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Servile Labour in Hellenistic Crete**

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The Private Landed Property and Servile Labour in Hellenistic Crete

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Abstract

The paper begins with the issue of ‘supposed’ original equal allotment of private land properties (*aphamiai* and *klaroi*) among the citizens of Cretan *poleis*, but its main focus is on the growth and concentration of private landed properties in Hellenistic times. In order to determine whether the original equal allotment of the civic land (*chora*) really occurred, epigraphic and literary evidence will be examined. Archaeological evidence does not offer us sufficient insight or knowledge in terms of the exploitation of the land in Hellenistic Crete. The substantial modification of patterns of private landed property in Hellenistic Crete is studied by way of comparing passages drawn from three Greek writers – Plato (*Alc. I* 122d–e), Aristotle (*Pol.* 2.1270a) and Polybius (6.45–47). This paper seeks to take into consideration also the servile component, thereby exploring initial modalities of land exploitation, as well as their subsequent transformations. Thus the parallel issue of the servile workforce used inside private estates is addressed. In doing so, the disappearance of dependent labour of helotic kind (*aphamiotai* and *klarotai*) will be considered and its replacement, as in other regions of the Greek world, by chattel slavery. Hence two essential questions will be examined – when and why did this happen?

Keywords: social history, economic history, Cretan epigraphy, historical narrative, land exploitation, agriculture, Cretan slavery, serfs, serfdom

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Anyone who has the intention of addressing the issue of private landed property and servile labour attached to it in Crete before the Roman province, in other words before 67 BC, should start their investigation by asking the following fundamental question: was there an original equal distribution of landed private properties among the citizens of Cretan *poleis*? This distribution should include the servile workforce in the form of serfs, just like in Sparta and in other Greek countries which have practiced a slavery of helotic type. ‘An original equal distribution’ refers to the allotment which surely dates from archaic times. It is only after consideration of this question will we be able to focus our attention on the central issue of agrarian regime in Hellenistic Crete, namely examining the growth as well as the concentration of private landed properties.¹

The Original State of Things

To look closely at the issue of initial equal land allotment in Cretan cities, our main source remains the quotations from ancient writers, while the local epigraphic production is entirely disappointing.² Given the very poverty of available evidence in relation to the study of the issue, we do not have the luxury of examining separately the two different categories of evidence, namely literary and epigraphic sources. Thus they must be crosschecked against each other.³ In doing so, we can conclude that the *klaros* was in fact a plot of land attributed to any citizen by draw, held in his direct possession and farmed by unfree or dependent peasants called *klarotai*,⁴ whereas the *aphamia* (or *apamia* in some old epigraphic texts) would be, without any doubt, another kind of private landed property, localised somewhere in a boundary area, cultivated by serfs called *aphamiotai*.⁵ Regarding the chronology, the available evidence covers an ongoing period from the 6th to the late 2nd century BC: 1/ the technical term of *aphamia* (*apamia*) figures in an inscription from sixth-century Eleutherna, the serfs *amphamiotai* being mentioned for the first time by Callistratus, a Greek grammarian from Alexandria and disciple of

¹In what concerns the topic of the increase and concentration of landed properties in general, and in the whole Greek world, see Bresson 2007: 156–160.

²See Bile 1988: 319 (§ 51.11.a) and Bile 2003: 37–39.

³The literary sources are as follows (only the serfs called *klarotai* and *amphamiotai* are mentioned): 1/ Ephor. *FGrH* 70 F29 (4th century BC), 2/ Kallistratos *FGrH* 348 F4 (first half of the 2nd century BC) and 3/ Sosicr.Hist. *FGrH* 461 F4 (his acme at the middle of the 2nd century BC). The epigraphic evidence, always fragmentary (only the plots of land called *klaroi* and *aphamiai/apamiai* are mentioned): 1/ *ICret* II.12 16Ab₂ (6th or 5th century BC, Eleutherna), 2/ *ICret* IV 72 col. V₂₇ (the Law Code of Gortyn, at about the middle of the 5th century BC), 3/ Chaniotis 1996: 276–278 n° 37₁₆₊₂₀ = *ICret* I.16 17 (early 2nd century BC, maybe before 189), 4/ Chaniotis 1996: 278–280 n° 38₁₀₊₁₅ and *SEG* XLI 1991 742 (early 2nd century BC, maybe before 184), 5/ Chaniotis 1996: 338–351 n° 59₇₂ and *SEG* XXVI 1976–1977 1049 (late Hellenistic, 111/110 BC), 6/ Chaniotis 1996: 358–361 n° 61A₅₅ = *ICret* I.16 5 (late Hellenistic, 110/109 or 109/108 BC).

