The Menelaion: A Local Manifestation of a Pan-Hellenic Phenomenon

by

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To my family: alespoň budu vždycky vaše prdelka.

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Thanks to Sonia, for her tremendous knowledge of sex and gender, and to Alex, mi poquito cabron; I am expecting cookies any day now.
Note on Greek names:

I have chosen to rely on consistency in my spelling of Greek words rather than a particular formula; the Greeks themselves were not always consistent in their spelling. However, I have avoided Latinizing most words and have transcribed them directly from the Greek.
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Art historical periods and their abbreviations
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Late Bronze Age / Mycenaean Period (1575-1100)
  Late Helladic I (LHI) 1575-1500
  Late Helladic IIA (LHIIA) 1500-1450
  Late Helladic IIB (LHIIIB) 1450-1400
  Late Helladic IIIA1 (LHIIIA1) 1400-1350
  Late Helladic IIIA2 (LHIIIA2) 1350-1300
  Late Helladic IIIB1 (LHIIIB1) 1300-1230
  Late Helladic IIIB2 (LHIIIB2) 1230-1190
  Late Helladic IIIC 1190-1100

Dark Ages (1100-900)
  Submycenaean 1100-1050
  Protogeometric (PG) 1050-900

Early Geometric I (EGI) 900-875
Early Geometric II (EGII) 875-850
Middle Geometric I (MGI) 850-800
Middle Geometric II (MGII) 800-760
Late Geometric I (LGI) 760-735
Late Geometric II (LGII) 735-700
Orientalizing / Subgeometric 700-600
Archaic 600-500
Classical Period 500-323
Hellenistic Period 323-31
Glossary of Greek Terms

This is only a partial glossary; terms described at length in the text will not appear here.

arêtê  --  excellence
deme  --  neighborhood
heroön / heroa  --  hero / heroine shrine
hérôs, pl. hérôes  --  hero, heroine
kaloskagathos  --  upstanding, good and noble
kleos  --  glory
obe  --  village
oligarchia  --  manpower shortage
pharmakos  --  scapegoat
polis, pl. poleis  --  city-state
sophrosynê  --  prudence, restraint
teknopoiia  --  production of children
temenos  --  a piece of land marked off as sacred
theos, pl. theoi  --  god, goddess
timé  --  honor
xenia  --  guest-host relations
Introduction:

A Plurality of Helens

In his *New History*, the second century CE grammarian Ptolemy Chennos (also called Ptolemy Hephaestion) alleges that over two dozen celebrated women named Helen lived at the time of the Trojan War.¹ These women include a painter, a woman who ate three dogs a day, and a woman from whom Homer took his account of the Trojan War. The *New History* of Ptolemy, a “liar on a grand, academic scale,” now exists chiefly in an extended summary in the *Bibliotheca* of the Byzantine patriarch Photios (c. 810 CE – c. 893 CE).² Photios derides the *New History* as rife with extraordinary and poorly imagined information, and contemporary scholars like M. L. West have found Ptolemy to be “singularly disreputable.”³ However, Ptolemy’s odd account of the origins of the *Iliad* is true in one sense: many Helens do and did exist.

Helen of Sparta’s first appearance in extant literature occurs in Homeric epic, around the early eighth century BCE. Visual evidence of the heroine dates shortly thereafter. By circa 730 BCE, a potential depiction of the “face that launched a thousand ships” appears on an Athenian krater; a male figure holds the wrist of a female figure, as he begins to climb aboard a large, oared ship (see Figure 1).⁴ The

⁴ C. Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* in *Christopher Marlowe. (Selected.)*, ed. P. E. Pinkerton (London: Walter Scott, 1884), v.3.
scene may not depict Helen’s abduction by Paris; it may merely be a generic abduction scene or even a farewell. Some have proposed that the krater depicts Theseus and Ariadne.⁵

That Helen and her narrative nonetheless filtered into the collective consciousness of the Greeks is certain. Six epics were composed in the generations succeeding Homer in order to complete, without trespassing upon, his Iliad and Odyssey.⁶ Scenes from these epics, as well as the Iliad and the Odyssey, were commonly depicted in art across the ancient Greek world (see Figure 2). Helen appears outside the realm of epic as well, in lyric poetry, history, plays, and rhetorical exercises.⁷ Two springs bear her name, and she was the object of heroic cults in such dissimilar poleis (city-states) as Athens and Sparta.

Sparta, the mythological birthplace and home of the Homeric heroine, was alleged to have worshiped her at two sites, at a shrine within the polis and at a shrine several kilometers outside the polis.⁸ We know very little about the former shrine, but the latter has been archaeologically attested; the partial walls and foundations of a fifth-century BCE monument to Helen of Sparta and her husband Menelaos, known as the Menelaion, have been recovered on a ridge near the west bank of the Eurotas River (see Figure 3). The wealth of archaeological information recovered from the

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⁶ In order of narrative chronology, these were the Kypria (which preceded the Iliad), the Aithiopis, the Little Iliad, the Sack of Troy, the Returns (which preceded the Odyssey), and, finally, the Telegony. These epics now persist chiefly in the summaries of an unidentified Proclus.
⁷ Helen’s appearances in lyric poetry include Sappho, fragment 16, fragment 23, fragment 56; Alkaios, fragment 5, fragment 6; Plato, Phaedrus, 243B; Theocritus, Idyll 18. Her appearances in history include Herodotus, 1.3; 3.113-116. Her appearances in plays include Aeschylus, Oresteia; Euripides, Helen, Orestes, Trojan Women, Hecuba; Aristophanes, The Lysistrata. Her appearances in rhetoric include Isokrates, oration 10; Gorgias, Encomium of Helen.
⁸ Herodotus, Histories, 6.61; Isokrates, oration 10.63; Polybius, Histories, 5.14, 21 ff; Pausanias, Description of Greece, 3.9.
Menelaion, in conjunction with sparser literary and historical references to the site and its objects of worship, allows us to begin to explain the meaning that Helen and Menelaos may have had for ancient Spartans.

We approach the Spartan cult of Helen and Menelaos primarily as a local phenomenon, though in dialogue with pan-Hellenic mythology. Narrowing our focus permits us to analyze the worshipers at the Menelaion according to their particular social and cultural identities. While we are not able to directly access the thoughts and emotions of Helen and Menelaos’ long-dead worshipers through the material culture recovered from their shrine, detailed context can help us learn something about the range of responses to cult practice at the Menelaion and the identities worshipers may have constructed through engagement in cult practice.

In this study, context will include a broad overview of heroic cult study and the history and culture of the Lakedaimonian state, particularly its central polis Sparta. Even beyond its benefits to archaeological analysis, detailed context will make this study more accessible to those outside the classical archaeological community, as well as those outside the archaeological community altogether. The cultural narratives constructed in archaeology have greater significance when they are accessible to a larger community, particularly the community whose history they purport to inform. Thus, inasmuch as accessibility does not distort argument or diminish scholarly rigor, it ought to be attempted.

Feminist archaeology is a useful way to ensure a meticulous argument. While some recent studies in gender archaeology and the archaeology of women have separated themselves from the feminist label, it is only a label and need not be
associated with mainstream “bra-burning” stereotypes of feminism. In this study, androcentrism will not be replaced with gynocentrism; Menelaos will not be shunted to the side in favor of Helen.9 As evidence permits, each cult figure will be examined equally in his or her own right, as well as in relation to his or her spouse. Archaeological evidence will be interpreted partly according to its role in reflecting and reifying socially imposed gender roles. These gender roles are not inherent and intersect with other self- and socially-prescribed identities, like class and ethnicity.

Only with careful attention to detail and context, nuanced by the insights of feminist archaeology, can the local identities of Helen and Menelaos and their significance to their Spartan worshipers be determined. Insight into cult practice surrounding the Menelaion, one of the largest classical period monuments in one of Greece’s most powerful classical era poleis, can contribute immensely to understanding of the political and social functions of ritual practice. Why did Sparta construct what was, by its standards, a very impressive monument to two figures who were so often reviled by post-Homeric artists and thinkers as a scheming adulteress and a feeble-hearted cuckold? By establishing both general and specific context for the site and its objects of worship, we hope to find out.

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9 If Menelaos receives short shrift in this study, it is because he was not so popular an object of literature and art, and we have less evidence for Menelaos’ role in Greek life, much less Spartan life, than for Helen’s.
Figure 1. Late Geometric krater c.730 BCE – 720 BCE
Findspot: Thebes, Boioitia.
Collection of the British Museum, London
Photograph by Maria Daniels, March 1990
Figure 2. Depictions of Helen in Greek art.
Figure 3. Remains of the classical period Menelaion in Therapne. From Harry’s Greece Travel Guides. Image source: http://www.greeceathensaegeaninfo.com/p_laonia_city_sparta.htm
Helen and Menelaos belong to a large group of heroes and heroines who were worshiped across Greece. These heroes, heroines, and their cults have long been studied in classical archaeology and philology. The Menelaion was identified as such as early as 1833. Forty years later, German businessman-archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann’s recovery of a sixth-century BCE potsherd inscribed “I belong to the hero” from the upper fill of a grave circle in Mycenae aroused archaeological interest in heroic cult once again. Ambitious philological studies of heroic cult, like those of E. Rohde and L. R. Farnell in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries analyzed heroic cult as a pan-Hellenic phenomenon. As more heroic cult sites were archaeologically identified and analyzed, heroic cult became a topic of discussion for some of the most prominent classical archaeologists of the twentieth century, like J. N. Coldstream, A. Snodgrass, and I. Morris.

The definition of the Greek word ἥρως diverges somewhat from the English word “hero.” ἥρως appears to have been used in two ways in Greek literature. In epic, ἥρως refers to a mortal person, generally a warrior, who does not have a particularly distinctive afterlife. In Homer’s Odyssey, for example, Achilles is

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confined to the same dreary region of Hades as are other lesser mortals. On the other hand, later writers apply the word to any dead person who receives worship; for these writers, the hêrôs’ identification as such is inextricably linked with his or her status as a cult figure. The Greek word for heroine varies across regions and time periods, but it generally consists of the stem of the word hêrôs and a feminine suffix. Hêrôs alone has likewise been demonstrated to have referred to women.

For this reason and for expediency, hêrôs will be a gender neutral term in this study. Many hêrôes originate in Homeric epic. Helen and Menelaos, of course, belong to this category. Likewise, many of Menelaos’ comrades in battle, like Neoptolemus, the Greater and Lesser Aias, and Achilles are attested as objects of heroic cult. Menelaos’ brother Agamemnon, the leader of the Achaeans at Troy, was worshiped near modern Sklavokhori in Lakonia. At this archaeologically attested site, evidence suggests that Agamemnon was worshiped alongside an older deity Alexandra, an aboriginal goddess whom many classicists believe to have been associated with the Trojan prophetess Cassandra.

Non-Homeric mythical hêrôes also received cult worship. Pausanias speaks extensively of the cult of Herakles, although he appears to have seen Herakles’ hero status as primeval and believes his worshiped incarnation to be that of a god.

Another non-Homeric mythical hêrôs was worshiped in the Olympian sanctuary,
Pelops, the grandfather of Agamemnon and Menelaos. Pelops’ purported funeral mound and shrine are archaeologically attested, but the site’s dates of use have not been firmly established.  

Eponymous hêrôes are a subcategory of these mythical hêrôes. They generally lack a personality and mythological background and appear to have been invented to explain the origins of a people and of their name. They include such figures as Messene of Messenia and Lakedaimon of Lakedaimonia.

Historical people also became objects of worship in heroic cult. These people included politicians, poets, philosophers, and athletes. The Spartan lawmaker Lykourgos, if he can be assumed to have existed, was the earliest figure in this category to have been heroized; his worship is dated to the fifth century BCE. By the third century BCE, the family of an ordinary dead person could heroize him or her, provided they possessed ample resources to establish a cult. In some regions, like Attica and Lakonia, this was not very common. Because the social value of the title hêrōs was probably related to its scarcity, one can assume that hêrôes were venerated most in regions where this title was rare.

As well as the protagonists of epic, myth, and history, Greeks often worshiped antagonists, the stranger and the enemy. During the Persian Wars, Artachaees, a man of tremendous height and thunderous voice, was the invading Persians’ canal-builder at Acanthus on the Athos peninsula in northeast Greece. Following his death, the inhabitants of Acanthus worshiped him, his cult having been ordained by the Delphic

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19 Messene is attested in Pausanias, 4.1.1ff, 4.3.9, 4.26.8, 4.27.6, 4.31.11; Lakedaimon is attested in Pindar, Pythian Ode, 3.14; Pausanias, 3.1.2-3, 3.13.8, 3.18.6, 3.20.2, 7.18.5, 9.35.1; Apollodorus, Bibliotheca, 2.2.2, 3.10.3; Hyginus, Fabulae 155.
20 Herodotus, 1.66.1.
oracle.\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, due to his tremendous beauty and the fact that he was an Olympic victor, the Segestans worshiped Philip of Kroton after his death in battle against Sicily.\textsuperscript{22} According to Margaret Visser, the antagonism of the \textit{hêrōs} “enhances the value placed upon the quality honored;” thus, Artachaees must be remarkably impressive and Philip remarkably beautiful to merit worship, despite the enemy status of each.\textsuperscript{23} This might have significance in the case of Helen, demonized for her provocation of the Trojan War but worshiped, literally and figuratively, for her beauty. Certainly Greeks were able to acknowledge the nobility of an enemy; one has only to recall the \textit{Iliad}’s sympathetic depiction of the Trojans.

The antagonistic hero Cleomedes of Astypalaea, however, is almost entirely lacking in admirable and sympathetic traits.\textsuperscript{24} A boxing champion in 496 BCE, Cleomedes, in a fit of madness at having been denied the victor’s crown for unnecessarily killing his opponent, destroyed a schoolhouse in Astypalaea, killing sixty children. He fled from the angry citizenry into the sanctuary of Athena, and, leaping into a box, disappeared. On being consulted, the Delphic oracle ordered Cleomedes’ worship. In the case of Cleomedes, heroic worship is thus inextricably linked to the hero’s disappearance. This disappearance is significant both as a miraculous event and as a means by which Cleomedes escaped or transcended death.

Much of heroic cult practice appears to have been peculiarly aligned with the mortality of \textit{hêrôes}. Gregory Nagy argues that the combination of epic and cult ritual compensated for the shortened lifespan of \textit{hêrôes}, in comparison with the immortal

\textsuperscript{21} Herodotus, 7.117.1.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 5.47.2.
\textsuperscript{24} Pausanias, 6.9.6-8; Plutarch, \textit{Romulus}, 28.4-6.
theoi (gods and goddesses).25 Through epic, hêrôes received the kleos (glory) that was their due. Through cult practice, hêrôes were mourned in the manner that was their due. Thus, hêrôês received epic timé (honor) through kleos, and ritual timé through cult.26

While Nagy’s analysis of the conjunction of epic and heroic cult lacks incontrovertible evidence and cannot be applied to hêrôes who do not figure in epic, ritual practice in heroic cults was often chthonic and connected to the dead. Thuein is a general term for sacrifice, but, when contrasted with enagizein, describes a particular kind of sacrifice. In thuein, after a sacrificial animal was killed, and its bones and fat were dedicated to the gods, male and sometimes female worshipers feasted upon the meat of the animal. In Enagizein, on the other hand, animal sacrifices were simply burned; worshipers did not consume the meat of an offering. Thuein occurs in both Olympian and heroic cults, but enagizein appears to have exclusively occurred in chthonic cults, like ancestor cult and heroic cult.27 In his analysis of Pausanias’ use of enagizein versus thuein in descriptions of heroic cult worship, Gunnel Ekroth observes that enagizein occurs primarily in connection with death and burial.28 In nineteen out of twenty-three cases in which a cult place is related to the burial place of a hero, Pausanias describes sacrifice as enagizein.29 Enagizein thus suggests a clear differentiation between theoi and hêrôes principally on the basis of hêrôes’ mortality.

26 Ibid., 149.
29 Ibid.
Relics of this mortality – namely, the bones of *hêrôes* – were very important to Greeks. Not only did they protect their possessors, but they also attested to *hêrôes*’ existence. Herodotus recounts the Spartans’ theft and subsequent worship of the bones of Orestes in his *Histories*. After a disastrous defeat in the Battle of the Fetters against Arkadian Tegea, the Spartans consulted the Delphic Oracle as to how they might best the Arkadians. The oracle’s cryptic response was interpreted as an exhortation that Sparta retrieve Orestes’ bones from where they lay in Tegea, unknown to the Arkadians. After finding these bones, recognizable as Orestes’ due to their great size and association with bronze weapons, the Spartans established a cult around them; they then conquered Tegea. Besides whatever mythical protection Orestes’ bones may have granted to the Spartans, ownership of these relics might have encouraged Spartans’ identification with the heroic past in which Orestes ruled Sparta with Helen’s daughter Hermione.

This traffic in heroic relics has been linked by many scholars to the worship of saints in Christendom; so, too, has the existence of a category of *hêrôes* who are sacrificed for the common good. This category is composed largely of women, virgins like Aglauros, who kills herself to assure Athens’ victory in the Eleusinian War. These self-sacrificing heroines were often cited in Attic oratory as models of civic virtue, exemplars for the male citizenry.

While heroes outnumber heroines in Greek heroic cult by a proportion as great as six to one, such self-sacrificing virgins do not comprise the entirety of worshiped

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30 Herodotus, 1.66-8.  
31 Morris 1988, 752.  
33 Ibid., 101.
heroines. For the most part, heroines received their heroic status from association with a hero. Many heroic cults, like that of the healer Asklepios, were centered around families; generally, only heroines lacking a family context, like the aforementioned virgins or Amazons, were able to stand alone. In extant fourth-century Attic deme (neighborhood) calendars regulating monthly worship, heroes and heroines received sacrifices in pairs. When the value of a sacrifice was explicitly noted, heroines usually received offerings of less value than did heroes. Helen may be an exception to this rule. On the fourth-century deme calendar of Thorikos, she is paired with her brothers the Dioskouroi, Castor and Polydeukes. While the monetary value of the siblings’ sacrifices is not recorded, notably, all three received sacrifices of fully-grown animals. Helen’s apparent parity with the men who surround her has led some to believe her to be an aboriginal goddess.

