
This is a serious study by a great scholar, the most thorough analysis of Spartan society and social and economic institutions yet written. Stephen Hodkinson (H) has for many years been the leading authority on all things Spartan. At last he has published a comprehensive and immensely detailed overview, of the two things which were central to the Spartan image as well as to the workings of any society: property and wealth. That means this is a book about the economy and by extension, power and social relationships. H destroys the myth of an egalitarian land of Spartiate *homoioi* and establishes a realistic image of a changing, but diverse, acquisitive, exploitative and hierarchical system. Not only does H get to the heart of the limited and disparate evidence, but also he is so well versed in the secondary material (some authors of which have been complicit in the mythical construction of Sparta) that *Property and Wealth* is a groundbreaking study. His use of sophisticated modelling techniques and a broad range of comparative methods to recreate a plausible vision of the Spartan State is outstanding. Particularly impressive is the nature of the relationship between helot labourer and Spartiate master.

In part one, H commences with a survey of the image of Sparta from antiquity to the present day. He begins by showing how Sparta’s image changed, and was always changing, through time. The central feature of his argument is the distinction made between the evidence prior to the third century revolution and the material produced after it. The Hellenistic and Roman writers created the image of Sparta that pervaded modern thought. Plutarch’s work is described as ‘creative literary artistry’ that ‘adapted’ and ‘altered’ material or ‘reshaped contexts’ (53). Plutarch, alongside the Hellenistic ‘Sayings of the Lacedaemonians’, gave rise to the myth of a land of military heroes living in equality and relative poverty that permeated later traditions. In contrast, classical writers made few references to Sparta’s disdain for wealth and luxury. But the modern world perpetuated the former image, one that no doubt is still held by most people. This survey of ancient and modern treatments is important to lay groundwork for what follows, for it clears away the debris of myths and misguided thinking about Spartan society.
H then discusses every aspect of his subject in three further parts. Part two deals with the land problem and helotage; he continues in part three to discuss the uses of movable wealth, public and private economic relationships, and the state's restraints on the use of wealth. Finally, the book concludes with the emergence of a plutocratic society and the crisis in which Sparta found itself between the fourth century and the revolution of the third. H's explanation for this crisis is a gradually declining number of citizens and the large amount of land held by a few wealthy Spartiates by the fourth century (432-441). This society was very different from the one described by Thucydides (1.6) in which 'those who had much land adopted a lifestyle as much as possible like that of the many'. Cleverly, H sees a continuity in the process by which already wealthy Spartiates grew richer through demographic changes and partible inheritance, reinforced by marriage practices. The earthquake of 464, and the Peloponnesian War and the consequent empire are, probably correctly, reduced to contingent causes in that process. Property and wealth lay at the heart of Sparta's success and its rapid decline.

H questions and seeks alternative answers to everything. Thus land ownership is explored from the principle that the Lycurgan model of equally disseminated plots from the start need not be historical. Clearly, there is evidence of private land ownership and of Spartans who were wealthier than other Spartans in the classical period. The famous statement by Aristotle that two fifths of Spartan land was owned by women is assessed (100) and H uses his theory of 'universal female inheritance' (published in 1989) to explain why many women could inherit land at Sparta. This theory is based on Gortynian evidence that women inherited half as much land as their living brothers. This would account for forty percent of Spartan territory, potentially, ending up in women's hands. Spartans, like other Greeks, were involved in commercial exchanges (151-82) and H even suggests that the so-called iron currency facilitated small transactions (181). Most sensibly of all H sees the relationship between helots and Spartiates not only as one of exploitation, but also of interdependence (113-25). They were part of the same system and he points out good evidence for wealthier and favoured helots.