⁴See Chaniotis 1996: 19f. and Chaniotis 1999: 186.

⁵See Chaniotis 1996: 20 n. 75, Chaniotis 1999: 186 and Willetts 1955: 47.

Aristophanes of Byzantium,¹ in the first half of the 2nd century; 2/ the oldest attestation of the term of *klaros* occurs in the Law Code of Gortyn, around the middle of the 5th century, and the name of serfs *klarotai* appears first, jointly with its definition, in Ephorus, in the 4th century; 3/ the latest epigraphic confirmation of persistence of the *klaros* and *aphamia* does not exceed the 2nd century, the early 2nd in the case of the *klaros* and the late 2nd in the case of the *aphamia*.

Therefore, we can postulate that an original equal distribution of landed private properties among the citizens of Cretan *poleis*, incorporating an attached dependent workforce in the form of serfs called *klarotai* and *aphamiotai*, had occurred on the island,² in very ancient times, at the time of the archaic epoch. It is generally admitted that, on the average and for a considerable time, the farms arising from such a distribution were of small size, and that their owners practiced crop diversification.³ If such a system of agrarian private exploitation survived, according to all enumerated sources, until Hellenistic times,⁴ one should question what consequently its evolution was in that period of history on the island, as we do not see any of its vestiges after the end of the 2nd century BC. The famous passage in Polybius with regard to the Cretan polity seems crucial for consideration of this issue.

The Transformations of the Land Exploitation Modalities in Hellenistic Times

The passage in question is embedded in the well known large digression which deals with the issue of the ‘pre-Roman’ regimes most debated by the ancients (6.43–52 and 56: Thebes, Athens, Crete or rather Cretan cities, Sparta, Carthage). As the historian, using rhetorical method, has recourse to a demonstration based on opposite comparisons, he does the same also in the case of the Cretan regime. Here he confronts with that of Lacedaemon, a mythical masterwork of Lycurgus, almost perfect and like a timeless system for that reason, although described essentially in the past tense, while to talk about the Cretan regime he uses normally the present tense (6.45–50). It is exactly here when Polybius criticizes so vehemently the socio-political institutions of the Cretan *poleis* that he deals briefly with the issue of the distribution of the wealth and in particular that of the landed wealth. The confrontation schema is based on two fundamental matters: 1/ in Sparta ‘no one possesses more than another, but all citizens have an equal share in the public land’ (6.45.3f.), whereas in Crete ‘[t]he laws allow them [*sc.* the Cretans] to possess as much land as they can get with no limitation whatever’ (6.46.1f.); then 2/ in Sparta ‘[t]he next distinctive feature regards the possession of money: for as it is utterly discredited among them, the jealous competition which arises from

¹See *BNP on-line A*: Callistratus n° I.4 (F. Montanari). In my paper quoted above, published in *Palamedes* (38 n. 4 and once again 41), there is a shameful and stupid confusion between Callistratus the Alexandrian grammarian from the first half of the 2nd century BC, and the homonymic historian from the 1st century BC (see *FGrH* 433 and *BNP on-line A*: Callistratus n° I.5 [K. Meister]).

²See Willetts 1955: 29, 49, 59 and, first of all, 61. Similarly, see Bile 2003: 25 and 36.

³See Sanders 1976: 135f.

⁴See Chaniotis 1996: 19f., Chaniotis 1999: 186.

inequality of wealth is entirely removed from the city' (6.45.4f.), and in Crete, contrary, '[m]oney is so highly valued among them [*sc.* the Cretans], that its possession is not only thought to be necessary but in the highest degree creditable' (6.46.2f.).¹

The conclusions we can draw from the Polybius' statements are largely weakened by the highly stereotyped and moralistic context of the comparison, managed in perfect accordance to the myth of the immutable Spartan *eunomia* instituted allegedly by Lycurgus. An excellent example of such a proceeding, injurious to the Cretans, is given once again in opposite manner: in Lacedaemon '[...] by abolishing covetousness, he [*sc.* Lycurgus] with it removed all motive for civil broil and contest: whence it has been brought about that the Lacedaemonians are the best governed and most united people in Greece' (6.46.7–9), what contrasts to what is said about the Crete where '[...] in fact greed and avarice are so native to the soil in Crete, that they [*sc.* the Cretans] are the only people (4) in the world among whom no stigma attaches to any sort of gain whatever [...]. (9) [T]he Cretans by their ingrained avarice are engaged in countless public and private seditions, murders and civil wars [...]' (6.46.3–9). Moreover, in the 2nd century BC, when Polybius writes his *Histories*, the Spartans no longer live (if they really lived in the past) in that ideal equality-union founded on an egalitarian share of the civic land (*chora*), so extolled by the historian. As this is explicitly demonstrated by the social disturbances which occurred in the times of the kings Agis IV and Cleomenes III and the tyrant Nabis, in other words only two generations before Polybius. However, it seems not abusive to try to detect in the Polybian discourse some echo of actual socio-political transformations which would have taken place in Cretan civic communities during Hellenistic period. Such a scenario fits perfectly to the context of the agitated history of the island situated at the intersection of interests and influences of the most important Hellenistic powers.²