A wide variety of ritual practices were common to both heroes and heroines. Annual sacrifices were common in heroic cult. Héroes received both blood sacrifices and libations, often performed at the tomb, as in funerary ritual. Specific votive items, including miniature vessels, shields, and reliefs with heroic type scenes were often dedicated to héroes. These totemmahl scenes date from the sixth century BCE to the Hellenistic period (see Figure 1.1). They usually feature a reclining man, holding a rhyton or phiälé (drinking vessels), with a woman sitting at his feet. To one side, a

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34 Farnell 1921, 358.
36 Ibid., 8.
37 Ibid., 28-32.
38 Ibid., 29.
39 If restoration of her name here is correct.
cupbearer draws wine, and a group of worshipers enter; these suppliants are much smaller than are the man and woman. A snake, a chthonic motif, or, in Attic totemmahl reliefs, a dog, often rests beneath a banqueting table. Sometimes a horse peers through a window behind the man. While the woman is not always featured in these scenes, they do give her an iconographical place and show the basic family unit of many heroic cults. Archaic Lakonian hero reliefs, while they are not usually grouped with totemmahl reliefs, are remarkably similar to them, except that the heroic figure is sitting, instead of reclining.

Some heroic cults show affinities with pharmakos (scapegoat) rituals. In basic pharmakos ritual, during crises a member of the community, often ill or disfigured (an indication of the gods’ displeasure) was lashed or stoned, driven out of the community or even killed, in order to cast out evils and misfortunes. At the Charilla festival in Delphi, every eight years an image of the heroine Charilla was symbolically beaten, hung, and buried. The ritual probably predates its explanatory myth. According to this myth, Charilla, an orphan girl, was beaten and humiliated when she begged her king for grain.\footnote{Plutarch, The Greek Questions, 12.293d-f.} She wandered off and hung herself, “the only possible feminine response to outrage” in Greek mythology, and the gods sent famine to Delphi.\footnote{Larson 1995, 135.} The Charilla festival was then instituted in her honor.

Competitive sports were also associated with heroic cults. The Nemean games were dedicated to Opheltes, a child killed by a viper who, upon death, was named Archemoros. The games were instituted in recompense for the child’s untimely
passing. Athletics were more often a feature of hero cult than of heroine cult, although some interpretations of Theocritus’ Idyll 18 suggest that girls in Sparta raced along the Eurotas River in honor of the marriage of Helen to Menelaos.

Perhaps due to the many personages encompassed by the term *hêrôs* and the variety of rituals with which they were associated, scholars of heroic cult have often failed to define the objects of their study properly, and, even when they have done so, such definitions have rarely become universal. Farnell’s 1921 *Greek Hero Cults* is one of the earliest texts to identify the field of heroic cult study. Although Farnell’s work was primarily philological, his three general categories of Greek cult of the dead have since been bolstered by archaeological evidence. The first category is “tendance,” cult activity associated with the recently dead. Archaeologically, tendance can be distinguished by the fact that ritual activity occurs at or near the time of its object’s burial. Farnell’s second category, ancestor cult, refers to the worship of anonymous, long-dead local people. For this category of chthonic cult, a preferable term is tomb cult, an appellation based more firmly in archaeological evidence. Tomb cult consists of Iron Age and later incursions into and deposits in Mycenaean tombs; in contrast to tendance, there is a significant gap between the date of the tomb’s last burial and its earliest ritual deposits. Tomb cults are anonymous and contain only modest offerings. They lack permanent shrines; worship is rooted in the tomb or tomb structure. Farnell’s final category, formal heroic cult, refers to the worship of named figures at shrines constructed for this purpose. Despite literary attestations to

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43 Antonaccio 1995, 176.
45 Farnell 1921.
46 Ibid.
the contrary, heroic cult never appears at Mycenaean tombs, although the Menelaion is located near a number of Mycenaean habitation sites. Worship in formal heroic cult is continuous and long-term, and offerings are more valuable and plentiful than in tomb cult.

While strict categorization of Greek cults of the dead is somewhat artificial, it is grounded on clear differences in the character of both cult figures and cult practice. Many scholars consider tomb cult to be an expression of heroic cult and have subsumed both under the category of heroic cult. While overlap does occur between chthonic cult types, largely due to hêrôes status as ancestors, maintenance of divisions between these categories is important, if only to ensure that scholars understand one another. As a result, I shall distinguish between tomb and heroic cult throughout this study, even when others do not.

Two general theories of tomb and heroic cult have emerged over the course of their study. The first holds that tomb and heroic cult are a continuation of native ancestor cult, often in the context of the developing polis. The second holds that the diffusion of Homeric epic inspired Greeks to adopt tomb and heroic cult as a means of asserting a connection with Mycenaeans and the Heroic Age of Greece.

The first heroic cult site to be identified and excavated was the Menelaion at Therapne, several kilometers from ancient Sparta. A number of test excavations of the site took place in the mid to late nineteenth century, prior to its more extensive excavation in 1909. These excavations will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Three.

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47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
In 1894, in his *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and the Belief in Immortality among the Greeks*, E. Rohde aligned himself with the theory that heroic cult was a revival of previous ancestor worship. When Rohde was writing, the Menelaion and Schliemann’s Grave Circle A were the only prominent heroic and tomb cult sites to have been excavated. Thus, because written sources attest to the existence of heroic cults at grave sites, Rohde believed that they arose at ancestral grave sites.

L. R. Farnell roundly rejected Rohde’s theory in his 1921 *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*. He suggested instead that heroic cult emerged due to the diffusion of Homeric epic across Greece. While acknowledging potential overlap between ἥρωες and ancestors, he noted that heroic cults are not always located in a hero or heroine’s home territory. Ἡρώες were multi-local and pan-Hellenic, while ancestors were not.

In the mid-1930s, S. Benton’s excavations at a cave in Polis Bay, Ithaca contributed more archaeological material to discussion about heroic cult. One of the first women to lead an excavation for the British School, Benton conducted her fieldwork at Polis Bay intelligently and meticulously. Among a host of other finds, her excavations recovered a Hellenistic potsherd with an inscribed dedication to the Homeric hero Odysseus. This single potsherd became an object of remarkable archaeological interest. It was published before the site’s complete ceramics analysis appeared, and, despite the fact that epigraphic attestations to Hera, Athena and nymphs’ worship were also recovered from the cave, most archaeologists now refer to it as the Odysseion.50 Because ceramics from the site demonstrate its continuous...

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use from the early Bronze Age until the Roman period, Benton argues that Odysseus’ worship dated as early as the Mycenaean period.\textsuperscript{51} However, there is no incontrovertible evidence that Odysseus’ worship predates the third century BCE; in its absence, one must regard him as a relative latecomer to the site.

While Benton’s excavation reports, more descriptive than explanatory, do not espouse either of heroic cult study’s two most prominent theories, C. Blegen’s 1937 excavation of Mycenaean tombs at Prosymna heralded a period of dominance for Farnell’s link between epic and heroic cult. Blegen’s excavations revealed deposits of Late Geometric and Archaic pottery in Mycenaean tombs, anonymous offerings to the anonymous dead. These tombs bore little resemblance to the two heretofore excavated and identified heroic cult sites (the Menelaion and the Odysseion), lacking shrines, long-term worship, and epigraphic evidence that might associate them with a particular hero or heroine. They are manifestly tomb cults and ought to be separated from formal heroic cult. Blegen, however, believed that these graves were “centers of heroic power” and that they demonstrated the significance of Homeric epic to post-Homeric Greeks.\textsuperscript{52} Thus, these deposits at Prosymna have become a focal point for discussion of heroic cult.\textsuperscript{53}

In his excavations at Mycenae in the early 1950s, J. Cook followed Farnell and Blegen’s theoretical trajectory. Cook’s excavations revealed another early heroic cult site, an Agamemneion, a shrine site for the hero Agamemnon. Because the site was founded in the eighth century BCE, Cook linked Agamemnon’s cult to the

\textsuperscript{51} Benton 1934-35, 58.
circulation of Homeric epic.\textsuperscript{54} However, there are good reasons for skepticism about this view. Dedications to Agamemnon at the site do not predate the fourth century BCE, it has a bewildering preponderance of female terracottas, and it lacks the metal offerings suited to heroes. Marinatos has suggested that, in its earliest incarnation, the Agamemneion was a shrine to Hera. \textsuperscript{55} However, one-to-one correlations between \textit{hêrôes} and their votive offerings are not always possible to determine; perhaps the odd assemblage at the Agamemneion is due to the cult’s location \textit{en route} to the Argive Heraeum, a sanctuary to Hera located five miles northeast of Argos. Suppliants at the Argive Heraeum may have deposited offerings originally intended for Hera at Agamemnon’s small road shrine.

J. N. Coldstream’s 1976 “Hero Cults in the Age of Homer” marks the apogee of Farnell’s heroic cult theory. Coldstream consolidates most archaeology pertaining to early tomb and heroic cult up to this time; however, the bulk of Coldstream’s study is dedicated to tomb cult, which he considered to be a manifestation of heroic cult. Coldstream mapped tomb cult sites across Greece, dating between 750 BCE and 650 BCE, a period that he called the Age of Homer. He established strict criteria for the identification of tomb cult. A site belonged to this category if its votive deposits were significantly later than the tomb’s most recent burial, and if they were not associated with any later buildings or burials.\textsuperscript{56} Coldstream determined that the Argolid, Messenia, Boiotia and Attica had more tomb cult sites in the Age of Homer than did any other region in Greece (see Figure 1.2). Thessaly, Lakonia, Achaia, Rhodes, and Crete, on the other hand, completely lacked tomb cult sites. To account for this

\textsuperscript{54} Antonaccio 1994, 393.
\textsuperscript{55} Antonaccio 1995, 150-151.
\textsuperscript{56} Coldstream 1976, 13.
disparity, Coldstream analyzed the appearance of Mycenaean and post-Mycenaean tombs throughout Greece. By the Age of Homer (750 BCE – 650 BCE), in the regions containing the greatest number of tomb cult sites, the multi-burial tombs of Mycenaean Greece (see Figure 1.3) had become obsolete. The dead were instead buried individually, in slab-lined cuts in the earth or rectangular pits. In Thessaly, Rhodes, and Crete, on the other hand, tombs bore a closer resemblance to those of Mycenaean Greece. Coldstream believed that in regions where funerary structures changed between the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages, Greeks, awed by the strangeness of Mycenaean tombs, associated them with the era of epic and mythological heroes and began to worship them. Continuity in tomb types would thus run counter to the establishment of tomb cult.

Despite Coldstream’s remarkable synthesis of data, some of the tomb cult sites included in his analysis have been quite heavily debated. T. Hadzisteliou-Price criticized the inclusion of propitiation due to accidental intrusion in Coldstream’s catalogue of tomb cult. This would occur if someone came across a Mycenaean grave in the course of digging a later grave; out of respect for the occupant(s) of the tomb he or she had disturbed, the gravedigger might leave an offering. In propitiation, deposits would have been unplanned and did not constitute regular ritual practice. In addition to this, Antonaccio has noted that many of Coldstream’s reports of post-Mycenaean intrusions or deposits are actually later burials.

57 Coldstream’s analysis cannot be extended to Lakonia, which has very little information about Late Bronze Age burials.
58 Coldsteam 1976, 17.
59 Antonaccio 1994, 396.
60 Antonaccio 1995, 42.
A. Snodgrass’ 1982 analysis of tomb cult heralded the reemergence of a focus on the ancestor status of heroic cult figures and tomb occupants. Snodgrass noted that, although Greeks always practiced tomb cult ritual at Late Bronze Age graves, they may not have associated these graves with the Homeric heroes and heroines by whom they might have been occupied. Indeed, if tomb cult had been influenced by the diffusion of Homeric epic, its practitioners might have noted the contradiction between Mycenaean burial practices, in which the dead are inhumed, and burial practice in Homeric epic, in which the dead are cremated.

Snodgrass’ analysis of tomb cult approached Coldstream’s map of tomb cult sites from the perspective of environmental and agricultural trends. The eighth century probably marked Greece’s transformation from a pastoral to an agrarian society. In Attica, numerous miniature granaries have been found in tombs dating from this period; Homer’s *Odyssey* grants civilized men the epithet of “eaters of bread.” Rather than seeing epic as driving cultural change, Snodgrass saw for as a tool in coping with it, especially the emergence of private property. In agrarian society, property-ownership was important. In Snodgrass’ analysis, tomb cult, as an adjunct of heroic cult, became a way to define this property, by establishing a connection with a land’s earlier occupants.

Snodgrass argued that Coldstream’s tomb cult distribution was related to the existence or non-existence of an enfranchised peasantry. In regions lacking tomb cult, land was cultivated by a class of serf- or slave-like laborers for its proprietors.

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62 Ibid., 115.
63 Ibid., 116.
64 Ibid., 117.
These laborers had little reason to validate their presence on land that they did not own, and landowners might have seen tomb and heroic cult as beneath their dignity. The preponderance of tomb cults in Messenia challenges Snodgrass’ theory, however, as their use continues after Messenia’s submission to Spartan rule and its peoples’ loss of their lands. Snodgrass suggests that, in the case of Messenia, this continuity is the result of a collective memory of past freedom.65

Snodgrass’ theory of tomb and heroic cult, as well as the validity of pan-Hellenic tomb and heroic cult studies, has been the object of significant debate in recent years. In his “Early States and Hero Cults: A Reappraisal,” James Whitley, an early proponent of regionally-focused tomb and heroic cult study, restricted his analysis of tomb cult to Attica and the Argolid. By analyzing tomb cult in light of historical contingency and regional differences in cult distribution, Whitley constructed believable arguments for the cultural function of tomb cult in both Attica and the Argolid, although his study suffers from a paucity of information. Because, in Attica, tomb cult occurred at sites that were already settled in Protogeometric times, and the quality of offerings at tomb cult sites was often quite high, Whitley argued that the eighth-century recolonization of Attica from Athens induced a rural elite to reassert a claim to their land through tomb cult.66 On the other hand, because the Argolid was not peaceably united in the eighth century, and tomb cults were concentrated in the center of Argos and at the Argive Heraeum, opposite poles of the

65 Ibid.
Argive state, tomb cult may have asserted and created borders. Participation in tomb cult, then, would have been a “political act,” supported by the Argive state.67

Other archaeologists have continued to focus on regional and cultural variation in heroic and tomb cult study. In his analysis of tomb and heroic cult, I. Morris called attention to the fact that the same cult could evoke contrasting ideologies, and that these ideologies varied by region, culture, and class.68 While tomb and heroic cults dotted most of ancient Greece, irrespective of regional dialect and ethnicity, they cannot have meant the same thing to the Dorian Spartans, newcomers to Greece, and to the supposedly autochthonous Athenians.69 C. Antonaccio demanded for still more specificity in heroic cult study; not only regionally- and culturally-specific study, but analysis that called attention to the existence of different groups in a community, which “…may each hold a separate past, or place a different emphasis upon some aspect of the shared past.”70 A plurality of explanations in heroic cult studies would accommodate the possibility of multiple perspectives on cult practice within a single community.

While the Menelaion site has figured in pan-Hellenic heroic cult studies, it has been examined very little in light of recent culturally and socially contingent heroic cult theory. Antonaccio provides a detailed synthesis of the Menelaion’s history of excavation in An Archaeology of Ancestors, but her study is primarily descriptive.71 The pan-Hellenic studies in which the Menelaion has been incorporated have been useful in identifying patterns of heroic cult practice, but they often lose contact with

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69 Morris 1988, 756.
70 Antonaccio 1994, 408.
71 Antonaccio 1995, 155-166.
the individual worshipers of heroic cult sites. Full interpretation of individual sites requires their analysis according to a detailed cultural and historical context. The background for such an analysis of the Menelaion will be provided in Chapter Two of this study, an overview of the people, history, and mores of the Spartan polis.
Figure 1.1 Totenmahl relief
Findspot: Merbaka, Peloponnese c. 300 BCE
Collection of the NY Carlsberg Glyptotek, IN 1594
Photograph by ChrisO, 26 August 2008.
Figure 1.2 Tomb cults in Greece during the Homeric Age (c. 750 BCE – 650 BCE). Map of southern Greece showing where later votive offerings have been found in Mycenaean tombs. At unbracketed sites, offerings begin c. 750 BCE – 650 BCE. At bracketed sites, offerings begin c. 750 BCE.

Figure 1.3 Mycenaean tomb structures  
Author’s drawing, adapted from  
http://www.ou.edu/finearts/art/ahi4913/aegeanhtml/myctom1.html
Chapter Two:

Lakedaimon

Physical Location

Sparta is located in the Eurotas River Valley in the region of Lakonia in the central
Peloponnese (see Figure 2.1). Sparta’s ancient holdings (see Figure 2.2), following its
eighth-century BCE conquest of Messenia (see below), were bordered to the south,
east, and west by the Mediterranean Sea. Its northern frontier is less well-defined, but
it probably ran from a point on the east coast two kilometers from modern Astros,
below the River Tanos, to the coast of Messenia, where it was bordered by the Nedha
Valley to the north. Thucydides gives Sparta two-fifths of the Peloponnese, about
8,500 km² of land. Its nearest rival, Athens, held only 2,500 km² of land.

In craggy, barren Greece, the Eurotas River Valley stands out as relatively
fertile; it “is, and must always have been, the heartland of Lakonia.” The ancient
Spartan plain was filled with the Pliocene deposits of an inland sea, fertile soil that
has since been removed by erosion and covered with alluvium generated in Roman
and medieval climate fluctuations. Due to this overlay of alluvium, contemporary
agriculture cannot be exactly projected into antiquity. Modern Sparta cultivates

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72 A brief note about terminology is in order here. The Spartan state is called Lakedaimon or
Lakedaimonia, and its people (both citizens and non-citizens) Lakedaimonians. The state’s central
polis was Sparta, and the term “Spartiate” encompasses all Spartan males with full citizenship.
73 P. Cartledge, Sparta and Lakonia (New York: Routledge, 2002), 5-6.
74 Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, 1.10.2.
75 Cartledge 2002, 6.
76 Ibid., 15.
77 Ibid., 16.
olives, wheat, barley, citrus, and maize, but these last two crops are post-classical imports.\textsuperscript{78}

The climate in ancient Sparta likely differed little from Sparta’s present climate.\textsuperscript{79} Contemporary Sparta receives little rainfall and is marked by a prolonged summer drought.\textsuperscript{80} A third of Sparta’s rainfall occurs during November and December. This seasonal distribution is conducive to the harvest of the cereals that were a significant component of the Spartan diet; contemporary Lakonia manages two cereal harvests annually.\textsuperscript{81} Sparta’s mean summer temperature, adjusted for height above sea level, is the highest in Greece, 27° C (80.6° F). Its winters, too, are rather harsh, although Sparta itself rarely receives snow.\textsuperscript{82} The Taygetos Mountains to the west of the Eurotas River Valley retain snow until early June.\textsuperscript{83} These snowcaps may have been effective barriers to communication.\textsuperscript{84}

**Historiography**

The analysis of ancient Spartan history and customs is somewhat less straightforward than its climate and geography. Spartan archaeology, like most classical archaeology, focuses heavily on the mythical and the monumental. While the recently-published Laconia Survey has extended the scope of archaeology in Lakonia, there is still room for more quotidian archaeological fieldwork, particularly pertaining to agricultural

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Spartan climate differs little from that recorded across Lakonia and can thus be applied to wider Lakonia.
\textsuperscript{80} Cartledge 2002, 22.
\textsuperscript{82} Cartledge 2002, 22.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 24.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.
and domestic sites. Due to this lack of archaeology relating to Lakedaimonians’ day-to-day lives and ordinary gaps in the archaeological record, Spartan culture and history must be reconstructed with considerable aid from ancient historians.