The archaeological evidence is not ignored. This shows the diversity of Spartan culture in the sixth century (209-13), and the wealth of rich Spartiates deployed, especially abroad (271-98). It also shows that in
some areas, particularly in funerary practices and memorialisation of the
dead, restrictions were placed on the deployment of wealth, specifically
after 550 BC (237-63). Thus even rich Spartiates in the classical period
dressed and looked like other Spartiates (219-26), underwent similar
upbringing (214-16) and limited themselves to modest displays in death
memorials (247). But status differentiation did exist in the fifth century in
personal relationships and patronage (352-4) as well as in overseas
connections of xenia (336-344) and participation in athletic festivals and H
focuses on wealthy Spartans’ involvement in equestrian events (312-19).
The superficial image of equality broke down in the later fifth century and
the gulf broadened between very rich and poor. As part of this process H
argues that the class known as mothakes may have been the sons of
impoverished (and therefore former) Spartiates who enjoyed the specific
patronage of the affluent (354-6).

All the issues are enormously complex in the light of both the
Hellenistic and later evidence that creates a barrier between the modern
reader and the classical reality. Take for one example the complicated
discussions (85-90) surrounding the so-called ancient portion (archaia
moira) as opposed to other land supposedly owned by Spartiates in
classical antiquity. The evidence comes from Herakleides Lembos (c. 170
BC) and the Hellenistic Instituta Laconica (Plutarch Moralia 238e-f) and
states that there were two legally distinct types of land held in Sparta: one
was shameful to sell, the other illegal to be sold. The Herakleides passage
has been considered reliable classical evidence on the grounds it comes
from Aristotle’s Lacedaemonian Constitution. H discusses the many
theories surrounding when and how Aristotle knew about the ancient
portion, and admits that there had been a time when he had concluded, not
unreasonably, that Aristotle’s knowledge of two different types of land
was enough to suggest that special categories of land existed in the
classical period. He goes on to state that the difference between land was
minuscule and that (following recent discussions by Stefan Link and John
Lazenby inter alios) part of the Herakleides passage was an Hellenistic
addition. Now he believes that the ancient portion was not land, but the
tribute provided by the helots. This could not be sold. Finally, H argues
that the ancient portions themselves were not classical at all but
Hellenistic. They were part of the third century revolution that so changed
Sparta and made it into the idealised egalitarian society that appears in the
later sources.
Later (125-31) H discusses the nature and amount of tribute Helots paid to their Spartiate masters. Plutarch (*Lycurgus* 8.4, 24.3, *Moralia* 239e), following a tradition that went back only to the Hellenistic period, claimed the helots provided a fixed amount. H discredits the evidence of this practice in the classical period on which this theory is based. According to H, a Tyrtaean fragment (fr. 6 West) suggests that share cropping (‘half the yield’), and therefore a percentage of annual production, was a more likely form of tribute extraction than fixed rents in the classical period. Fixed rents allow more opportunities for tenants to enjoy wealth in good years, but expose them to danger in bad harvests. H provides evidence of the common practice of share-cropping from modern Asia (and elsewhere) to justify his point and confirm Tyrtaeus, but he could have drawn upon further supporting examples from the Roman world, specifically from the estates of Pliny the Younger, in which tenant farmers became sharecroppers due to consistently bad yields and an absence of available or reliable labour in Italy (see D. Kehoe, ‘Allocation of Risk and Investment on the Estates of Pliny the Younger’, *Chiron* 18, 1988, 15-42, largely following Pliny *Epistles* 3.19).

