further references.

⁸¹ See Hoffman (1984, 312) on the case of early modern France.

⁸² ‘Pain-incentives’, as Stefano Fenoaltea calls them; see Fenoaltea 2004.

⁸³ See especially Meillassoux (1991, 277–80), who calls this regime ‘exploitation totale’ (‘totalitarian exploitation’ in the English translation) and remarks that it is feasible only as long as a continuous supply of new slaves is available. On the ability of slave populations biologically to reproduce themselves, see Patterson 1982, 132–3 and Lovejoy 2000, 278–9.

⁸⁴ For discussions of the evidence, see especially Ducat 1990, 56–62, Singor 1993, and Hodkinson 2000, 125–31. Against the use of Tyrtæus, fr. 6 and 7 West, as evidence for Helotage, see Luraghi 2003, 113–15 (and see also the cautious remarks of Hodkinson 1992, 130).

⁸⁵ For a discussion of the economic regime of the Penestai, see Ducat 1994a, 90–1.

⁸⁶ See Ducat 1990, 64. Hodkinson (1992, 132) points out that sharecropping does not necessarily affect in a negative way productivity. However, in order for a sharecropping contract to be advantageous for the master, it needed to afford a very

high level of control on the workers, which in turn required a higher involvement on the part of the master; see Banaji 1989–90, 295.

⁸⁷ On the ritual humiliation of Helots, see Ducat 1974 and 1990, 111–19. The evidence does not go back in time beyond Myron of Priene. For a skeptical approach to Ducat's views, see Whitby 1994.

⁸⁸ The extent to which Spartiates recognized Helot families is controversial in modern scholarship; the view put forward here is defended in Luraghi 2002, 229. Notice that in Crete the Gortyn Code (III 52–IV 6) provides direct and explicit evidence for the absence of custodial rights. For the absence of custodial rights as equivalent of natal alienation, see Patterson 1982, 6.

⁸⁹ Compare Cartledge 1988 and Luraghi 2002.

⁹⁰ For the need to deconstruct such an image, see Hodkinson 2008, 285–6 (= 2003, 248).

⁹¹ In the following, I summarize the results of Hodkinson 2008, 302–18 (= 2003, 263–78).

⁹² Evidence in Luraghi 2008, 138–40.

⁹³ On hints in the literary sources to the existence of an elite among the Helots, see Ducat 1990, 164. In Messenia, the phenomenon merged with the emergence of Messenian ethnicity from the fifth century BCE, as I have argued more extensively elsewhere (Luraghi 2008, 198–208).

⁹⁴ Dramatic differences in territorial extension are sometimes forgotten when comparing Greek poleis. See Hansen (2004, 71–2), where the average territory of a Cretan polis is estimated at about 167 km² as against 8,400 km² of the Spartan territory pre-369 BCE.

⁹⁵ On the disappearance of slavery in Russia and its merging with serfdom, see Hellie 1982, 695–708. On the enserfment of free peasants, Moon 1999, 66–70. Note that serfdom did not actually replace slavery as a main provider of dependent workforce for agriculture: Russian slaves appear to have had a minor role in agrarian production, Hellie 1982, 495–502.

⁹⁶ See the works quoted in Kolchin 1987, 43. Kolchin himself considers Russian serfdom as a form of slavery, but underlines the actual historical differences between it and African slavery in North America (1987, 43–6).

⁹⁷ Apart of course from the State itself and the Orthodox church; see Moon 1999, 97–100.

⁹⁸ A point developed in Luraghi 2002, 233–4. See now Nafissi 2009, 121–3. For the way that the despicable image projected onto the Helots reinforced the Spartiates' view of themselves, see Ducat 1990, 126.

⁹⁹ On medieval Korea as a slave society, see the discussion of Palais 1984.

¹⁰⁰ Patterson 2003, 293–5. For the origin of slaves in the Koryo period, see Salem 1978, 156–7.

¹⁰¹ The peculiarity of this situation has been often remarked upon; see e.g. Palais 1984, 188.

¹⁰² See Patterson (2003, 292–3) and his previous discussion of the transition to Late Antiquity in Patterson 1991, 347–56. For a comprehensive discussion of older and more recent approaches to this question, see especially Whittaker 1988, and more recently Wickham 2005, 263–4.

¹⁰³ Patterson 2003, 295–6.

¹⁰⁴ Patterson 1982, 110–13. For a discussion of Helotage in light of Patterson's observations, Luraghi 2002, 236–8. See also Patterson 2003.

¹⁰⁵ See Van Wees 2003, 66–71.

¹⁰⁶ Note especially Sherman (1979, 85): '...it is careless inference on the part of some writers that the Indians were actually enslaved *en masse*'. For an introduction to the *encomienda* system (the system of allocation of the indigenous workforce to the Spanish colonists) in the several areas of Spanish Mesoamerica, see Kramer 1994, 1–16. Keith (1976, 25–54) discusses the case of Peru. On the indigenous bases of the *encomienda* system in the Aztec area, see Lockhart 1992, 430–2.

¹⁰⁷ On this, see Kramer 1994, 227–8.

¹⁰⁸ I owe this observation to Brent Shaw. See Banaji (1997, 274) with further bibliography.

¹⁰⁹ See Lockhart (1992, 3–9) and already the seminal work of Gibson 1964. The change of paradigm was largely made possible by the increasing ability of scholars to draw upon Nahuatl documents, a relatively recent development.

¹¹⁰ Sherman 1979, 5–6; MacLeod 2008, 40–1, 98 (Central America); Keith 1976, 43 (Peru).

¹¹¹ Patterson 2003, 295.