Ancient Sparta produced no historians itself, and the inscription of laws was reportedly forbidden; the only records kept at Sparta were lists of kings and oracles. Sparta’s history and culture have thus been conveyed to modern classicists chiefly through the histories and ethnographies of outsiders. Some of these outsiders, inhabitants of other Greek poleis, principally Athens, never visited Sparta, and many of them wrote centuries after the events that they recounted. The flat, unempirical stereotype of Spartan culture created by these historians was christened le mirage Spartiate, the Spartan mirage, by F. Ollier. This mirage of an austere, authoritarian polis, hostile to the arts and chiefly concerned with war, pervades modern conceptions of Sparta.

The first extant detailed account of Spartan life appeared in 375 BCE with the Athenian general Xenophon’s Constitution of the Lakedaimonians. Xenophon (c. 430 BCE – 354 BCE), like many disseminators of Spartan history and customs, was a Lakonizer, an ardent admirer of Lakedaimon and its people. Xenophon’s writings on the Spartan state are often suspiciously utopian, but he is hardly the most egregious of Lakonizers, and, as the only historian known to have lived in Sparta, he gives contemporary classicists a rare inside perspective on Spartan culture.

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86 Cartledge 2002, 49.
Kritias’ (c. 460 BCE – 403 BCE) two *Constitutions of the Lakedaimonians*, in poetry and prose, slightly preceded Xenophon’s work, but only fragments of them remain. One of the Thirty Tyrants installed at Athens by Sparta after the Peloponnesian Wars, Kritias is more lavish in his praise of Sparta than is Xenophon. His *Constitutions of the Lakedaimonians* eulogize every facet of Spartan culture, from its famed temperance to its less famous cups and shoes.\(^8\)

Plutarch (c. 46 CE – 120 CE), another Lakonizer and a native of Boiotian Chaironea, has influenced the contemporary image of Sparta more than any other ancient historian.\(^9\) His *Life of Lykourgos*, a description of Spartan culture in the guise of a biography of the proto-mythical lawgiver Lykourgos, starkly contrasts ascetic, communitarian Sparta with the hedonistic, individualistic Roman Empire of his own time.\(^9\) Sufficient fits exist between his work and that of Xenophon to indicate some continuity between fourth-century and Roman Sparta or at least to demonstrate Plutarch’s judicious use of earlier sources.\(^9\) Unfortunately, these earlier sources may have included third-century revolutionary propaganda, which attempted to legitimize third-century social reforms by baselessly retrojecting them to the Spartan state at the height of its power. Thus, some of the social and political structures that Plutarch places in early Sparta may not have existed until the third century BCE.

Lakonizers were not the only historians guilty of distorting Spartan history and culture; Sparta’s critics and enemies did, too. Herodotus (c. 484 BCE – 425

\(^8\) Kritias, fragment 6, fragment 34.
BCE), Greece’s “father of history” was Halicarnassian by birth, but he spent some time in Samos and Athens. While he is certainly not openly antagonistic towards Sparta, his use of Athens as “…a frame of reference in his construction of both the Greek and non-Greek worlds” alienates Sparta from wider Hellas. Sparta is the only Greek polis that Herodotus describes ethnographically, examining in particular its autocratic elements – namely, the diarchy. Herodotus’ ethnography of Sparta subverts the usual role of ethnography in his Histories; rather than helping his audience make sense of foreign custom through analogy with known customs, he interprets Spartan customs through analogy with “barbarian” customs. Despite his bias, Herodotus remains a valuable authority on early Sparta, as he is our only extant historical source who was able to hear living memories from the sixth century BCE.

Beyond outsiders’ politicization of Sparta’s history and culture for their own purposes, Sparta itself may have promoted the Spartan mirage. The authoritarian stereotype of le mirage Spartiate brought with it a reputation for control and internal stability. This reputation could have effectively concealed Sparta’s internal social problems, including its revolutionary enslaved class and shortage of full citizens (see below).

A dose of skepticism ought to underlie interpretation of all Spartan history, but a broad sketch of the Lakedaimonian polis’ development and decline can be gleaned from ancient sources, particularly when corroborated by archaeological

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92 Cicero, On the Laws, 1.5.
94 Herodotus, Histories, 6.56-60.
95 Millender 2002, 6; Herodotus, 6.58-60.
findings. A rough timeline of Sparta’s history from its foundation until the mid fourth century BCE appears on the following pages. Events are included only insofar as they impacted the construct of and worship at Menelaion. For a more detailed account of the history of Lakedaimon, see P. Cartledge’s *Sparta and Lakonia*.

**Chronology**

**12th century BCE** Tradition indicates that the Peloponnese was colonized by the Herakleids, descendants of Herakles to whom the region had been promised by an oracle.  
97 Leading masses of Dorians, the brothers Temenus, Crespontes, and Aristodemos marched into their promised land.  
98 Temenus took the Argolid, Crespontes, Messenia, and the twin sons of Aristodemos, who had died mid-journey, Prokles and Eurysthenes took Lakonia.  
According to myth, Prokles and Eurysthenes were the first rulers of the Spartan diarchy, although neither was the eponym for his respective dynasty, the Agiadai and the Eurypontidai.

**c. 950 BCE** Archaeological evidence gives this date as the *terminus post quem* for Sparta’s foundation.  
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97 Herodotus, 6.52, 4.147; pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 2.8.2; Plutarch, *Life of Lykourgos*, 4ff; Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 2.18.7, 3.1.5f, 3.7.1, 4.3.4f.
98 The Dorians were Greeks who had not been influenced by the Minoan and Mycenaean culture. From whence they came is uncertain. They spoke a dialect of Greek – Doric Greek – differing only slightly from that of the reportedly autochthonous Greeks, like the Arkadians and the Athenians.
99 Cartledge 2002, 81.
c. 750 BCE  Sparta begins to show evidence of contact with wider Greece. By this time, Amyklai, several kilometers outside central Sparta, has been incorporated into the *polis*. This incorporation was not complete; into the classical period, Sparta was composed of five partially-amalgamated *obes* (villages): Limnai, Kynosoura, Pitana, Mesoa, and, by 750 BCE, Amyklai.¹⁰⁰

c. 735 BCE – The First Messenian War takes place. Sparta defeats Messenia and subjugates its populace. A wet, fertile region, “good for ploughing, good for growing,” located in the weathershed of the Taygetos Mountains, Messenia’s incorporation into Lakedaimon nearly trebles Sparta’s agricultural holdings.¹⁰¹ Its people are enslaved and compelled to farm. They set aside half of each harvest for Spartan consumption, joining the ranks of Lakedaimon’s enslaved class, helots (see below).¹⁰²

Early 7th century BCE  The conquest of Messenia makes many Spartans remarkably wealthy. Some employ this wealth in temple-building, an opportunity to simultaneously display one’s affluence and demonstrate one’s piety. The Menelaion (see Chapter Three) is

¹⁰⁰ See Thucydides, 1.10.2.
¹⁰¹ Tyrtaios, fragment 5.3; S. Hodkinson, Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta, (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2000), 145.
¹⁰² Tyrtaios, fragment 6.
established, and the first stone temple is built at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia in Limnai (see below).

c. 650 BCE  Lakedaimon, having been recently defeated by Argos at the Thyreatis, between the Argolid and Lakonia, and having contended with the revolt of the discontented Parthenai, is at a low point.\textsuperscript{103} Messenia takes advantage of this and revolts, a conflict known as the Second Messenian War.\textsuperscript{104} Sparta is once again victorious.

The mid to late 7\textsuperscript{th} century BCE  Lakedaimonian artistic production thrives. The lyric poet Terpander, Lesbian in origin, ushers in a succession of visits by foreign poets. The poet Alkman, either Lakonian or Sardinian, emerges shortly thereafter. He is the earliest of the nine lyric poets deemed canonical by Hellenistic Alexandria. Lakonian ivory-working peaks, and local bronze work continues to improve until its sixth-century apogee. Lakonian pottery develops into a “full-blown orientalizing black-figure style,”

\textsuperscript{103} The only thing known about the identity of the Parthenai is that they were somehow impure in birth.
\textsuperscript{104} Despite the eyewitness accounts of the poet Tyrtaios, little is known about this revolt. Pausanias’ accounts of the Messenian Wars, while lengthy and detailed, are patently unreliable, as his sources include Myron the historian and Rhianus the epic poet, both of whom had some role in manufacturing heroic, historically-imprecise tales to lend Messenia an early history and political identity (Starr 1965, 28).
which is traded as far as Sparta’s colony at Taras in south Italy.\textsuperscript{105}

\textbf{c. 550 BCE} Sparta attempts to subjugate Arkadian Tegea in the Battle of the Fetters. According to Herodotus, Sparta’s aim in conquering Tegea was to enslave its populace, as it had Messenia’s.\textsuperscript{106} Overconfident Spartans marched upon Tegea, carrying irons to chain the conquered Tegeans. They were instead defeated by Tegea and forced to work the land in the very chains which they had intended for their conquerors. On consulting the Delphic oracle as to how they might secure victory against Tegea, the Spartans were ordered to steal the bones of Orestes and to establish a cult around them (see Chapter One). Having done so, Sparta bested the Arkadian polis. Instead of enslaving Tegea, it formed a military alliance with it, perhaps the first of Sparta’s alliances in the Peloponnesian League.

\textbf{c. 546 BCE} Sparta’s defeat of Argos cements its hegemony over the Peloponnese. The Peloponnesian League, a one-sided alliance whereby members swear to follow Sparta whithersoever it leads, includes all of the Peloponnesian states, except Argos and

\textsuperscript{105} Cartledge 2002, 117. Taras was colonized by the \textit{Partheniai}.
\textsuperscript{106} Herodotus, 1.66-68.
Achaia. Sparta’s consolidation of the League establishes it as a serious military power in wider Hellas.

**During the 5th century BCE**

Sparta’s import of nearly all crafts steadily declines. Athens begins to dominate trade, particularly that of figured pottery.

c. 490 BCE – 479 BCE

The Persian Wars occur. Sparta emerges as *de facto* head of Greece’s alliance against encroaching Persia.

c. 480 BCE

The Battle of Thermopylae take place, among the best-known battles of the Persian Wars. The brave defeat of the Spartan king Leonidas and his three hundred men at the Battle of Thermopylae has been cited as both the apogee and the trough of Spartan masculine militarism.  


c. 479 BCE

The Spartan regent Pausanias heads the final land battle of the second Persian invasion, the Battle of Plataea (479 BCE). Persia is defeated and, with the Battle of Mycale, the Persians are ousted from Hellas.
c. 478 BCE  The Athenian empire emerges. Athens heads the Delian League, a coalition of approximately 150 poleis.

c. 464 BCE  An earthquake devastates Sparta and decimates its citizenry, occasioning another helot revolt, the Third Messenian War. Thwarted in their plan to march upon the Spartan polis, helots hole up on Mount Ithome in Messenia. Athens sends 4,000 hoplites to Ithome to support Sparta’s siege of the helots. After brief fighting, Sparta dismisses the Athenian troops, fearing their reaction to the discovery that the helots whom they are fighting are fellow Greeks. Athens repudiates its Persian War alliance with Sparta and allies itself with Sparta’s enemy Argos.

c. 460 BCE  The helot revolted is suppressed. The helots defeated at Ithome are permitted to leave the Peloponnese peacefully. They are settled by Athens at Naupactus on the Corinthian Gulf.

c. 460 BCE –  The First Peloponnesian War takes place. It is concluded in

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108 Dates for the conflict are uncertain. I assume, with Cartledge, that Thucydides’ account of the revolt has been corrupted, and that it was not ten years long (Cartledge 2002, 217).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>445 BCE</td>
<td>a thirty-year peace agreement whereby Sparta agrees to respect Athens’ hegemony on the sea, and Athens agrees to respect that of Sparta on land.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 431 BCE – 404 BCE</td>
<td>The peace agreement does not last; the Second Peloponnesian War breaks out. The Peloponnesian League defeats Athens, and Sparta installs the bloody oligarchy of the Thirty Tyrants, including the aforementioned Kritias, at Athens. By 403 BCE, however, the Athenian general Thrasyboulos, with the aid of Thebes and a contingent of Athenian men, has defeated the Thirty and restored Athenian democracy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 395 BCE – 387 BCE</td>
<td>Thebes, Corinth, Athens, and Argos with the backing of Persia, reacting to Spartan expansionism, form a “potent anti-Spartan confederacy.” Conflict with this confederacy is called the Corinthian War. Alarmed by Athens’ naval successes in the war, Persia withdraws its support from the League and backs Sparta. The war is ended with the King’s Peace. Mediated by the Persian ruler Artaxerxes, the King’s Peace decrees that the Persians are permitted to keep the whole of Asia Minor, and all Greek states, with the exception of Lemnos, Imbros, and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Skyros, are proclaimed autonomous. The war is thus inconclusive.

371 BCE

Oligarchia (manpower shortage) stemming from loss of men in warfare, the earthquake of 464 BCE, and a decline in the number of men able to fulfill Spartan citizenship requirements, has made filling the ranks of Sparta’s citizen army increasingly difficult. Sparta may have also failed to maintain up-to-date battlefield tactics. 110 Regardless, in 371 BCE, Thebes inflicted upon Sparta a disastrous military defeat at the Battle of Leuktra in Boiotia.

369 BCE

The communities of free non-citizens (perioikoi) surrounding central Lakonia and the natural defenses of Lakonian topography fail to prevent the Thebans from penetrating deeply into the region. In 369 BCE, Thebes frees Messenia. The Theban commander Epameinondas supervises the founding of the Messenian polis Messene, establishing a citizen register from among the ranks of former helots and distributing Messenian land to its new citizens.

Sparta’s descent into military obscurity marks the end of the period with which we are concerned. While use of the Menelaion site continued into the second

century BCE, most of its deposits predate Sparta’s decline, and little can be extrapolated from those postdating it. Perhaps declining Sparta lacked the resources and the incentive to maintain worship at the Menelaion.

**Spartan Culture**

Sparta is one of only two Greek *poleis*, the other being Athens, for which exists sufficient evidence of the right kind to construct “a convincing social portrait in the round.”¹¹¹ Thus, further context for study of the Menelaion provided in this chapter will consist of descriptions and discussions of Spartan social, political, and economic institutions. While these institutions probably changed throughout Spartan history, sources describing them date principally to the classical period; where it is possible, the culture and institutions of early Sparta will be described, but, for the most part, the following descriptions date to the classical period.

**The Spartan Government**

One of the chief contributors to the ancients’ perception of Sparta as a stable *polis* was its “mixed constitution.” A “mixed constitutional” government was thought to achieve balance by combining aspects of all basic constitutional types: monarchy, aristocracy/oligarchy, and democracy/polity. By negotiating among several extremes, this ideal government attained the mean.¹¹² Each branch of the Spartan government was believed to correspond to one constitutional type. The diarchy corresponded to

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monarchy, the gerousia to aristocracy/oligarchy, and the assembly and the Ephorate to democracy/polity.\textsuperscript{113}

The Spartan diarchy was believed by much of wider Hellas to be a primitive carry-over from the Dark Ages.\textsuperscript{114} However, while the diarchy was the only hereditary position in the Spartan government, diarchs’ power and privileges, particularly during peacetime, were more religious-charismatic than despotic. The diarchs, direct descendants of Zeus through Herakles, were leaders of two priesthoods of the ruler of Olympus, Zeus \textit{Lakedaimôn} and Zeus \textit{Ouranios}, local and celestial Zeus, respectively.\textsuperscript{115} They nominated \textit{Pythioi}, officers whose sole purpose was the consultation of the oracle at Delphi, and had custody of all oracles.\textsuperscript{116} At the communal mess, the diarchs were the first to be served, were given double portions, and led libations.\textsuperscript{117}

Their burials were a particular point of interest for Herodotus.\textsuperscript{118} While common Lakedaimonians were buried without ceremony, the diarchs were mourned outrageously. People from all social strata were required to put on mourning garments, at risk of incurring a fine. Thousands attended the diarchs’ funerals, and government was put on hold for ten days.