If Polybius (6.46) describes an infinite concentration of landed wealth inside Cretan citizen communities (in opposition to the immutable Lacedaemonian order), resulting in social troubles and discords, it seems clear that such a description may easily coincide with the phenomenon of Cretan Hellenistic piracy and mercenary. Such actions and activities were providing an escape for citizens who suffered accelerated pauperisation after they had lost their inherited parcels (*klaroi*) for the benefit of more and more rich local notables, although one should also take into account the ongoing fragmentation of family plots divided between heirs, in the context of important demographic growth. In such conditions the Polybian narration is likely to refer to a historical reality and not only to a completely artificial and purely ideological

¹The English translation of Polybius' *Histories* is borrowed, here and below, from the *Perseus* website (<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>).

²See Chaniotis 1988: 69f., Chaniotis 1996: 18f., Chaniotis 1999: 182–184.

construction.¹ If that was the case, what should be the implications for the dependent peasants, namely the serfs *klarotai* and *aphamiotai* involved in the cultivation of citizens' parcels or *klaroi/aphamiai*? The answer seems obvious: their progressive disappearance in parallel to the acquisition and use of the chattel slaves, delivered in abundance by Cretan piracy into the local market from the middle of the 2nd century until the conquest of the island in the sixties of the 1st century BC. The captives taken by pirates were even regarded as one of the most important commodities of Cretan exportation.² The dependent population of helotic type, in the form of serfs *klarotai* and *aphamiotai*, was attached to the cultivated fields rather than to their proprietors. And such attachment was inappropriate to the needs of any larger estate (naturally, the epithet 'larger' must be understood at the modest Greek scale, out of any comparison with what we know of Roman enormous estates or *latifundia*).

It is worth noting that a similar tendency to use a servile workforce acquired in the market place, beside the dependent population of serfs, can be taken into consideration even in Sparta, and a long time before Polybius' epoch, as a passage in the Plato's *Alcibiades I* (for some it would be a work of a Pseudo-Plato³) where Socrates proceeds to compare Athenian and Lacedaemonian wealth (122d/e) seems to suggest:

*If again you [sc. Alcibiades to whom Socrates talks] regard wealth, and think yourself something in that way, I must not keep silence on this point either, if you are to realize where you stand. For in this respect you have only to look at the wealth of the Spartans, and you will perceive that our riches here are far inferior to theirs. Think of all the land that they have both in their own and in the Messenian country: not one of our estates could compete with theirs in extent and excellence, nor again in ownership of slaves, [of all other] and especially of those of the helot class, nor yet of horses (122e) nor of all the flocks and herds that graze in Messene.*⁴

Plato's dialogue carries an important ideological as well as pedagogical (moralising) teaching – it is enough to read carefully advice and precepts, given by Socrates, to which our quoted passage belongs (120a–122c). These

¹See Willetts 1955: 103f., 161f., 243 and 252f. (in the island, in Hellenistic times, the landed properties become alienable and are progressively accumulated inside a more and more narrow circle of local owners).

²See Willetts 1955: 48f., Chaniotis 1988: 69, Chaniotis 1996: 19 and Chaniotis 1999: 183.

³See *BNP on-line A*: Plato n° 1.C.2 (Th. A. Szlezák).