In spite of the scholarship, this is a very depressing book because it highlights unwittingly and certainly not through any fault of the author how little is known about the ancient world. If a book as thorough, as genuine and as sophisticated in its approach to its subject as *Property and Wealth* suffers from defects at all it is because the nature of the ancient evidence is so problematic. H’s ambition was ‘to provide a systematic examination of a crucial aspect of classical Sparta, her system of property and to analyse the role of private wealth within her society’. This the author has most certainly done. But Spartan society, as H and all scholars are well aware, changed much through antiquity. The evidence is spread over the entire period (not just the classical) and a snapshot of classical Sparta is impossible. Thus what was common practice, accepted behaviour or regular terminology in the fifth century may not hold true for the fourth and certainly not for Plutarch’s day. H often encounters this problem. After all where would the ancient historian be without Plutarch, Pausanias and Diodorus, to name but three later writers? H needs to rely, as we all do, on these later historians for certain crucial pieces of information about the Spartan state. He uses Plutarch, (*Lycurgus* 12.2) to show that Spartiates were required to provide five minae of cheese as compulsory mess dues and thus to demonstrate the need Spartans had for animal husbandry as a ‘practical necessity’ (151), whereas early in the
book H made much of the suggestion (48-50) that the material found in the Hellenistic *Instituta Laconica* (preserved in Plutarch’s *Moria*) and Plutarch’s works on Sparta (52-60) brought to fruition the post third century revolution Hellenistic ‘egalitarian image.’ There are other moments, too, in which Plutarch is the sole source. For example, H notes that the Spartiates made the helots drink unmixed wine and exhibited them in the messes (199, Plutarch *Lycurgus* 28.4 *inter alia*). The sad question is, how can we know that Plutarch was right about this and untrustworthy about other things?

The treatment of the relationship of helots to the Spartan State illustrates everything that is both interesting and frustrating about studying Sparta. H discusses whether the helots were held in collective servitude or were the private property of individual Spartans, an idea which has attracted much support in recent years (113-17). He concludes that the helots were in ‘a condition of double dependence’ on both state and individual Spartiate. This is an interesting notion and may say much about the blurred individuality of Spartiates and their relationship to the state. But it also appears to be having it both ways with the source material. The evidence as always is scant and ambiguous. The later sources emphasise the communal and public nature of helotage, especially the state-sanctioned murder of helots by the *krypteia*. By way of contrast, H states that there is ‘no hint of collective ownership in the classical sources’. The only good evidence is Ephorus’ statement (FGrH 70 fr. 117) regarding the state’s supervision of manumission of the helots. This H sees as not conclusive as (following Ducat) mass liberation independent of the owners is known from states that had far more developed chattel slave systems. He also notes that Xenophon (*Constitution of the Spartans* 6.3) does not refer to them (i.e. helots) as communal property, listing them alongside other private possessions. Aristotle, H claims, supports this (*Politics* 1263a32-5) and both sources recall that Spartiates made available the slaves of their household to their friends. But importantly for this discussion, as H is aware, neither Xenophon nor Aristotle use the Greek work ελως for these slaves but οίκεται and δούλοι respectively. Now it is possible that both meant helots in their discussions, but it is equally possible that the οίκεται referred to by Xenophon were really household slaves in a similar mould to those found in Athens. There is nothing to suggest that Spartans could not have οίκεται and δούλοι as well as helots working in their homes and on *kleroi*. Xenophon’s point was surely to juxtapose Spartan communal helpfulness with Athenian contemporary
private greed and lack of sharing alike. H notes the different status of certain helots in Sparta elsewhere, but this evidence suggests the possibility of several different types of servile labour that included full chattel slaves, household retainers and more communally held helots.

The foregoing is meant only to stress that these debates will be the backbone of modern studies concerning Sparta in the years to come. Property and Wealth asks the right questions and frames the logical and theoretical solutions to the problems of ancient Sparta perfectly. Still there are immense leaps of faith that have to be made to envisage the realities of Sparta in the Classical Period. But there is an awareness of these leaps and H is not replacing one mythical edifice of Spartan society with another. Evident through this book is a desire not only to establish a framework from which to strive for answers to Spartan problems, but also to create an environment in which questions are constantly asked that will lead to more concrete and honest answers to problems about the ancient world. This last point is perhaps the book’s greatest strength. I found myself asking questions about Sparta and about H’s questions and methods throughout. Plutarch unwittingly put his finger on it when discussing Lycurgus: nothing can be said about the great lawgiver that cannot be disputed (Lycurgus 1.1). The same can almost as easily be stated about the Spartans. At least thanks to Stephen Hodkinson our knowledge about their community has improved and will continue to improve in the years to come.

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