Despite this, the Spartan diarchy was hardly absolute; if the king ever held even quasi-absolute power, by Aristotle’s time, he was nothing more than a general for life.\textsuperscript{119} The diarchs had their greatest privileges and responsibilities during

\textsuperscript{113} Plato, \textit{Laws}, 3.691e-692a; Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 1265b; Plutarch, \textit{Life of Lykourgos}, 7.1;
\textsuperscript{114} Cf. Herodotus, 6.56-60.
\textsuperscript{115} Herodotus, 6.56.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 6.57.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 6.58.
\textsuperscript{119} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 1271a.
wartime. They were sole commanders of the Spartan army. They marched into battle accompanied by a bodyguard of three hundred and, on campaign, were permitted to sacrifice as many animals as they desired.\textsuperscript{120} During peacetime, however, as members of the gerousia, the Council of Elders, the diarchs were merely two among thirty. Indeed, Sparta’s Great Rhetra, the oldest extant statement of governmental organization in Greece, marks an early check on the diarchs’ power.\textsuperscript{121}

According to Plutarch, the chief function of the Great Rhetra was the establishment of the gerousia.\textsuperscript{122} The gerousia was comprised of twenty-eight gerontes who, with the addition of the diarchs, formed a council of thirty. Gerontes were all over the age of sixty and served for life. By the fourth century, they ran for office and were elected by the people according to the volume of shouts that they aroused.\textsuperscript{123} If, as Plutarch and Plato suppose, the gerontes were meant to counter the power of the kings, one can assume that they were elected, not appointed, even in their earliest incarnation.\textsuperscript{124}

The gerousia judged capital crimes, including homicides and trials “of spiritual goodness.”\textsuperscript{125} Stressing the importance of the gerousia, Cartledge has labeled Sparta “quite literally, a gerontocracy,” and, indeed, Sparta was the only Greek polis known to respect the elderly.\textsuperscript{126} Younger men normally yielded to older men in the

\textsuperscript{120} Herodotus, 6.57. Notably, in this section of his Histories, Herodotus states that Spartan kings had a bodyguard of one hundred, but in all other sections of his Histories, Spartan kings had a bodyguard of three hundred. The earlier citation of one hundred might, therefore, be a copyist’s mistake or a mistake on the part of Herodotus.
\textsuperscript{121} Starr 1965, 37. See Appendix One.
\textsuperscript{122} Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 5.6-7.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 26.2.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 5.6-7; Plato, Laws, 692a.
\textsuperscript{125} Xenophon, Constitution of the Lakedaimonians, 10.3.
streets and rose from their chairs when older men entered the room. Perhaps this so-called “gerontocracy” accounts for Sparta’s notorious conservatism.

The Spartan government’s assembly was composed of all Spartan citizens. Decisions to go to war were its prerogative, but, according to Cartledge, beyond this, the assembly only ratified the decisions of the gerousia. Regardless, its existence belies Sparta’s authoritarian reputation; at the very least, Spartiates were permitted some semblance of self-government.

The Ephorate is generally said to post-date the assembly, having been established during the First Messenian War (c. 735 BCE – 724 BCE). Like the gerousia, the Ephorate appeared to have been meant to be a check on the diarchs’ power. While G. Huxley indicates that early Ephors were appointed by the diarchs, thus reducing the likelihood that they would oppose the kings, by the fourth century, Ephors were elected by and from the people.

During the classical period, the Ephorate was composed of five Ephors, after one of whom the year was named. The correspondence between the number of Ephors and the number of Spartan obes suggests that one Ephor was drawn from each obe. Ephors served only year-long terms, unlike the members of the gerousia. All magistracies were accountable to the Ephors; the Ephorate could remove officials from office at any time and institute capital cases against them. While decisions to go to war were taken by the assembly, the Ephorate normally called up the army.

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129 Oliva 1971, 127.
decided on the size of each campaign, and appointed commanders. In a culture as warlike as that of Sparta, such a role held particular influence. By the fourth century, diarchs were forced to accommodate the demands of the Ephorate.

**Citizens and Citizenship**

The body of people that elected Sparta’s Ephorate and *gerousia* excluded the majority of Lakedaimonians, including women, children, helots, and *perioikoi*. Spartan citizenship, unlike Athens’, did not officially require descent from citizens, but few foreigners were granted citizenship. Spartan citizens fulfilled two criteria, which guaranteed one’s socialization in Spartan values: attendance at the state-mandated system of education, the *agôgê*, and membership in the communal mess.

The *agôgê* inculcated into young Spartans the militaristic, communitarian mentality for which Sparta became famous. It may have been instituted as a reaction to the Second Messenian War (c. 650 BCE), as part of a larger cultural system meant to safeguard against the threat of helot rebellion. When boys entered the *agôgê*, they took the first steps to becoming a part of Sparta’s ever-ready citizen-army. Until they reached old age, their primary activity was military training.

At the age of seven, boys were sent to live in a public dormitory, and they commenced their formal training in the *agôgê*. While they learned to read and write a bit, the education of the *agôgê* was primarily military in character. Spartan youths learned obedience, hard work, and the ability to win in battle. They were educated

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130 Andrewes 1966, 60-62.
in strict self denial, permitted only one cloak for the entire year and forbidden bathing.\textsuperscript{132} They slept on rough reed mattresses that they had built themselves.\textsuperscript{133}

Surveillance was a significant component of the agôgê. Boys were supervised by a paidonomos, appointed from those who had held high office.\textsuperscript{134} He had as his retinue a number of young men carrying whips, who punished transgressors at his orders.\textsuperscript{135} An eiren, a young man just out of his teens, was likewise set to supervise the boys.\textsuperscript{136} He ensured that they received the most meager diet possible and encouraged them to steal in order to supplement their meals, an act thought to encourage self-reliance.\textsuperscript{137}

The theft of the agôgê has been a point of some scholarly dispute. Classical sources do not doubt its occurrence, but scholars like N. Kennell and Ollier debate its regularity on the grounds of impracticability.\textsuperscript{138} However, Isokrates’ castigation of the practice in his \textit{Panathenaikos} indicates that theft focused only on farmers, non-citizens, and Xenophon describes the practice as closely regulated.\textsuperscript{139} Perhaps the Spartan notion of theft formed part of a larger heroic ideology, through which Sparta attempted to ally itself with Homeric heroes who were defined by acts of “taking.”\textsuperscript{140}

The practice of paederasty, erotic relationships between adolescent boys and adult men, was a significant component of Spartan boys’ lives during their teenaged

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., Xenophon, \textit{Constitution of the Lakedaimonians}, 2.4.
\textsuperscript{133} Plutarch, \textit{Life of Lykourgos}, 16.7.
\textsuperscript{134} Xenophon, \textit{Constitution of the Lakedaimonians}, 2.2.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 2.5.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 2.6.
\textsuperscript{138} Ollier 1933, 28; N. Kennell, \textit{The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education and Culture in Ancient Sparta} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995) 122-3)
\end{flushright}
years. Men from good families, probably in their twenties and thirties, attached themselves to the boys of the *agôgê*. Relationships with these men might have aided boys’ transition into adult society. In fourth-century Crete, a youth was introduced into the communal messes of his *philetor* (his paederastic lover); this may have also been the case in Sparta. Paederasty may have fostered male solidarity, smoothing over the antagonistic impulses bred by excessive competition. According to Aelian, if somewhat implausibly, paederasty was of such social utility that any upstanding (*kaloskagathos*) Spartiate who refused to act as *erastes* (paederastic lover) to a boy of fine character was fined by the Ephors.

As described by Xenophon, Plutarch, and Aelian, paederasty was not permitted to veer into physical sexuality, a protestation that smacks of naïve idealization. Given the large gap between the onset of puberty for the Spartan male, around the age of fourteen, and men’s usual age of marriage, mid-to-late twenties, and given adolescent males’ comparative isolation from young women, it seems a bit prudish to assume that Spartan paederasty conformed to Platonic ideals. Anal sex, though openly frowned upon by much of Hellas, was likely a covertly acknowledged feature of many, if not most paederastic relationships.

Boys probably matriculated from the *agôgê* at the age of eighteen or nineteen. Following their twentieth birthdays, Spartiate men could probably attend and vote at

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142 Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 3.10.12.
145 See Winkler’s *Constraints of Desire* for a discussion of the degree to which male homosexual relationships were actually denigrated across Greece prior to the writings of Plato.
the assembly. This was, however, contingent on their inclusion in a communal mess group, into which they had to be voted. Messes met in the evening in groups of fifteen. Each group member contributed a set amount of ground barley, wine, cheese, figs, and money for the purchase of extras to the mess. Hunters often contributed game to the meals, and the wealthy often brought bread; thus, despite Plutarch’s protestations to the contrary, the communal mess did not so much equalize the Spartan citizenry as unite them. Indeed, inclusion in the communal mess was restricted to those in the upper classes; by Aristotle’s time, many Spartans did not have the means to contribute to the mess and lost their citizenship.

Required contributions to the communal mess were exorbitant, far beyond the dietary needs of the mess’ members. T. Figueira estimates that Spartan mess dues, as relayed by Plutarch and Dikaiarchos are approximately five times Spartan subsistence. By S. Hodkinson’s calculations, surplus food levied at the communal mess represented 37.5% of a Spartiate’s total mess dues, with an even higher wine surplus. Despite the disparity between Figueira and Hodkinson’s calculations, it is clear that mess dues significantly exceeded Spartan dietary needs. They may have been a form of taxation; perhaps surpluses were given to the agôgê or to invited guests. While Plutarch reports that helots were occasionally brought to the mess and

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146 Hodkinson 1983, 105.
147 Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 12.2.
148 Xenophon, Constitution of the Lakedaimonians, 5.3; Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 10.1.
149 Aristotle, Politics, 1271a.
151 Hodkinson 2000, 196-197.
forced to imbibe and ingest excessively to demonstrate the perils of overindulgence to boys from the *agôgê*, such lessons would not fully account for the mess surplus.\(^{152}\)

Spartiates received their mess dues from helots who labored on Spartiate-owned tracts of land (*kleroi*) in Lakonia and Messenia. Plutarch describes these *kleroi* as equal portions of land distributed by the government at birth among those Spartiate males deemed fit to be raised.\(^{153}\) In this version of Spartan property ownership, a Spartiate was life tenant of his *kleros*, which, after his death, reverted back to the state. This interpretation of property-ownership, however, is not credible. The Spartan government would have had to maintain a supply of land sufficient for redistribution to every new son born, and myriad *kleroi* would be owned by infants and toddlers. Perhaps this account of property ownership originates in third-century propaganda, which sought support for land redistribution according to this model by citing the mythical lawgiver of early Sparta Lykourgos as its earliest practitioner. Hodkinson suggests that *kleroi*, following their initial allotment as private property, perhaps after the Messenian Wars, were passed to one’s descendants as part of the usual Greek system of partible inheritance, that is, by dividing them among one’s heirs.\(^{154}\)

**Helots**

Spartiate property-ownership was closely tied to the status of Sparta’s helot class.

Defining helot status is a difficult endeavor for contemporary historians, largely due to the problems it presented to ancient historians. The second century CE grammarian Polydeukses ambiguously placed helot status somewhere between free and slave, a

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\(^{152}\) Plutarch, 28.4.


\(^{154}\) Hodkinson 2000, 81.
classification that raises more questions than it answers.\textsuperscript{155} In my view, helots were, quite simply, enslaved, although they are more aptly compared to the African diasporic enslaved people of the New World than to the chattel slaves of wider Greece.

Helots had more freedom than did chattel slaves. They could not be exported, and, although no restriction on their sale within Lakedaimon is known, sales were probably rare, permitting some family continuity. They could also own property; some had boats in 425 BCE, and in 223 BCE, 6,000 Lakonian helots had the resources to purchase their freedom.\textsuperscript{156} They accompanied Spartiates into battle and perhaps furnished their own weaponry. Because inclusion in the communal mess required Spartiates’ constant presence in Sparta, rural helots were probably permitted a certain degree of freedom and the opportunity to forge their own cultural identity. While the notion that Messenian helots remained semi-independent following their original conquest may be rooted in Messenia’s post-independence propaganda, lack of surveillance could account for Aristotle’s statement that the helots often revolted.\textsuperscript{157}

Helots had existed in Lakedaemon prior to the Messenian Wars, but by the mid-fifth century, most were descendants of conquered Messenians. Modern scholars link the etymology of the word “helot” to the Greek ἥλωτος (captured), but Pausanias states that helots received their name from the Achaean Lakonian city Helos, the people of which were the first helots of Lakonia.\textsuperscript{158} Pausanias’ etymology is suspect,
but Lakonian helots may have been a survival of Lakonia’s Mycenaean population. Thus, according to the mythological account of the Return of the Herakleids and the Dorian migration, these Lakonian helots, rather than the Spartiates, would have been descendants of Helen and Menelaos’ people. Spartiates were descended from the Dorians; their kings were descended from the Herakleids.

Rural helots paid a regular tribute of produce to their Spartiate masters. According to Tyrtaios, this tribute amounted to half of their produce, a proportion rooted in Homeric wartime ransoms, a constant reminder of helots’ status as subjugated peoples.\textsuperscript{159} A later, fixed tax, the \textit{apophora}, is cited in Plutarch as the helots’ tribute, but J. Ducat dismisses it as a Hellenistic fiction.\textsuperscript{160} Both tributes would have been difficult to eke out from the land; rural helots had to feed themselves, as well as Spartiates, and this task would have grown increasingly difficult with each generation, as \textit{kleroi} were divided again and again among Spartiate heirs.

Not all helots were rural slaves. Some worked in urban Spartiate households. As was the case with chattel slaves in other regions of Greece, domestic helots were probably somewhat integrated into Spartiate families. They were fed and sheltered by their Spartiate masters, and, as fellow Greeks, were certainly capable of communicating with them at length. While gendered divisions of labor are not visible in rural helotry, some domestic tasks (most prominently, wet-nursing) were definitely allotted to female helots.

While ancient Greek society generally accepted true freedom as contingent on slave ownership, helotry was a particularly contentious form of slavery, as it hinged

\textsuperscript{159} Tyrtaios qtd. in Pausanias, 4.14.5; Link 2004, 3; Hodkinson 2000, 127.

on the enslavement of fellow Greeks with legitimate political aspirations. Perhaps largely as a result of the tensions created by helots’ and Spartiates’ shared ethnicity, denigration and degradation were routine features of helots’ treatment. Myron, an admittedly dubious source, writes that helots were whipped regularly and forced to wear caps, without which they might be physically indistinguishable from lower status free people.\textsuperscript{161} As we have seen, drunken, gluttonous helots may have been displayed before Spartan youths to caution them against overindulgence. Even if \textit{sophrosynē} (prudence, restraint) was not necessarily characteristic of Spartan society, as suggested by N. Humble, inebriated helots could have been paraded before youths purely to mock the former and amuse the latter, reasserting a power disparity by shaming the powerless.\textsuperscript{162}

Such mistreatment constitutes only the minor accusations levied against Sparta for its behavior towards helots. The \textit{krypteia}, as described by Plutarch, was a rite of passage whereby youths who had passed through the \textit{agôgê} were sent into the countryside alone to kill helots, particularly those who seemed to have the most power and propensity to revolt.\textsuperscript{163} The Ephorate’s annual declaration of war on the helots may have been meant to absolve the \textit{krypteia} of their murders in advance. Although this notion of the \textit{krypteia} conforms to Sparta’s apparent fear of helot rebellion, it seems rather implausible. Presumably, helots would have adopted some means of coping with these attacks. Also, while they may have been perceived as a collective entity, individual helots worked for particular Spartiates, and wanton decimation of the helot populace could prove problematic, since Spartiates might not

\textsuperscript{161} Myron of Priene, qtd. in Athenaeus, \textit{Deipnosophistae}, 4.657D.
\textsuperscript{162} Humble 2002, 98.
\textsuperscript{163} Plutarch, \textit{Life of Lykourgos}, 28.1-3.
want to lose valuable workers. Plutarch’s notion of the *krypteia* makes sense only if we imagine it as a regulated police force that killed helots at the behest of their masters. Even so, it seems a bit sensationalist.

Plato, too, describes the *krypteia*, but as “a bloodless endurance trial, or as an exercise of inspection,” like Plutarch’s, but without murder. This version of the *krypteia* is less widely circulated than that of Plutarch. Certainly, as L. Pearson drily states, “Plato enjoys no great authority as an historian.” However, Plato’s *krypteia* follows a model similar to that of Plutarch without its logistical improbability.

Linked loosely to Plutarch’s description of the *krypteia* in his *Life of Lykourgos* is an account of the Spartan slaughter of 2,000 helots. Thucydides also describes this event; Ephoros, likewise, although both he and Plutarch probably drew on Thucydides. According to Thucydides, 2,000 helots, having distinguished themselves for valor in an unidentified Spartan battle, were promised freedom by the state. They were crowned and led around Sparta’s temples in what was probably a manumission ceremony, but subsequently disappeared, presumably slaughtered. P. Oliva unequivocally states that “there can be no doubt of the authenticity of this episode,” and D. Harvey, referencing the Athenian massacre of 1,000 at Mytilene, insists that the helots’ slaughter was logistically possible. However, the usual Spartan methods of execution, hanging and poisoning, would have been insufficient for such a great number of people. While the *kaiadas*, a chasm into which Spartans

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165 Qtd. in Oliva 1971, 144.


167 Thucydides, 4.80.2-5; Ephoros qtd. in Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, 12.67.

cast wrongdoers, may have executed these 2,000 helots, it has thus far yielded only seventeen skeletons.\textsuperscript{169} Thucydides’ tale is certainly implausible in scope, but a smaller number of helots may have suffered this fate.

Although the krypteia, the slaughter of the 2,000, and even some of the more quotidian mistreatment of helots bear marks of hyperbole, they probably contain some clues to Sparta’s behavior towards its helot class. Even if helots possessed more freedom than did chattel slaves, their relations with Spartiates were always the inherently bitter relations of oppressed with oppressor. Xenophon writes that the helots so hated the Spartans that they desired to eat them raw; according to Aristotle, the helots vigilantly awaited Sparta’s misfortune.\textsuperscript{170} Contemporary scholars often ascribe the basic principles of Spartan social practice to fear of the helot class. The militaristic society underpinned by the agôgé is believed to have stemmed from fear of helots; the treaties of the Peloponnesian League are believed to have contained clauses requiring allies’ aid in the event of a helot revolt.\textsuperscript{171} Cartledge does not hesitate to define Spartan history as “fundamentally the history of the class struggle between the Spartans and the Helots,” a struggle that grew increasingly tense as helot population growth rapidly outpaced that of the Spartan citizenry, and the manpower shortage made maintaining Sparta’s citizen army increasingly difficult.\textsuperscript{172} While we know of only four securely-established helot revolts in the four hundred years of Messenia’s subjugation to Sparta, lesser revolts likely occurred and remained unchronicled. The Taygetos Mountains separated Messenian helots from Sparta and

\textsuperscript{169} Paradiso 2004, 186
\textsuperscript{170} Xenophon, \textit{Hellenica}, 3.3.6; Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 1269a.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 229.
their masters; thus, it is possible that some free helot communities existed in Messenia, like the maroon communities of enslaved people in the Americas.