¹¹² See the discussion of the relevant evidence in Ducat 1990, 55, and notice that Plat. *Alc.* I 122d, which appears to refer to chattel slaves, is talking about the wealth of the Lacedaemonians, which includes the *perioikoi*; on Helots and *perioikoi*, see above n. 31.

¹¹³ Note that in his most recent work Patterson (2008, 63–5) suggests viewing the *thētes* of the Homeric world as former or semi-manumitted slaves, but his perspective can profitably be reversed: they could be the main group that was being pushed into slavery during the archaic period.

¹¹⁴ See Link 2001.

¹¹⁵ In this sense, Dal Lago and Katsari (2008) represents a particularly admirable attempt at breaking down barriers.

¹¹⁶ But most scholars today would qualify D.B. Davis' statement regarding 'slavery's ultimate dependence on real or simulated ethnic barriers' (Davis 1966, 47). On ethnicity and slavery, see Patterson 1982, 178–9.

¹¹⁷ See Hellie (1982, 385–412) on factors supporting the enslavement of ethnic insiders in Russia, and Kolchin (1987, 157–76) on the ideological underpinnings of serfdom, compared with slavery in the United States.

¹¹⁸ See Salem Unruh 1977, 627–8 and Salem 1978, 155–8.

¹¹⁹ See Figueira 1999, 221 and Luraghi 2008, 203–4.

¹²⁰ Tellingly, ethnic difference plays no role in Homeric slavery, see Wickert-Micknat 1983. On wealth and social hierarchy in archaic Greece, see now Duploux 2006.

¹²¹ On the centrality of the dichotomy Greek-*barbaros* for the Greek ideology of slavery in the classical period, see Rosivach 1999. Critique of Helotage as enslavement of Greeks: Klees 1991, 45–6.

¹²² See Kolchin's comparison of arguments against slavery in the United States and against serfdom in Russia (Kolchin 1987, 178–82). On the final chapters of the history of Helotage, see especially Kennell 2003.

¹²³ For a summary of the results of the Laconia Survey, see Catling 2002, 244–55, and see Hodkinson 2008, 297–9 (= 2003, 259–60).

¹²⁴ The two verbs are unrelated. ἐλεῖν is to be booked under Indo-European *selb₁, while the various forms of ὀλισκομαι are built up around the aorist ἐάλων, probably in origin an aorist passive (transposed into Indo-European *e-*ulh₃-eb₁-*) of the verb seen in Hittite *-*u₃l₃-mi* ‘slay’, Tocharian A *wäl-* ‘die’, and hence representing ultimately an Indo-European **uelh₃-*; only secondarily is a connection felt, so that the initial aspiration of ὀλισκομαι is after either ἐλεῖν or αἰρεῖν.*

¹²⁵ The vowel system of the Laconian dialect did not contain the phoneme represented in Attic by the so-called ‘spurious’ diphthong <EI>. Accordingly, the product of a contraction of two like *e* vowels will have been a long *ē* of the same type as inherited long *ē*, and thus represented graphically (in the Ionic alphabet) by <H>.

¹²⁶ Such protheses go back directly to root initial laryngals as a rule, which were ‘vocalized’ in this position. Evidence for such a laryngal beginning this root is the long augment which must be set up for the aorist of ὀλισκομαι in order to account for the vowel quantities of the attested ἐάλων, which will result from the same quantitative metathesis seen e.g. in the acc. sg. of the noun βασιλεύς: **βασιλῆφα* > **βασιλῆᾱ* > **βασιλέᾱ*. The immediate preform **ῥῑφάλων* would then have its long augment from the prehistoric combination of augment *e-* plus initial sequence **h₁u-*: **eh₁u* > **ēu*-. However, this long augment can be explained otherwise: it seems to have been extended to most verbs beginning in *u-*, cf. the plupf. ῥῑδει < **ῥῑδεε* next to οἶδα < **φοῖδα*, a root which certainly had no initial laryngal (cf. εἶδον < *ἔ-φιδον*, ἰδέ < *φιδέ*, etc.).

¹²⁷ This reconstruction is complicated slightly by laryngalistic problems on which it is not appropriate to expand at any length here. Put simply, the root to which the derivatives in -lo- of Germanic and the hypothetical **seilo-* of Greek is made is probably to be set up ultimately as **sh₂eh₁-i-* (Hittite *išhija-* ‘bind’). The presence of *h₂* in the root makes it slightly difficult to explain the *e*-vocalism observed in Greek, but this can be done at low cost by assuming that the basic formation was an adjective in -lo- with zero-grade of the root **sh₂h₁-lo-* (next to the **sh₂eh₁-lo-* continued by Germanic **sailo-*(?)) which already in Proto Indo-European will have simplified to **sh₁i-lo-* before laryngal metathesis > **sih₁-lo-*. This adjectival **sih₁lō-* ‘binding’ was then substantivized with accent retraction and a new full grade → **séj(h₁)lo-* ‘binding thing, bond’. All of the processes just invoked have parallels and are part of the working apparatus of current Indo-European linguistics.

¹²⁸ Redard 1949; Leukart 1994. For secondary *t*-stems to case forms in IE see the chain **ǵʰi_o/em-* ‘winter’: locative **ǵʰeim-en* ‘in winter’ (Sanskrit *béman*): **ǵʰeimen-t-* in Hittite *gimmant-* ‘winter’ (A. Nussbaum, 16th UCLA IE Conference (2004), Handout); *t*-stems mildly productive to instrumentals at some stage in Greek: the same Nussbaum takes de-instrumental **polh₁ib₁-t-* ‘inhabiting a polis’, expanded in *-ā-* according to the productive pattern, as the origin of the suffix -τήγς.

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