**Perioikoi and Other Non-Citizens**

*Perioikoi* are another non-Spartiate subject class, but their status is even less well-defined than that of helots. They were free subjects of the Spartans, living in separate municipalities, of which there were said to be one hundred.\(^{173}\) Most *perioikoi* lived in Lakonia and were ethnically, linguistically, and culturally indistinguishable from Spartans.\(^{174}\) Interestingly, the name of the Spartan state, Lakedaimon, included *perioikoi*, as well as Spartiates. Other Greek states, like Athens, only included citizens in their names. Ancient writers often referred to *perioikic* communities as *poleis*, perhaps because the word implies a political claim, and Sparta may have been forced to negotiate with *perioikoi* as though they were independent communities.\(^{175}\)

*Perioikoi* paid a direct tribute to the Spartan diarchs, but perhaps their relation to Sparta was as forced military allies. Negotiations with *perioikoi* may have given Sparta experience with one-sided alliance and prefigured those it imposed on the Peloponnesian League.

The origins of the *perioikic* communities of Lakonia and Messenia were probably diverse. At least two were resettlements of Sparta’s refugee populations.\(^{176}\) Others may have arrived at their subject status through one of three routes.\(^{177}\) First, an independent community may have come under the rule of the Spartan state, either

\(^{173}\) Cartledge 2002, 84.
\(^{174}\) Ibid.
\(^{176}\) Cartledge 2002, 84.
\(^{177}\) These three routes are briefly discussed in Cartledge 2002, 84.
voluntarily or involuntarily. Second, a *perioikic* settlement could have been directly established by the Spartan state. Third, a pre-Dorian community could have received an influx of Dorian settlers. In this last case, *perioikoi*, like Lakonian helots, would have been descendants of Lakonia’s Mycenaean-era heroes and heroines.

Apart from ports like Gytheion, most *perioikic* communities were probably farming peasant communities that exploited additional resources like fish, minerals, fruit and nuts.\(^\text{178}\) Because craftsmanship was outlawed for the Spartan citizenry, *perioikoi* probably produced most of Lakonia’s crafts.\(^\text{179}\) *Perioikic* communities occupied liminal regions; they provided a buffer zone between urban Spartiates and rural helots, and trade was transacted through *perioikic* territory. Few *perioikic* revolts are known; they were probably not culturally homogeneous, and Sparta may have kept them divided and “exploited class differences and other sectional interests among its subjects.”\(^\text{180}\) *Perioikoi* were likewise not treated as poorly as were helots and thus had less incentive for rebellion.

Still less is known of Sparta’s other non-citizen populations. Included among these are *hypomeiones* (“inferiors”), *tresantes* (“tremblers”), *nothoi* (“illegitimates”), and *mothakes*, the last of which have entirely defied proper definition. These categories of person have been variously defined as the bastard sons of Spartan citizens (*mothakes*), helot boys educated with Spartan citizens (*mothakes*) or disenfranchised former citizens (*hypomeiones*, *mothakes*).

\(^{178}\) Shipley 1992, 182.
\(^{179}\) There is meager evidence for Spartiate craft production, and some Spartan citizens were probably craftsman. For the most part, however, *perioikoi* probably produced Sparta’s crafts (Cartledge 2002, 158).
\(^{180}\) Shipley 1992, 187.
Spartan Women

Little can be said of Sparta’s lower-class women, but the lot of its upper-class women is comparatively well-documented. Athenians, whose women were chiefly confined to the household, regarded the “license” of Spartan women with shock, outrage, and fascination. The Athenian playwright Euripides (c. 480 BCE – 406 BCE) imagined Spartan women, with Helen at their forefront, as licentious and immoral.\textsuperscript{181} Aristotle believed their freedom – particularly, their capacity to inherit property – to be among the primary causes of Sparta’s decline.

While Athenian girls were not usually educated, Spartiate girls went through a state-mandated system of education similar to the \textit{agôgê}. This system of education is not as extensively documented as is the \textit{agôgê}, but it included a similar athletic regime. Unmarried women exercised regularly, running, wrestling, and throwing the discus and javelin.\textsuperscript{182} Such physical activity required that the dress of Spartiate women afford them significant mobility; unmarried women and perhaps married women clothed themselves in “revealingly slit mini chiton[s].”\textsuperscript{183} This garment is attested in numerous Lakonian bronzes, primarily from the sixth-century BCE (see Figure 2.3).\textsuperscript{184} The women depicted in these bronzes, runners, are well-muscled with only minor secondary sexual characteristics. Cartledge associates sculptors’ disinterest in “feminine” bodies with the predominance of homosexuality in Sparta’s male culture.\textsuperscript{185} Still further, these “masculine” women might attest to a blurring of

\textsuperscript{181} Cf. Euripides \textit{Andromache}, \textit{Trojan Women}, \textit{Hecuba}. His \textit{Helen} is a notable exception.
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
sexual binaries in Spartan society, whereby distinctions between men and women were not sited chiefly in the body.

Female public nudity in religious processions is also attested and again confirmed in sixth-century BCE Lakonian bronzes (see Figure 2.4).186 In wider Hellas, female nudity in art was not common before the fifth-century BCE, and, even then, was primarily reserved for women of low status. The relative “immodesty” of Spartiate girls and women must have been shocking to non-Spartan Greece.

According to both Xenophon and Plutarch, female public nudity and engagement in athletics were intimately linked with the primacy of teknopoiia (child production) in Spartan culture.187 As oligarchia began to plague the Spartan state, Spartiates became increasingly concerned with “the procreation of embryonic warriors.”188 By 500 BCE, all Spartiate men were obliged to marry.189 Unmarried men over the age of thirty were punished by exclusion from the Gymnopaidia (the festival of light-armed warriors) and were forced to walk the perimeter of the city walls in the winter, naked, singing of their failure.190 By the fourth century BCE, fathers of three sons were rewarded with exemption from military service, and fathers of four sons were freed from all burdens of the state.191 Female nudity may have been meant to stimulate male sexual interest, ironically, in the same fashion that nudity in the Spartan gymnasia promoted paederasty. Physical exercise produced strong women who stoically birthed strong children. A feminist espousal of the Spartan state

186 Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 14.4-7.
187 Xenophon, Constitution of the Lakedaimonians, 1.4; Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 14.2.
188 Hodkinson 2000, 422.
189 Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 15.1; see Cartledge 1981, 95 for references.
190 Given the fact that Spartan males were said to be naked at all times, it is unlikely that the nudity was a significant part of punishment.
191 Aristotle, Politics, 1270a.
as an early ally in struggles for gender equality is thus hasty, given women’s grossly overemphasized reproductive role. However, even this genre of civic value lent some social power to Spartiate women, who are depicted by Plutarch as speaking proudly of themselves as the only women who give birth to men.\textsuperscript{192}

Even if women’s public personae ultimately rested on childbearing, their public engagement permitted them to take a sense of pride in athletics and gave them a realm within which they, like men, might excel.\textsuperscript{193} It was a Spartan, Kyniska, sister of the Euryponid king Archidamos, who, in the fourth century BCE, became the first female victor in the Olympiad for her horse-breeding. Ironically, Archidamos reportedly encouraged his sister to breed horses to compete in the Olympic horse races in order to demonstrate to Spartiate horse-breeders that their success as breeders hinged on their wealth, rather than their \textit{arête} (excellence), for horse-breeding was an activity open solely to those with money.\textsuperscript{194} This did not prevent Kyniska, on winning, from boasting about her success, erecting monuments commemorating her victory in the Altis (the Olympic sanctuary) and in the Temple of Zeus at Sparta. The former included the following boast:

\begin{quote}
“Kings of Sparta are my father and brothers.
Kyniska, conquering with a chariot of fleet-footed steeds,
Set up this statue. And I declare myself the only woman
In all Hellas to have gained this crown.”\textsuperscript{195}
\end{quote}

Following Kyniska’s death, a \textit{herōon} (hero shrine) was erected for her at the Platanistas in Sparta, an area named for its plane trees, the traditional location of a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[192] Plutarch, \textit{Life of Lykourgos}, 14.4.
\item[193] Ibid.
\item[194] Pausanias, 3.8.1-3.
\end{footnotes}
fight between adolescent boys. The construction of Kyniska’s herōon in this locale indicates that her Olympic victory was honored by all of Sparta’s population. It places her near the urban shrine of Helen of Troy, suggesting that she, like Helen, may have achieved exemplar status for young Spartan women, and, indeed, numerous other Spartan women excelled at horse-breeding at subsequent Olympiads. Kyniska’s connection with Helen extends beyond her association with the Homeric heroine’s urban shrine; an inscribed dedication from Kyniska to Helen has been located at the Menelaion.

Spartan women’s accomplishments may not have been limited to the athletic realm. Aristophanes refers to a Spartan poetess called Kleitagora, and several female Spartan Pythagoreans are named by Iamblichos. While epigraphic attestations to female literacy – in the form of votive dedications – are few and far between, some Spartiate women were probably literate.

Assuming that women’s system of education was parallel to that of men, they probably concluded it around the age of eighteen. Based on this supposition and on Plutarch’s declaration that women wed when they were “…in…[their]…prime, ripe and ready for it,” one can assume that Spartiate women married somewhere in their late teens, probably by the age of twenty. Like exercise, this comparatively late marriage age was encouraged by teknopoiia’s prominence; women married at the peak of their fertility. Even so, this late marriage age would have produced a smaller age gap between brides and their grooms than was usual in Greece and, correspondingly, might have lessened the power differential between the two.

196 Pausanias sees this as a pattern, inspired by Kyniska; 3.8.1.
197 Aristophanes, Lysistrata, 1237; Iamblichos, The Life of Pythagoras, 267.
198 Cartledge 1981, 93.
Plutarch gives a striking account of the Spartan practice known as marriage by capture.\textsuperscript{199} In marriage by capture, a bride was forcibly abducted and handed over to a so-called bridesmaid. This bridesmaid would cut off the bride’s hair and dress her in men’s clothing. The bride would then be left in a darkened room, resting on a straw mattress. Her groom would enter the room, have sex with his bride, and return to his public dormitory. This bride-“capture” took place repeatedly with the same woman, often, according to Plutarch, until a child had been produced by the union.\textsuperscript{200} It is unclear if and when bride and groom cohabited.

The transvestitism involved in marriage by capture has been the center of extensive scholarly discussion. Some argue that it was meant to ease young men’s transition from exclusively homosexual relations to heterosexual relations.\textsuperscript{201} Women, with their short hair, were made to resemble the youths of \textit{agôgê}; like the young boys, they might have been expected to be the “passive” component in sexual intercourse.\textsuperscript{202}

Plutarch’s account of marriage by capture sounds disturbingly like ritualized rape, and he gives no clues as to female agency in the matter. S. Pomeroy indicates that the ritual was “an enactment of a previous arrangement and came as no surprise to the bride.”\textsuperscript{203} She calls attention to Xenophon’s description of marriage, which commences with the statement, \textit{epei...gunê pros andra elthoi} (“when a woman went to a man”), an assertion of female agency in marriage.\textsuperscript{204} However, Xenophon does

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{199} Plutarch, \textit{Life of Lykourgos}, 15.3-15.5.
\item \textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 15.5.
\item \textsuperscript{201} Cartledge 1981, 101.
\item \textsuperscript{203} Pomeroy 2002, 137.
\item \textsuperscript{204} Xenophon, \textit{Constitution of the Lakedaimonians}, 1.5
\end{itemize}
not describe marriage by capture, and perhaps he refers to another means of contracting marriages.

It was a disgrace for men to be seen visiting their brides; marital relations took place only by night and in secret. Xenophon insists that the covertness of male-female sexual relations increased partners’ desire for one another.205 This argument is logically consistent with Sparta’s focus on teknopoiia; infrequent male-female interaction may have ensured that the goal of heterosexual relations was always purely reproductive. Beyond sex, men and women may have remained isolated, for the most part, within their respective gendered spheres. Even when men and women cohabited, men probably spent little time in the household, taking their meals with the communal mess and spending their days training.

Marriage by capture may not have been the normative Spartan marital model, at least not in the late sixth century BCE. Herodotus recounts the abduction of the bride of the Spartan king Leotychides by Leotychides’ co-ruler Damaratos.206 The outrage of Leotychides at Damaratos’ transgression suggests that marriages were could be arranged by betrothal, a far more feasible marital model than marriage by capture, particularly given women’s significant property holdings (see below). If marriage by capture were common, poor men might have often “captured” wealthy brides to increase their holdings, particularly as more property became concentrated in women’s possession.

205 Ibid.
206 Herodotus, 6.65.
Reproduction was sanctioned both in and out of marriage, which perhaps accounted for Sparta’s alleged lack of prostitutes. If a Spartiate man was unable to produce children, he often introduced an admired fellow citizen to his wife in order that the two might procreate. Children produced from this union contributed to Sparta’s body of citizen-soldiers without reducing the inheritance of the original husband’s children. This practice, known as wife-sharing or husband-doubling, probably emerged in the fifth century as a result of Sparta’s growing problem of oligarchia. The degree of female agency in wife-sharing / husband-doubling is uncertain, although Xenophon asserts that women benefited from this practice because they gained power in two households.

Spartiate women’s influence was not solely confined to their key role in teknopoiia. They were able to own property and, by the middle of the fourth century, reportedly due to the number of heiresses and the size of dowries, held two-fifths of Sparta’s land-holdings. Spartan heiresses, women who inherited in absence of a male heir, were called patrouchoi. Given the etymological similarity of the term to the Cretan patrōiōkos, like patrōiōkoi, patrouchoi may have retained control over their inheritances throughout their lives. By contrast, the epikleroi (heiresses) of Athens ceded control of their property to their eldest sons when they came of age. Additionally, in both Athens and Cretan Gortyn, most married or betrothed heiresses

207 Plutarch, Life of Lykourgos, 9.6. Sparta may have had hetairai by the classical period (see Athenaeus, Deipnosophistae 12.34), but very little evidence for prostitution exists.
209 Xenophon, Constitution of the Lakedaimonians, 1.9.
210 Aristotle, Politics, 1270a.
211 Hodkinson, Property and Wealth, 105.
were forced to wed their next of kin on inheriting their parents’ property.212 In Sparta, they were permitted to retain their existing or intended spouse.213

Certain marital practices in Sparta suggest that even women with male siblings may have inherited family property. Polybius indicates that it was common for three, four, or more brothers to share a wife.214 This practice, adelphic polyandry, is cross-culturally associated with female property ownership; at Sparta, brothers, concerned about the division of their inheritance, might have combined their resources in order to marry a wealthy woman.215 Uterine half-sibling marriages (marriages between children of the same mother but different fathers) also hint at universal female inheritance.216 This practice would have concentrated the siblings’ parents’ property.

Women probably received part of their inheritance in the form of a “pre-mortem inheritance,” what Aristotle calls a “dowry.”217 This pre-mortem inheritance would have been given to a daughter on the occasion of her marriage. Its size would have been based on the size of inheritance she expected to receive on her parents’ deaths. In Gortyn, women received half of the inheritance that their brothers received; this may have been Spartan practice, as well, as Gortyn’s model of inheritance produces the 2:5 male-female proportion of land-owners that Aristotle bemoans in Sparta.218

212 Except in circumstances hinging on production of an heir (Hodkinson 2000, 95).
213 Ibid.
214 Polybius, 12.6b.8.
217 Ibid. 100.
218 Ibid.
While Aristotle situates female “license” in early Sparta, in most histories, women became increasingly visible in classical and post-classical Sparta. As the number of Spartan citizens declined, war casualties began to have a larger proportional impact. The death of 400 Spartiates at the battle of Leuktra in 371 BCE would have eliminated a fourth of Sparta’s citizens; a similar loss in 480 BCE would have eliminated only a twentieth. With the deaths of husbands and brothers, the number of property-holding widows and the size of female inheritances would have increased. Given women’s exclusion from the communal mess and the hoplite army, as well as Spartan restrictions on dress and ornamentation, women had few outlets for the deployment of their economic resources, and, thus, may have accumulated significant amounts of wealth. Some men probably had to rely on their wives’ kleroi, as well as their own, in order to produce their communal mess dues, increasing women’s power over their husbands.

Religion

Like Athens, Sparta worshiped the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon. The patron deity of Sparta was Athena; her cult site on the Spartan acropolis has been excavated, but it has yielded comparatively little archaeological information. Athena’s festival was probably the Promacheia, attested but once by Athenaeus. Little is known of this festival, except that it appeared to include perioikoi and a solemn procession of the boys of the agôgê.

219 Aristotle, Politics 1270a.
220 Hodkinson, “Female Property Ownership,” 121.
221 Athenaeus, Deipnosophistae, 674a-b.
Interestingly, although Athena was the patron deity of Sparta, the Promacheia does not appear to have been Sparta’s primary annual festival; this was the Hyakinthia. The Hyakinthia took place at the Sanctuary of Apollo and Hyakinthos in Amyklai, just outside central Sparta. In myth, Hyakinthos was a Spartan youth beloved of Apollo, whom Apollo accidentally killed with a discus. The Hyakinthia both mourned Hyakinthos’ death and celebrated his subsequent apotheosis. As relayed by Athenaeus, the Hyakinthia took place over three days.\(^{222}\) For the first day, participants mourned the death of Hyakinthos; they did not eat bread, sing the paean to Apollo, or practice the regular rituals of \textit{thuein}. On the second and third days, feasting, dancing, and celebration occurred. Members of all age groups and genders in the citizen class participated in the Hyakinthia. Cartledge sees it as emphasizing a division between the Spartan countryside and its central \textit{polis}; while the Promacheia welcomed \textit{perioikoi}, the Hyakinthia permitted only citizens a role in its processions and contests.\(^{223}\) N. Richer believes that it may have constituted a rite of passage for Spartan young people and legitimised Spartan \textit{paederasty}.\(^{224}\)

About one kilometer south of the sanctuary of Hyakinthos at Amyklai, a votive dump from the shrine of the Trojan War prophetess Alexandra/Kassandra and Agamemnon (see Chapter One) has been located.\(^{225}\) The dump includes terracotta figurines, miniature vases, pottery, and metal objects. It also includes a large number of Lakonian hero plaques (see Chapter One). One basic type features a seated male with a \textit{kantharos} (drinking vessel) before a snake. Another shows a seated male with

\(^{222}\) Athenaeus, \textit{Deipnosophistae}, 139d.  
a standing female; a snake is between them, feeding from the female’s *phiale* (libation vessel). These hero reliefs are common across Lakonia; when coupled with the sanctuary of Hyakinthos, the Menelaion, and three other potential *heroa* (hero shrines) across Lakonia, in Sparta, Angelona, and on the road to Megalopolis from Sparta, it becomes apparent that formal heroic cult was quite common in Lakedaimon.

The most prominent cult site in Sparta may have been the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Limnai. Excavation of the Orthia site has yielded a rich variety of well-preserved votives.226 These votives were recovered in clearly-stratified deposits, having been protected both by a layer of sand, deposited before the sanctuary’s sixth-century BCE reconstruction, and a third century CE Roman amphitheater. This amphitheater was constructed to accommodate bloodthirsty tourists who desired to observe the ritualistic whipping of youths, often to death, at the altar of Artemis Orthia. The spectacle and the degree of violence in the ritual were Roman elaborations on Spartan cult practice. Before Roman times, this ritual, the *diamastigōsis*, was probably a rite of passage for adolescent boys. Both Plato and Xenophon briefly reference a ritual in which boys were whipped, but not to death, as they attempted to steal cheeses from Orthia’s altar.227

The goddess originally worshiped at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia may not have been Artemis. Although some dedications recovered from the sanctuary are directed towards Artemis Orthia, most early dedications are directed towards Orthia alone, and both contemporary classicists and ancient scholars have failed to find a

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plausible explanation for the attribute “Orthia.” Perhaps Orthia was the original object
of worship at this site, a goddess of Dorian or Phoenician origin.\textsuperscript{228} Orthia’s
association with nature and fertility, marked by a proliferation of animal votives and
figures with erect phalloi, may have encouraged her identification with the goddess
Artemis.

All of the above sites could have been regularly visited by members of all
strata of Spartan society. We know next to nothing of helots’ religious practices.
Domestic helots probably conducted their religious activities in the same manner as
the chattel-slave, “on the fringes of his master’s,” but we do not know whether or not
rural helots constructed their own shrines or had their own festivals.\textsuperscript{229} Perioikoi did,
but they worshiped the same deities as the Spartiates and may have frequented the
same shrines.\textsuperscript{230}

Sparta was famously superstitious. Besides the spiritual primacy of the
Spartan diarchs, with their divine ancestry, elaborate funerals, and leadership in cult
practice, considerable weight was accorded to oracles. The Pythioi, officials with the
sole responsibility of consulting the oracle at Delphi, were known only in Sparta.
Colonization, governmental structure (that is, the Great Rhetra), and warfare were all
sanctioned by the Delphic oracle. Spartan respect for seers was such that, according
to Herodotus, the only two foreigners to be granted Spartan citizenship were the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{228} For discussion of Orthia’s Dorian origin, see Dawkins et al. (1929), 399-406. For discussion of
Orthia’s Phoenician origins see J. B. Carter, “The Masks of Orthia,”\textit{ American Journal of Archaeology}
\textsuperscript{229} R. Parker, “Spartan Religion” in \textit{Classical Sparta}, ed. A. Hodkinson, (Norman, Oklahoma:
\textsuperscript{230} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Iamid seer Tisamenus and his brother Hagis. Tisamenus’ prophecies brought Sparta victory in five battles.

Oracular sanction and divination were particularly significant in war. By Xenophon’s account, multiple preliminary and crossing-sacrifices accompanied Spartan forays into foreign territory. A herd of animals followed the Spartan army on its campaigns, to be sacrificed at the bidding of the Spartan diarch. On three different occasions during the Peloponnesian Wars, the Spartan invasion of the Argolid was abandoned due to inauspicious border sacrifices. Sacrifice both sanctioned and legitimated Spartan military exploits; R. Parker notes that “a state which before going to war declares ceremonially that its cause is just is insisting on its adherence to certain rules.”

Conclusion

Particularities of Spartan history and social institutions suggest that we should resist simply assimilating and analyzing the Menelaion within a pan-Hellenic framework. Worship at the Menelaion took place within a particularly Spartan social context; the concerns of the Lakedaimonians did not necessarily coincide with those of those of the Athenians, and the benefits which they hoped to achieve from worship at the Menelaion may not have been the same. As classical archaeology has been dominated by the study of Athens, assimilation of Sparta to pan-Hellenic analysis ultimately assimilates the Laedaimonian polis to study of Athens. In doing so, one would fail to

231 Herodotus, 9.33-35.
232 Ibid., 9.35.
233 Xenophon, Constitution of the Lakedaimonians, 13.2-5.
234 Thucydides, 5.54.1, 55.3, 116.1.
account for Sparta’s militaristic, communitarian male culture, the power and visibility
of upper-class women, and the particular genre of tensions between classes and
ethnicities engendered by the Messenian Wars, differences which made Sparta
foreign even to its Greek contemporaries.
Figure 2.1 Map of the Greece
Detail of map from Harry’s Greece Travel Guides
Image source: http://www.greeceathensaegeaninfo.com/a-greece-travel/a-maps/map-ancient-pel-war-lg.jpg
Figure 2.2 Sparta’s ancient holdings, c. 545 BCE.
Map by P. Cartledge, Sparta and Lakonia (London: Routledge, 1979), 2.
Figure 2.3 Lakonian bronze figure of running girl  c. 550 BCE – 540 BCE
Collection of National Archaeological Museum at Athens
Author’s drawing, adapted from
http://cache.daylife.com/imageserve/01Jbb8K6ee04I/340x.jpg
Figure 2.4 Lakonian mirror with support in the form of a nude girl c. 550 BCE
Findspot: Southern Italy
Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Photograph by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
Image source: http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/images/h2/h2_38.11.3.jpg
Chapter Three:
Helen and Menelaos in Sparta

Three kilometers east-south-east of the center of modern Sparta, where the Magoula flows into the Eurotas, yellow-red marled hills rise up from the riverbank (see Figure 3.1). These hills have long been identified with the region Therapne, cited by Polybius, Isokrates, and Pausanias as the location of the heroic cult of Helen of Troy and her husband Menelaos. A conglomerate structure located on a narrow plateau in these hills near the modern chapel of Hagios Elias (the prophet Elijah) was identified with this shrine, the Menelaion, as early as 1833 by L. Ross. Ross undertook several days of excavation at the so-called Menelaion in the early nineteenth century, recovering a number of lead votives of the type recognized as typically Lakonian.

In December 1888, Heinrich Schliemann, fresh from his discoveries at Troy, Mycenae, and Tiryns, wrote:

“I came to Sparta with great hopes: the more so since the hills to the north-east of the Eurotas were known as the Menelaion, where Menelaus and Helen were worshipped in a temple...It is true that the site of ancient Sparta is strewn with classical and later sherds; but, by an irony of fate, the whole of the rising ground upon which we could have expected to find a prehistoric royal palace contains not even a rubbish-dump, and there is nowhere the slightest trace of prehistoric sherds or building-blocks.237

Ironically, the following year, C. Tsountas identified Mycenaean remains upon this same “rising ground,” adjacent to the shrine of Helen and Menelaos. He dug several

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236 Isokrates, oration 10.63; Polybius, Histories, 5.14, 21 ff; Pausanias, Description of Greece, 3.9.
237 Qtd. and trans. in Hooker 1980, 22-23.
test pits but, unsatisfied with his finds, did not fully excavate the site. Therapne was the object of archaeological inquiry once more in the nineteenth century when P. Kastriotis partially cleared the Menelaion shrine, revealing the conglomerate platform now visible and unearthing more Lakonian lead votives.

In 1909, encouraged by shepherds’ reports of finds near the alleged Menelaion, the British School at Athens, led by J. P. Droop, M. S. Thompson, and A. J. B. Wace conducted the first thorough excavation of the Menelaion site.\(^{238}\) They cleared the remains of the Menelaion shrine and dug several trial pits in the area immediately surrounding it. On the platform of the shrine, they discovered the walls and floor of a sixth-century BCE structure, either a storage chamber or the house of the shrine’s caretaker. They dated the standing shrine to the fifth-century BCE but established a period between the Late Geometric and Early Hellenistic periods for the site’s use. They drew extensive analogies between the Menelaion and the sanctuary of the fertility goddess Orthia / Artemis Orthia, excavated by the British School in the previous year.\(^{239}\) Similarities between votive offerings at the two sites led the Menelaion’s excavators to conclude that Helen, like Orthia, was “an old mother or nature goddess.”\(^{240}\) This analysis fit closely with emerging interest in mother goddess theory, not yet appropriated by the ecofeminist movement, but strong after the first publication of James Frazer’s *Golden Bough* in 1890 and the discovery of the Venus of Willendorf in 1908.

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\(^{239}\) Dawkins, et al., 1929.

\(^{240}\) Wace, et al. 1909, 109
The British School’s 1909 excavation at the Menelaion also revealed a Late Mycenaean structure of unbaked brick coated with painted plaster on the eastern peak of the Menelaion ridge. This structure underwent further excavation, headed by R. Dawkins, in 1910.241 Its rectangular floor plan was recovered, as well as three Late Mycenaean kraters and two clay jar sealings. The building, “Dawkin’s house,” appeared to have been destroyed by fire.

Therapne was permitted a sixty-year respite from further excavation until, in the 1970s, H. Catling headed another British School dig in the area.242 He and his crew focused chiefly on the Mycenaean site at the Menelaion, attempting to detect continuity between the Mycenaean remains and the post-Mycenaean cult. They isolated three periods in the plan of Dawkins’ house (see Figure 3.2). The first period, known as Mansion 1, dates to the second half of the fifteenth century BCE. Mansion 1 was a south-facing, two-storey building, planned as three parallel units, the central one being of the megaron type.243 The megaron is generally considered to be the basic structural unit for the regional palaces of the Mycenaean era, the buildings in which Helen and Menelaos, were they historical figures, would have lived. These megaron-type “palaces” may have been the central regional administrative units during the Mycenaean era. Mansion 1, however, significantly predates those recovered at Tiryns, Mycenae and Pylos.

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243 A megaron-type building is a rectangular structure with at least one room and an entrance in one of its short sides (R. L. N. Barber, “The Origins of the Mycenaean Palace,” in Sanders, ed., 1992, 14).
Not long after its construction, Mansion 1 suffered serious damage, likely due to an earthquake. It was rebuilt on the same site, reoriented, and withdrawn ten meters from its original wall. The burial of the walls of the new building in over a meter of fill and the Mansion’s relocation from the edge of the hillside suggest a concern for stability. Erosion on the north and south sides of the hill prevent a full understanding of this second structure’s blueprint, but it may, too, have been a megaron-type structure. The mansion appears to have been abandoned at the close of LHIIIA1. Only in the thirteenth century was it partially rehabilitated. This last structure, called Mansion 3 by Catling, is the building that Dawkins excavated in 1910.

Catling and his crew located still more Bronze Age remains in the hills around the Menelaion (see Figure 3.1). North Hill, north of the Menelaion ridge, contained the remains of prehistoric dwellings in unstratified wash levels, associated with LHIIIB pottery. Aetos Hill, south of the Menelaion ridge, contained a surface deposit of LHIIIIB2 pottery. By the thirteenth century BCE, Therapne may be assumed to have been a fairly significant habitation area.

While J. T. Hooker later argued that the mansions on the Menelaion ridge were too minor to have been Mycenaean palaces, in his 1975 excavation report Catling unequivocally stated that these mansions were “surely the homes and administrative centres for successive Masters of Lakonia,” the forerunners of the thirteenth-century palaces at Mycenae, Tiryns, and Pylos.244 The function of Therapne’s mansions has little bearing on their relationship with the Menelaion. Continuity has not been established between the mansions and the Menelaion; a gap of five hundred years separates Mansion 3’s last occupation from the earliest deposits

244 Hooker 1980, 32; H. Catling 1975, 264.
at the Menelaion. The Menelaion’s worshipers probably had no acquaintance with the
prior status of the ruined Mansion, particularly given the fact that Dark Age Lakonia
appears to have undergone significant depopulation.245

Given Coldstream’s theory that tomb and heroic cult arose from post-
Mycenaean Greeks’ awe at Mycenaean structures (see Chapter One), the condition of
the ruins around the Menelaion ridge during the earliest period in which the site
shows evidence for cult activity may bear on our analysis of the Menelaion.
Unfortunately, the mansions’ condition is well-nigh impossible to determine. None of
the Menelaion’s historical attesters reference ruins at the site, but not all of them
necessarily visited Sparta, and Pausanias, at least, shows a marked disinterest in
ruins.246 He _does_ place the shrine at the tomb of Helen and Menelaos, but, while the
Mycenaean Mansions contain nine burials, none are monumental, and none show the
post-Mycenaean depositions that would mark them as centers of tomb cult.247

As no Mycenaean structural remains are located directly on the Menelaion
site, it seems likely that worship was not oriented towards the nearby Mycenaean
habitation site. Worship at may have instead focused on the rocky knoll around which
the extant shrine was constructed; this knoll may have been believed to be the
tumulus of Helen and Menelaos.

Catling’s 1970s excavations around Therapne identified a second cult site on
North Hill near another knoll, “the counterpart of the knoll on the Menelaion Hill.”248
Due to heavy erosion, nothing remains of the shrine, but a test dug near the west scarp

245 Cartledge 2002, 61.
247 Pausanias, 3.9.
of the hill unearthed a deposit of miniature vases and fragmentary terracotta horse-
and-rider figures. Should further excavation occur at this site, and should this 
excavation recover epigraphic attestation to the object(s) of worship at this shrine, 
one might conceivably determine whether these identical knolls were believed to be 
tombs. If the object of worship at the shrine on North Hill was a hêrôs, rather than a 
theos, this knoll, as well as the one at the Menelaion, may have been believed to be a 
tumulus.

Catling’s excavation likewise recovered the first epigraphic attestations to 
Helen and Menelaos’ worship at the site, finally corroborating Ross' hypothesis of 
150 years earlier. A bronze pointed aryballos (a small, narrow-necked flask, perhaps 
meant to hold oil or perfume), dating to the second quarter of the seventh century 
BCE was recovered from the terrace fills of a trench northeast of the extant shrine 
(see Figure 3.3). The aryballos is inscribed “Deinis dedicated these to [Helen, wife of] 
Menelaos.” The name Deinis is attested in Pindar's N. 8.26 (Deinidos, genitive); 
here, Helen's worshiper is definitely male. A second dedication to Helen was found in 
this same trench in the form of a c. 570 BCE bronze harpax (see Figure 3.4) an 
instrument of unknown use, bearing the inscription “for Helen.” The following 
year, Catling recovered Menelaos' first inscribed offering from the bottom of the 
cistern (see Figure 3.5). This blue limestone stela, dating to the early fifth century 
BCE, on which was once mounted a bronze statuette, is inscribed “Euthikrenes 
dedicated [this] / to Menelaos.”

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249 Discussion of the aryballos’ inscription occurs in H. Catling and H. Cavanagh, “Two Inscribed 
250 Discussion of the aryballos’ inscription occurs in Catling and Cavanagh 1976, 153-156.
H. Catling’s son Richard continued excavations at Therapne in the 1980s on a terrace on the southern slope of the Menelaion hill. R. Catling’s site consisted of several wash layers of sub-Geometric and early archaic votive offerings and the walls and floor of late thirteenth- and twelfth-century BCE structures. Some votives had washed down from the Menelaion, including a sixth-century BCE bronze phiale dedicated to Menelaos, but others showed joins with the wash level containing the Mycenaean structural remains, meaning that they were not secondarily deposited. According to R. Catling’s analysis, the Mycenaean remains, a “rather unprepossessing heap of rubble,” were linked with the Heroic Age, and associated votives constituted an offering to a Bronze Age hero or heroine. While R. Catling suggests that his deposit owes its restricted lifetime to the construction of the Menelaion higher on the hill, if Mycenaean structures were a focus of cult practice, it would make little sense to relocate their worship away from the remains. We can thus conclude that this was a votive dump.

The true center of worship, the Menelaion proper, can be divided into several stratigraphic and architectural stages. The Menelaion’s first period commences in the late eighth or early seventh century. It lacks associated architecture, beyond several blocks of soft white poros, which owe their early date entirely to their association with early votive deposits and give no clues to their in situ configuration. During this

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253 R. Catling 1985, 216.
254 R. Catling 1985, 210-211.
period, the cult site may have had no more than a small altar, perhaps surrounded by a *temenos*, a piece of land marked off as sacred.\textsuperscript{255}

The mid sixth century BCE marks the next phase of cult practice at the Menelaion, in which a small monumental structure was built. This structure was of poros blocks, all of which were found out of context, either reused in the extant structure or used in fills. A large, relatively shallow pit, the Great Pit, was cut around this time. Its nature and function are unknown, but upcast from the pit was probably used to build the platform on which the sixth-century shrine was constructed. Could the pit have provided access to Helen and Menelaos as *hêrôes*, chthonic deities? Perhaps the pit was an egress into the world of Helen’s brothers the Dioskouroi, who were said to have lived under the earth at Therapne.\textsuperscript{256} However, no epigraphic attestations to the divine twins’ worship have been found at the Menelaion.

The sixth-century shrine, known as the “Old Menelaion,” was probably pedimental, roofed with terracotta tiles, and decorated with at least one painted terracotta disc acroterion (see Figure 3.6). Due to the site's poor stratigraphy, the Old Menelaion cannot be closely dated, but its construction may be linked with Sparta’s success in the Messenian Wars. The post-Messenian-War influx of wealth into Sparta would have provided the resources for the shrine's construction, and Sparta's victory in the wars would have provided the occasion.

The Old Menelaion survived only into the fifth century BCE, when it was taken down and replaced with the conglomerate structure, which persists in a ruined state today (see Figure 3.7). Stratigraphic tests suggest that the classical shrine may

\textsuperscript{255} Catling 1976-1977, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{256} Alkman, fragment 7.
have been built on the foundation of the Old Menelaion, although W. Cavanaugh and R. Laxton suggest that the Old Menelaion was actually the structure identified in 1909 as a storeroom or shrine’s attendant’s home.257 The classical shrine is composed of a monument, identified only by its rectangular floor plan, on an earthen platform, surrounded by a retaining wall of large ashlar blocks of conglomerate; the entire structure is 22 by 16 meters on ground plan. The retaining walls of the terrace may have been crowned with a limestone and marble triglyph frieze, surrounded by a coping containing statues.258 The partial foundations of a ramp remain on the platform; this ramp probably led from the platform's southwest corner, along its west side, doubling back around its north and east sides to reach whatever structure was located at the summit of the platform, probably a small temple, embellished with at least one marble disc acroterion. The classical period Menelaion was one of the largest monumental buildings in Lakonia; like all Spartan temples, however, it did not have the developed peripteral form of Greece’s most famous temples, like the Parthenon (see Figure 3.8).

Not long after the classical shrine's initial construction, a buttressing conglomerate terrace was built in ashlar on the east and south sides of the retaining wall, increasing the structure’s ground plan to 25.5 by 19.5 meters and providing additional space for major dedications. Around this time can be traced the cutting of a cistern near the north wall of the shrine, the fill of which contained many of the extant structural fragments of the Old Menelaion, as well as H. Catling’s inscribed dedication to Menelaos. The fill itself cannot be earlier than the second century BCE.

258 Part of a marble triglyph from this frieze was recovered in the 1909 excavations.
the date of two Megarian bowls found in separate layers. The cistern probably continued in use as long as the shrine did, as the Eurotas River, the site’s closest water source, was a brief hike downhill.

H. Catling has plausibly suggested that the classical shrine’s construction is connected to “Spartan exhilaration at their part in the defeat of the Persians” in the aftermath of the Persian Wars (499 BCE – 479 BCE).\(^{259}\) Alternatively, the shrine may have been built in the aftermath of the terrible earthquake of 464 BCE, a suggestion bolstered by the concern for stability one sees in the construction of the shrine's buttressing terrace. These suggestions are not mutually exclusive.

Despite Sparta’s role in warding off Persia, and its subsequent gains in the Peloponnesian and Corinthian Wars, worship at the Menelaion had entered a decline by the early fifth century BCE. Most votives at the site precede the fifth century BCE; dedications slow before the shrine’s reconstruction and Sparta’s fourth-century decline. It was not deserted altogether for several centuries. Inscribed fourth- and third-century BCE statuette bases, as well as the aforementioned second-century BCE Megarian bowls have been recovered from the site. Indeed, a single second-century CE bronze fibula recovered from the upper fill of the Great Pit suggests that the site may have been frequented by the occasional worshiper, as well as those with antiquarian interests, even after the site's probable desertion.

The site's parallel decline with that of the Spartan state suggests that worship at the Menelaion was in some way a political or a politically-sanctioned act. Whether or not the site emerged as a location of worship independently of the state, it appears to have been cared for and administered by the state. Third-century BCE stamped

\(^{259}\) H. Catling 1976-1977, 42.
tiles from the site are inscribed *Damosios Athanas Ni*, indicating that the shrine was maintained on the behalf of the people.

The richest deposits of votive offerings from the Menelaion come from the area directly surrounding the platform walls and from the archaeological feature known as the Great Pit. Votive offerings are all secondarily deposited, having washed down from the locations at which they were originally dedicated or having been used in fills. They range broadly in material and form. They are made of bone, bronze, terracotta, lead, and gold. They include sundry paste dedications, like beads and several pierced scarabs, as well as iron implements, including two ploughshares and fragments of assorted weaponry. Ceramics include examples of all Lakonian periods.

We approach the Menelaion's votive offerings with the view that their subject matter can provide clues to the significance of the site for Lakonia's people. Votives’ subjects reflected the desires and the demands of their dedicators; they are relics of worshipers’ self-creation through ritual practice. Stylistic considerations and periodization of artifacts are addressed in great detail in the British School’s publication of the Menelaion’s 1909 excavation, so I will not address them at any great length here.

By far, the most common votives at the Menelaion site are of cheap lead. These lead votives, probably due to their number, contain the widest range of subject matter of all materials at the site. They depict a broad range of animals, including lions, birds, horses, rampant goats, cocks, and particularly in the shrine's later period, deer (see Figure 3.9). Some of these animals, like lions and horses, also show up in other materials, like bronze and terracotta. Each animal probably had a particular
meaning for its dedicator, but these meanings are difficult to determine. Waterbirds
and lions are common motifs in orientalizing Greek art and suggest eastern stylistic
influence; the lion, in particular, would have been an exotic creature. The goat, on the
other hand, was a common farm animal. Horses, too, were commonly bred in
Lakonia, although their breeding required greater resources than did goat-farming.
Horse votive offerings may reference aristocracy or heroism; horses are common in
the iconography of heroes in sixth-century totemmahl reliefs and Lakonian hero
reliefs.

The Menelaion’s excavators have, on the whole, seen this range of animal
votive offerings to be a reflection of Helen’s status as a fertility goddess. This is
perhaps an oversimplication; a votive offering of a horse quite clearly holds different
associations than does a votive offering of a lion. However, the inclusion of common
farm animals, like the goat, in the votive subject matter, when coupled with the
ploughshares found at the site, suggests that the cult at the Menelaion was thought to
have some bearing on crops’ and animals’ fertility. As Spartiates were not directly
involved in farming, these votive offerings may have been dedicated by non-citizens,
like helots and perioikoi. Some mythological animals are also included in the votive
assemblage, like sphinxes and centaurs, depicted in lead and terracotta, but these
would not have been connected with fertility.

Besides the aforementioned real and mythological animals, men appeared in
the lead votives of the Menelaion in the form of soldiers (see Figure 3.10). It is likely
that Menelaos was meant to be the object of these offerings, for there is no reason to
associate Helen with war and weaponry. Despite her central status in the Trojan War,
Helen was an object of contention, not a contender. Menelaos, on the other hand, though a cuckolded husband, was still a doughty warrior. Men or women could have dedicated these soldier figures to him, praying for the safety of the realm or the safety of Lakedaemonian soldiers. Because helots and perioikoi were core constituents of the Spartiate army, particularly with rising oligarchia, the role of the Menelaion cult in warriors’ lives probably transcended class and status differences.

The lead votives of the Menelaion likewise include a large number of jewelry imitations, particularly from the site’s earlier periods of use (see Figure 3.11). These were probably the offerings of women, substitutes for real jewelry, which rarely appears at the Menelaion site.260 Were these the offerings of upper-class women, whose jewelry this would have imitated? Or were these the offerings of lower-class women, who could not afford to own, much less dedicate, real jewelry? As objects of adornment, they may have constituted prayers to divinely beautiful Helen.

What have been identified as loom weights were located throughout the upper strata of the Menelaion.261 Weaving was the provenance of women in Sparta, as in the rest of Greece, although upper-class women wove only for ritual purposes.262 Helen is associated with weaving twice in Homeric epic; she weaves the exploits of the combatants of the Trojan War, and she makes and embroiders a dress for Telemachus’ future wife.263 Helen’s weaving has been linked to her status as a self-conscious character; it aligns her with Achilles, with his oft-iterated concern for kleos

260 Some beautiful jewelry does appear in the Menelaion’s artifact assemblage, including a number of bronze bull’s head pendants and pomegranates in bronze, silver, and gold.
261 Wace et al. 1909, 124.
263 Homer, Iliad, 3.139-143; Homer, Odyssey, 15.100-109.
(glory), which she shares. 264 Helen’s weaving is a metaphorical construction of narrative. Coupled with her self-consciousness, it aligns her with the epic poet, as well as Achilles. In the case of the cult at the Menelaion, however, it is rather unlikely that the “loom weights” were connected to narrative or kleos; instead, they may have referred to some ritual weaving practice, particularly if deposited by upper-class women, or to regular domestic weaving.

Women are likewise depicted among the lead votives from the Menelaion. Alongside hydrophoroi (water-bearers), Athenas, Gorgons, and female musicians, a number of votives depict women bearing pomegranate offerings. Recall the tale of Persephone who, abducted by Hades, the god of the underworld, was confined to the earth’s nether regions, while her mother Demeter mourned her above. 265 While awaiting rescue, Persephone yielded to hunger and ate four pomegranate seeds. This fated her to live in the underworld with Hades for four months of each year, a month for each seed. Clearly, then, the pomegranate has associations with love and fertility, as Persephone’s consumption of the fruit bound her to Hades. Likewise, the pomegranate has chthonic associations, making it an apt offering for a chthonic heroic cult.

These lead votives of women also include a large number of “winged goddesses” of various types (see Figure 3.12). Similar figures have been recovered from the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. They hint at eastern stylistic influence, recalling the winged goddesses of the Egyptians and Phoenicians, like Maat and Astarte. Interestingly, Nemesis, Helen’s mother in the lost epic the Kypria, was often

265 Hesiod, Theogony, 912-914; Hyginus, Fabulae, 146; Apollodorus, Bibliotheca, 5.1 & ff.
depicted with wings. However, because Helen’s connection with Sparta was through her mortal mother Leda, they probably do not depict Nemesis.

Some archaeologists and classicists see depictions of Helen in the terracotta horse-and-rider figures recovered from the site, mostly dating to the post-Lakonian-II period. However, beyond the Menelaion site’s identification with Helen, there is little reason to believe that she is the rider of these figurines. Quite a few of these riders are of indeterminate sex; many are male. Mythologically and iconographically, Helen and Menelaos have no known association with horses. While Helen’s brothers the Dioskouroi are often depicted on horseback and are given the epithet “having good horses” by Pindar, Helen herself has no explicit link with the animal. Indeed, these horse-and-rider figures have also been recovered from the unidentified shrine on North Hill, as well as from the temple of Artemis Orthia. Because horses are often linked with heroism and because they attested to the elite status of their owners, perhaps these riders were meant to depict their upper-class Spartan dedicators.

No famous horse-riding couple is known in Greek mythology or art, although a single male rider appears on three sixth-century BCE Lakonian cups executed by the Rider painter (see Figure 3.13). M. Pipili suggests that this rider is generic; perhaps the Menelaion’s riders were, as well. Because the Menelaion riders lack distinguishing features, while they could conceivably represent Helen and Menelaos,

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266 A large cache of them was located near the building identified by Wace et al. as a storeroom or living quarters for the sanctuary’s caretaker.
267 These could, of course, depict Menelaos.
268 Pindar, Olympian Ode 3, 39; see also Euripides, fragment Antiope.
269 M. Pipili, Laconian Iconography of the Sixth Century B.C. (Oxford: Oxford University Committee for Archaeology, 1987), 76.
I am more inclined to see them, like the Lakonian Rider, as generic figures. They may have been linked to a festival for Helen and Menelaos that, like Apollo’s Hyakinthia, involved a procession of riders. This is, admittedly, conjecture, as no festival for Helen and / or Menelaos has been securely attested thus far. The Heleneia, a festival allegedly celebrating Helen, is attested solely in Hesychius’ fifth-century CE lexicon. Additionally, the Helenophoria of Pollux owes its name to the word helenê (reed), as girls carried reed baskets during this festival.

One woman closely associated with horses certainly appears to have left an offering at the site, a partial dedication on a fragment of a small Doric capital and an abacus, Kyniska I nai. The letter forms of the dedication are consistent with the identification of the monument’s dedicatrix with the Olympic victor Kyniska, mentioned in the preceding chapter. Kyniska was an uncommon name; it means “little hound” and may have hinted at its bearer’s interest in the hunt. A. M. Woodward has restored the second half of the dedication to [Hele]nai, thus “Kyniska … to Helen.” If this Kyniska is the Kyniska of the 396 and 392 BCE Olympics, it is a wonderful coincidence that her offering to Helen has been recovered, particularly given the fact that she was heroized and worshiped alongside the Homeric heroine at the Platanistas in Sparta proper.

We know very little about Helen's sanctuary at the Platanistas, as it has not been archaeologically attested, but interpretation of cult practice associated with the site is quite heavily contested. Pausanias only briefly references Helen’s urban shrine,

271 Pollux, 10.191. While Helen's name shares a root with helenê, this does not mean that the festival was connected to Helen.
272 Wace et al., 1909.
locating it near the tombs of Alkman and Herakles, from which we can determine that it was quite a significant sanctuary.\footnote{Pausanias, 3.9.} Theocritus' “Epithalamium to Helen,” Idyll 18, may reference cult practices occurring at Helen’s urban shrine, as plane trees, from which the Platanistas derived its name, are prominent in the account. However, the poem is quite complicated and may not describe cult practice at all. In the “Epithalamium to Helen,” Spartan girls celebrate Helen's marriage to Menelaos by racing nude, smeared with oil, alongside the Eurotas River. Included in the race is a “tacit beauty competition” with Helen, by whom the girls are naturally defeated.\footnote{Pomeroy 2002, 24.}

At the close of the poem, following Helen’s transition from girlhood to womanhood, the girls garland a plane tree with flowers, pour out oil before it, and cut into its bark the legend “Worship me. I am Helen’s tree.” This section of the poem is as follows:

\begin{quote}
We first a crown of low-growing lotus\footnote{Translation is from Edmunds 2007, 12.} 
having woven will place it on a shady plane-tree.  
First from a silver oil-flask soft oil 
drawing we will let it drip beneath the shady plane-tree. 
Letters will be carved in the bark, so that someone passing by 
may read in Doric: “Reverence me. I am Helen’s tree.”
\end{quote}

Classicists have claimed that the libations at the plane tree and its association with Helen mark her as a goddess of trees and fertility. Unfortunately, no further evidence for this theory exists and no comparanda for Greek tree cult. L. Edmunds chooses to see the poem not as a depiction of tree-worship but as a commemoration of Helen, as she departs from adolescence to marriage: “The flowers are the flowers…[Helen]…once gathered with her friends. The oil is the oil with which she,
along with them, anointed herself when they prepared for the communal gallop.\footnote{Edmunds 2007, 15.}

On this view, “cult practice” may be too strong a descriptor for what occurs in Theocritus’ Idyll.

Helen’s association with trees in Pausanias’ description of Rhodes \textit{is} certainly cultic.\footnote{Pausanias, 3.9-10.} According to Pausanias, the Rhodians recounted a tale, according to which, at the end of the Trojan War, Helen is banished from Lakedaimon. She wanders to Rhodes and comes to stay with Polyxo, the wife of Tlepolemos, a man killed at Troy. Desiring to avenge her husband, Polyxo sends her servants to Helen, dressed as Furies; they hang her from a tree. To commemorate this event, the Rhodians establish a sanctuary of Helen Dendritis. This myth does not support Helen’s conceptualization as a tree daemon, for the mythology supporting the ritual is comes from the Trojan War myth.

Our most famous literary / historical anecdote about the Menelaion occurs in Herodotus.\footnote{Herodotus, 6.61-63.} In this story, a nurse, worried at the ugliness of the baby girl for whom she cares, begins to regularly carry the child several kilometers to the Menelaion ridge to place her before the image of Helen. One day, after leaving the sanctuary, the old nurse comes upon a woman. This woman asks to see the child, strokes her face, and pronounces that she will one day be the most beautiful woman in Sparta. From that day forth, the child grows increasingly beautiful; ultimately, she marries the Spartan diarch Ariston. This anecdote suggests that Helen accompanied girls and

\footnotesize{\bibitem{Edmunds2007}Edmunds 2007, 15.\bibitem{Pausanias}Pausanias, 3.9-10.\bibitem{Herodotus}Herodotus, 6.61-63.}
women throughout their lives.\textsuperscript{279} Interestingly, this story directly connects the primary trait of the mythological Helen, her beauty, with her cult function. Such an explicit link between ritual and mythological Helen is nowhere else visible in the Menelaion cult.

Because Helen’s cult practices lack an explicit relationship with her mythological narrative, many classicists have suggested that Helen is descended from an Indo-European fertility deity.\textsuperscript{280} This argument reconciles the lack of narrative in Helen's votive dedications and ritual practices with her mythological narrative by suggesting that the two are not connected. The case for Helen’s alleged Indo-European origins rests principally on her brothers’, the Dioskouroi’s, association with the Ashvin twins of the Rig Veda. The Ashvins are horsemen whose function is to provide help to those in need; their rescue of the sun princess Suryâ brings about the rising and setting of the sun. The Dioskouroi's character as twin saviors, often associated with horses, has led to such unequivocal declarations as the following by West: “Is there anywhere in the world of learning such a churl, such a sullen curmudgeon of a man, as would decline to believe that…[the Ashvins]…were identical in origin with the Greek Dioscuroi?”\textsuperscript{281}

Suryâ's rescue by the Ashvin twins is thought to have as its Greek counterpart a tale recounted by Apollodorus, Diodorus Siculus, and Plutarch.\textsuperscript{282} In this tale, Theseus, the king of Athens and vanquisher of the Minotaur, and his friend

\textsuperscript{279} If the lead votives depicting women with pomegranates were connected to human fertility, they were probably the offerings of adults.
\textsuperscript{281} West 1975, 9. See Edmunds 2007 for an argument against the Dioskouroi’s association with the Ashvins.
\textsuperscript{282} Apollodorus, 3.7; Diodorus Siculus, Biblioteca historia, iv, 63, 1-3; Plutarch, Theseus, 31-34.
Peirithoos, king of Larissa, make a pact to carry off daughters of Zeus together. Theseus chooses to abduct Helen, still a young girl. He and Peirithoos seize her as she is dancing at the sanctuary of Artemis Orthia. Theseus secrets her away to Aphidna in Attica, and he and the Larissan king journey to the underworld to seize Persephone for Peirithoos. While the kings are trapped in the underworld, having utterly failed in their kidnapping attempt, Helen’s brothers rescue her.

If this tale is not prominent enough in Helen and the Dioskouroi's mythology to link her to Suryâ and them to the Ashvins, some scholars suggest that the Atreidai, Menelaos and Agamemnon, are hypostases of Helen's brothers. Although, unlike the Dioskouroi, Agamemnon and Menelaos function separately, according to pseudo-Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women*, the brothers woo Helen jointly.\(^{283}\) That is, Agamemnon woos her for his brother, Menelaos.

Other associations between Helen and her alleged Indo-European foremother are drawn through linguistics. Helen’s Homeric epithet *Dios thugatêr* (Daughter of Zeus, Od. 4.227) is cognate with the epithet of the dawn goddess Ushas of the Rig Veda, *Divas duhitár* (Daughter of Dyaus). It bears note, however, that Artemis, Athena, and Aphrodite (all, likewise, daughters of Zeus) share this epithet with Helen. Other linguistic connections between Helen and sun goddesses are less plausible and involve the same tenacious imagination that made of the Odyssey a nature allegory.\(^{284}\)

\(^{283}\) The date for the *Catalogue of Women* is unclear; what can be said most surely is that it was written after 631 BCE (fragments 215 and 216 M-W reference the city of Cyrene, which was founded in 631 BCE).

\(^{284}\) West says of Roscher’s 1889 *Mythological Lexicon* that “splendid ingenuity was employed on working out, for example, that Odysseus was the sun, Penelope the earth, and her 118 suitors the days of winter (118 being a third of 354, the number of days in a lunar year). Odysseus appeared among them in beggar’s garb, i.e. shining weakly, and liberated the earth from winter; the twelve axes that he shot through in order to reclaim her represented, naturally, the signs of the zodiac" (West 1975, 15).
Beyond her association with twin brothers, the Dioskouroi, Helen shares no attributes with the conjectured Indo-European goddess with whom she is associated, beyond her epithet, *Dios thugatêr*. While linking Helen to an Indo-European deity could provide an explanation for attributes that are not explicit in her mythology, it likewise provides too much fodder for archaeologically baseless conclusions about her worship. This Indo-European genealogy is, then, not a particularly useful way to approach analysis of Helen's worshipers; indeed, it focuses on Helen to the exclusion of the culture that produced her. Even if Helen's originates from an Indo-European foremother, her worshipers associated her with the Homeric heroine, not with the Indo-European deity.

Links between Helen and Indo-European goddesses depend too heavily on a problematic “mother goddess” theory. R. E. Meagher's analysis of Helen invokes M. Gimbutas' controversial narrative of “the Kurgan migration,” situating Helen in relation to this tradition.  

According to Gimbutas, the Kurgans, patriarchal, Indo-European horse-breeders, migrated into Europe and subjugated its peaceful, matriarchal, goddess-worshiping people; Helen would be a post-Kurgan descendant of Old Europe's mother goddess. However, Gimbutas' argument is flawed on both archaeological and feminist grounds. The “mother goddess” figurines from which Gimbutas extrapolates a matriarchal, goddess-worshiping culture may not have been cult objects, and, even if they were, goddess worship does not imply a matriarchal culture. Some of these “mother goddess” figurines may not even be female. Gimbutas’ theory, particularly as appropriated by ecofeminism, perpetuates gender

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stereotypes. It maintains an oppressive dichotomy between women, nature, and emotion and men, civilization, and the intellect.

Ironically, in the often androcentric field of archaeology, Indo-European goddess interpretations of the Menelaion tend to ignore the significance of Helen's husband Menelaos. Menelaos was not as popular an object of cult or literature as his wife and has been more rarely referenced in discussions of Indo-European deities, but, given the preponderance of lead votives depicting warriors and the two dedications recovered at the site, he was probably a significant presence at the Menelaion. Note, in addition, that the site derives its name from him, although this arguably reflects the misogyny of the site’s historians, as well as Menelaos’ significance.

While Helen and Menelaos were worshiped individually, the cult in its entirety was constructed around the couple. The votive depictions of pomegranates and pomegranate-bearing worshipers at the Menelaion symbolize erotic love and fertility. These offerings reflected Helen and Menelaos’ couple status, although many may have been solely directed towards Helen, given her literary links with beauty and a plausible connection between beauty and fertility in Spartan culture.286 The irony that the marriage of Helen and Menelaos achieved exemplum status, particularly clear in Theocritus' Idyll 18, cannot escape the dullest of classicists, but Helen’s branding as archetypal adulteress is more a feature of later literature than of Homeric epic (although Helen indulges in quite vitriolic self-blame in the Iliad).287 In the Iliad, Helen is a penitent adulteress; in the Odyssey, she is, if oddly powerful, resigned to

286 Particularly in the poetry of Alkman; see Cartledge 1981, 96.
287 Edmunds notes that recent studies of Theocritus’ Idyll have stressed its “playfulness and irony” (Edmunds 2007, 13).
domesticity. West calls the Helen of Homer “the most marvelous, sincere, sweet-natured woman in ancient literature, with the possible exception of Sophocles' Deianeira.” 288 If Homeric epic contained the potential for Helen's harsh treatment by the sixth century BCE poet Alkaeus, by fifth and fourth century BCE Athenian tragedians, as well as her status as the object of fifth and fourth century BCE epideictic encomia, which necessarily suggested her indefensibility, one must recall the fact that not all heroic cults centered around admirable figures. Philip of Kroton, for example, was worshiped by hostile Segesta for his great beauty. 289 Helen and Menelaos were Lakonia's primary links to the Heroic Age. If not good, they were great, and greatness transcends goodness in many Greek heroes and heroines.

While Helen and Menelaos had particular cultic specialties, loosely connected to their mythical personae, their cult may have also received less directly related prayers. Perhaps the difficulty with properly relating and categorizing votives is due to the fact that worshipers sought the heroic couple’s benediction in areas that did not explicitly relate to Helen and Menelaos’ cultic or mythical characters. Their personalities were probably not so distinctly drawn that they heard only particular petitions. They were, first and foremost, protectors of Lakedaemon.

Exploring the gendered nature of the cult is significant for analysis, as it helps determine whether or not the Menelaion cult reflected or promoted gender divisions that we see in non-ritual Spartan culture. If the Menelaion site was a shared space, it may have been one of the few locales in which people of all sexes and genders interacted. To the extent that we can attribute to Sparta a gender binary, it appears to

288 West 1975, 3.
289 Herodotus, Histories, 5.47.
have been created and maintained spatially; men and women performed many of the same activities but in different spaces. If the Menelaion were not explicitly gendered space, given the similarities between certain features of male and female upbringing and concerns in Sparta (namely, engagement in athletics, but also their contributions to warfare), it could have been a place in which gendered lines were crossed.

One of our most significant artifacts in analyzing gender at the Menelaion is the inscribed aryballos from Deinis recovered by Hector Catling. Because of this, we know for a fact that Helen’s cult, at least, did not solely receive worshipers of her sex; Deinis’ offering to Helen attests to Helen’s significance to males as well as females. If other suggestions that both Helen and Menelaos were significant to people of either sex are conjectural, this evidence is certain.

The Menelaion site probably attracted a wide spectrum of people. The areas to which we can particularly link Helen and Menelaos’ cult – namely, reproduction and war – were the concern of all of the inhabitants of Lakonia, and the relative cost of many of the recovered votive offerings was within an affordable range for all Spartan classes. The Menelaion was probably a significant gathering place for all who lived in the cult’s general vicinity, a place in which a shared collective identity could be enacted through repeated ritual practice.

That the cult site’s primary building stages can be directly correlated with Spartan success in battle should come as no surprise. War brought both the wealth needed to construct new shrines and a period of readjustment. More prosaically, war further necessitated teknopoiia; perhaps the shrine’s elaboration during and after war times attested to the Spartan state’s concern for its declining citizenry.

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290 This is, admittedly, a feature of much of Spartan archaeology, due to its characteristic lead votives.
If Lakonian helots and *perioikoi* inhabited Lakonia prior to the Dorian migration, it is worth noting that Helen and Menelaos would have been the ancestors not of the Spartiates and their kings, who were descended from the Herakleidai and their Dorian followers, but of their helots and *perioikoi*. Intentionally or unintentionally, the cult of Helen and Menelaos at Therapne could have been a focal point for the gathering of the various strata and ethnolinguistic groups of Lakedaimonian society. The Menelaion cult could have built solidarity between the upper-class Spartiates, for whom Helen and Menelaos would have been exempla due to their status, and between lower-class Lakedaimonians, for whom Helen and Menelaos would have been ancestors. Certainly, Lakonian helots and *perioikoi* were not nearly as openly rebellious as their Messenian counterparts, attesting perhaps to a greater integration in Spartan society.

Although the cult at the Menelaion did have particular significance for its Lakedaimonian worshipers, Helen and Menelaos were also pan-Hellenic entities, and this aspect of their personae presumably accompanied their worship to a certain extent. Literature and art relating to the pair focus on Helen’s abduction by the Trojan prince Paris and her recovery by her husband Menelaos, but neither of Helen’s cult sites at Sparta refers to this. The Helen and Menelaos of Therapne are divorced from their mythological past; in their ascent to cultic status, they seem to have forgotten Ilium and golden apples. We cannot be sure that the pair was worshiped in its apotheosized form, since traditions of their apotheosis receive their earliest attestations from Euripides in the fourth century BCE, but Helen and Menelaos’
mortal burdens do not seem to figure in their cults. If their mythology was a part of cult practice, perhaps it was performed in a manner that left few or no material remains.

Menelaos’ mythology is essentially fixed, but, besides the most enduring of Helen’s narratives, recounted in Homeric epic, numerous divergent traditions of her involvement in the Trojan War exist. The most famous is detailed in Stesichorus’ palinode, part of which is preserved in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. According to this tradition, the sixth-century poet Stesichorus was blinded by Helen after writing a poem, in Pausanias’ account, a poem in which Helen’s mortal father Tyndareos is punished by Aphrodite for neglecting the goddess’ worship with twice- and thrice-married daughters. Stesichorus’ learns the cause of his blindness from a man who has seen Helen dwelling on the White Isle (*Leuce*) with her post-mortem husband Achilles and recants his original poem with the following words:

“That saying is not true.
You did not go to the well-benched ships
You did not go to the city Troy.”

Stesichorus’ sight is miraculously restored, and he begins to advance the myth that Helen stayed in Egypt, protected by the king Proteus, while an illusion of her created by the gods continued to Troy to wreak havoc. This narrative is also espoused by Euripides in his *Helen*.

A rationalized variant of Stesichorus’ narrative is preserved in Herodotus’ *Histories*. In this story, Helen again flees Sparta with Paris and is stopped in Egypt

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292 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 243B.
293 Translation is mine.
by Proteus. Proteus, shocked at Helen’s adultery and Paris’ violation of guest-host relations (*xenia*), sends Paris on his way without Helen. On arriving at the gates of Troy, the Greeks do not believe the Trojans when they insist that they no longer have Helen, and war ensues.

In Stesichorus’ original account, as well as that of Euripides, Helen’s narrative significance is aligned with Nemesis, her mother in the lost epic the *Kypria*: the gods intend Helen to be their tool in bringing about the destruction of the race of demigods. Material evidence connecting Nemesis and Helen exists; Helen’s most explicit link occurs in cult, at Nemesis’ sanctuary at Rhamnous in Attica. The base of Nemesis’ cult statue depicts Helen being led by the goddess Nemesis before her mortal mother Leda (see Figure 3.14). This statue does not indicate an episode in Helen’s mythology, so much as it explains the character of the cult at Rhamnous. The mythological reason for the cult’s location is the rape of Nemesis by Zeus at Rhamnous, the union, which, according to the *Kypria*, brought forth Helen. Interestingly, even in Homer’s epics, in which Helen’s divine parentage shows principally in her epithet, and Leda is unquestionably her mother, one of Helen’s handmaidens is called Adrasteia, a cult name of Nemesis.

However, as noted above, the Helen of the Menelaion was probably not associated with Nemesis. Helen’s mortal mother Leda ties her to Lakedaimon, and nothing of her cult – beyond perhaps the winged goddess votives – connects her with

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294 Herodotus, 2.113-115.
295 Interestingly, in the *Kypria*, with Nemesis as her mother, Helen ought to be a goddess, rather than a demi-goddess.
296 Homer, *The Odyssey*, 4.123.
Nemesis. Divine vengeance personified would make an odd exemplum for Spartan women.

In constructing Helen’s persona, one cannot assume continuity across all of her local manifestations. An “original Helen,” if she exists, may contain elements of all of these cultic figures, but one cannot extend elements of this “original Helen,” a conglomerate of all extant Helens, to each extant Helen. While this caveat could be extended to many, if not all epic heroes and heroines, it is particularly important in Helen’s case, as her mythology is singularly convoluted. From whence might one derive the notion that the Helen worshiped at the Menelaion was associated with trees? No evidence directly from the Menelaion site corroborates this suggestion. Our only evidence within Sparta of an association between Helen and trees occurs in Theocritus “Epithalamium to Helen,” but the value of the poem in reconstructing cult practice is dubious. Unfortunately, when we amalgamate all of Helen’s cultic manifestations and baselessly project them to her discrete cultic manifestations, it becomes easy to assume that the Helen of the Menelaion bore vestiges of a tree daemon status, even though nothing if the votive assemblage suggests this.

While Helen and Menelaos were pan-Hellenic figures, their personae at the Menelaion shrine were local to Sparta. The Helen of Therapne shows no evidence of association with the Helen Dendritis of Rhodes or the cult of Nemesis at Rhamnous. While Indo-European mythological genealogies are an appealing recourse in analyzing the disparate elements of cultic and mythological Helen, Helen, with her husband Menelaos, was worshiped in a singular fashion at her cult site in Therapne and the attributes of the couple, which are emphasized at Therapne represent a local
response to a pan-Hellenic figure.
Figure 3.1 Map of excavations at Therapne.
The 1909 excavations occurred at the Menelaion and around the Menelaion ridge. The 1970s and 1980s excavations occurred at the Menelaion, around the Menelaion ridge, on Aetos Hill, and on North Hill.
Figure 3.3 Aryballos, dating to the second quarter of the seventh century, recovered from the Menelaion site. The handle and mouth of the aryballos are inscribed “Deinis dedicated these to [Helen, wife of] Menelaos.”
Figure 3.4 Harpax with inscription “to Helen,” dating to c. 570 BCE, recovered from the Menelaion site. Its use is unknown. Drawing is from H. W. Catling and H. Cavanagh, “Two Inscribed Bronzes from the Menelaion, Sparta.” *Kadmos* 15 (1976).
Figure 3.5 Early fifth century BCE stela inscribed, “Euthikrenes dedicated these to Menelaos.”
Figure 3.7 The Menelaion today.
The standing shrine dates to the classical period.
Photograph by Laconian Professionals, 2002.
Image source: http://greciantiga.org/img/i/i651.jpg

Figure 3.8 The floor plan of a peripteral temple
Peripteral temples were surrounded by a row of columns on all four sides.
Drawing is the author’s own.
Figure 3.9 Animal-shaped votives from the Menelaion
Clockwise from top: a terracotta lion, a lead rampant goat, a bronze lion head, and a bronze bull head pendant.

Figure 3.10 Lead votive soldier figures from the Menelaion
Figure 3.11 Jewelry and jewelry imitations recovered from the Menelaion. Top four items and far right item on the bottom are lead imitations of jewelry. First item from the left in the second row is a paste scarab. Second item from the left is a paste bead. Drawing is author’s own, executed from photographs from A. J. B. Wace, et al., “The Menelaion,” Annual of the British School at Athens XV (1908-1909): 108-157.

Figure 3.13 Lakonian rider painting c. 550 BCE – 530 BCE
Photograph by Jastrow, 2006

Figure 3.14 The base of the statue of Nemesis at Rhamnous
Conclusion:

We commenced our study with Ptolemy Chennos’ plurality of Helens and end it by returning to this plurality. While we ostensibly focus on a single Helen and a single Menelaos when we examine the Homeric couple’s cult at the Menelaion, Helen and Menelaos would have had a different meaning for each of their worshipers. By focusing on the particular cultural context of the site, we have been able to analyze this meaning according to the social identities worshipers constructed within the Lakedaimonian polis.

While the mental, social, and emotional spheres of past Lakedaimonians are not readily apparent in the archaeological record, grounding in the history and culture of Lakedaimon can give one a hypothetical starting point for ritual practice’s interpretation, particularly as it intersects with class, gender, and occupation. Not all people reflected the prevailing attitudes of their classes, genders, and ethnicities, but acknowledgement of the potential for difference, even if we cannot exactly project that difference, prevents us from regarding Sparta and its people as monolithic. The uncertainty of such archaeological investigation beggars the question of their efficacy, but uncertainty should not keep one from asking questions.

In examining a local manifestation of pan-Hellenic mythology, we have allowed consideration of pan-Hellenic literature and material culture, but only insofar as they could be explicitly linked with the Helen and Menelaos worshiped at Sparta. Thus, if we have little reason to believe that the Helen of the Menelaion shares attributes with Helen Dendritis, we should not mix the two cults’ manifestations. An
always incomplete archaeological and historical record makes such mixing of incompatible material quite tempting, but it ought to be avoided. If we are interested in understanding the Menelaion’s significance to those that may have directly experienced it, we ought to tighten our locus of interest to Sparta proper, understanding that, while pan-Hellenic ideas like Helen and Menelaos themselves certainly filtered into Sparta, Helen and Menelaos’ worship at Sparta was rooted to a particular place and cultural context and, as such, was fundamentally Spartan.
Appendix: The Great Rhetra

The Great Rhetra is preserved in Plutarch’s *Life of Lykourgos*, and Plutarch presumably copied it from Aristotle’s lost *Constitution of the Lakedaimonians*. Ogden’s meticulous translation of the document is as follows:

[I order you] having founded a temple of Zeus Syllanios and Athene Syllania, having tribed/preserved the tribes and *obes*, having established…[thirty]…as a council of elders [*gerousia*] together with the leaders/kings, from time to time to celebrate Apollo/hold assemblies between Babyca and Cnacion, thus to bring in and set aside. Ultimate authority and power is to be the people’s.

Attributed, as is nearly every Spartan innovation, to the lawgiver Lykourgos, who was said to have received the Rhetra via the Delphic oracle, the dialect of the Rhetra is certainly Doric and, given the strange attributes of Athena and Zeus (which have thus far defied proper explanation), as well as the odd verbs and place names, is almost certainly pre-Archaic. Most classicists are convinced of its authenticity.

Beyond the division of the people into tribes (presumably, the three Doric tribes to which Tyrtaios attests) and *obes*, the Great Rhetra appears to limit the diarchs’ power, giving powers of proposal to the *gerousia* and decision to a people’s assembly.

Plutarch separately quotes a “rider” to the Rhetra, claiming that it was appended to the Rhetra by the kings Theopompus and Polydorus, on the grounds that

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299 Oliva 1971, 75.
300 Ibid.; Ogden, 1994; Cartledge 2002, 115-117.
301 Tyrtaios, fragment 19.8.
the people had perverted the gerousia’s proposals. Ogden’s translation of this passage is as follows:

[I order that] if the people speaks crookedly, the elders and leaders/kings be seters aside.

Ogden, in a complicated and highly technical article, argues that the rider is more primitive than the Rhetra and thus may have preceded it, forming a “self-contained constitutional document.” In this scenario, the addendum of the Rhetra to the Rider would have shifted power to the people. Nearly every word in the Great Rhetra and its Rider has been subject to intense debate, however, so I hesitate to unequivocally espouse any theory about it, although Ogden’s argument is compelling.

302 Plutarch, 6.4.
303 Ogden 1994, 86.
304 Ibid., 101.
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