⁴The English translation of Plato's *Alcibiades I* is borrowed, here and below, from the *Perseus* website, with a minor modification introduced between square brackets: I think it would be better not to translate the Greek expression *oud' au andrapodon ktesei ton teallon kai ton heilotikon* into 'nor again in ownership of slaves, and especially of those of the helot class' (as on the *Perseus* website), but rather into 'nor again in ownership of slaves, of all other and especially of those of the helot class' (cf. *LSJ*⁹: *allos* II.6).

recommend, just like in the case of Polybius, the caution and a thorough investigation, well embedded in the context. Plato describes in fact his Spartans as if they were all opulent aristocrats whose large estates would use, for the purpose of cultivating the fields, not only the helots, but also other slaves (122d), namely the chattel slaves bought to the market in order that they complement the workforce composed of serfs-helots. Let us go back a little to Plato's dialogue in order to place the whole of the passage in its context. In the *Alcibiades I* 120d–121c the conversation between the disciple (Alcibiades) and the master (Socrates) goes on in such a manner that it is easy to remark that we are immersed in all that is the most noble or the less vulgar/ordinary:

(Socrates) Is it probable that noble races should produce (120e) better natures, or not? (Alcibiades) Clearly, noble races would. (Socrates) And will not the well-born, provided they are well brought up, probably be perfected in virtue? (Alcibiades) That must be so. (Socrates) Then let us consider, by comparing our lot with theirs, whether the Spartan and Persian kings appear to be of inferior birth. Do we not know that the former are descendants of Hercules and the latter of Achaemenes, and that the line of Hercules and the line of Achaemenes go back to Perseus, son of Zeus? (121a) (Alcibiades) Yes, and mine, Socrates, to Eurysaces, and that of Eurysaces to Zeus! (Socrates) Yes, and mine, noble Alcibiades, to Daedalus, and Daedalus to Hephaestus, son of Zeus! But take the lines of those people, going back from them: you have a succession of kings reaching to Zeus – on the one hand, kings of Argos and Sparta; on the other, of Persia, which they have always ruled, and frequently Asia also, as at present; whereas we are private persons ourselves, and so were our fathers. And then, (121b) suppose that you had to make what show you could of your ancestors, and of Salamis as the native land of Eurysaces, or of Aegina as the home of the yet earlier Aeacus, to impress Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes, how you must expect to be laughed at! Why, I am afraid we are quite outdone by those persons in pride of birth and upbringing altogether. Or have you not observed how great are the advantages of the Spartan kings, and how their wives are kept under statutory ward of the ephors, in order that every possible precaution may be taken against the king being born (121c) of any but the Heracleidae?

There is no difference at all when Socrates leaves the royal sphere and draws his pupil's attention to the Persians and the Spartans themselves (122b–d):

And again, if you [sc. Alcibiades to whom Socrates talks] chose to glance at the wealth, the luxury, (122c) the robes with sweeping trains, the anointings with myrrh, the attendant troops of menials,

and all the other refinements of the Persians, you would be ashamed at your own case, on perceiving its inferiority to theirs. Should you choose, again, to look at the temperance and orderliness, the facility and placidity, the magnanimity and discipline, the courage and endurance, and the [effort]-loving, success-loving, honor-loving spirit of the Spartans, you would count yourself but a child (122d) in all these things.

The Persian ‘exterior’ refinement, as it were sartorial or decorative (luxury, robes, etc.), is paralleled with the Spartan ‘interior’ refinement, namely moral (temperance, orderliness, etc.). This juxtaposition shows in clear terms to which social layer Plato refers when he turns his attention to Sparta. As the Spartan moral refinement corresponds to the Persian ‘decorative’ refinement and as the latter identifies undeniably the aristocracies, even allowing them to differentiate themselves from the common people, one can conclude that the Plato’s ‘imaginary’ Spartans belong to a higher social layer. Then, the moral decorum of the Spartans which is expressed through a set of virtues enumerated one by one inside the paragraph 122c – *sophrosyne* (temperance), *kosmiotes* (orderliness), *euchereia* (facility), *eukolia* (placidity), *megalophrosyne* (magnanimity), *eutaxia* (discipline), *andreia* (courage), *karteria* (endurance), *philoponia* (effort-loving spirit), *philonikia* (success-loving spirit) and *philotimia* (honor-loving spirit) – is normally restricted, in the Greek thought, to the civic aristocracies. The *philoponia* cannot be absolutely rendered into ‘toil-loving spirit’ (as in the English Lamb’s translation on the *Perseus* website), the ‘toil’ being considered as ‘productive work’, but rather into ‘effort-loving spirit’, an ideal which fits perfectly to the same social register of the noblest and most respectable qualities.¹

Fortunately, Aristotle brings a welcome rectification of this idealised image, painted by Plato, of the socioeconomic relations in the fourth-century Sparta (*Pol.* 2.1270a):

[...] For next to the things just spoken of one might censure the Spartan institutions with respect to the unequal distribution of wealth. It has come about that some of the Spartans own too much property and some extremely little; owing to which the land has fallen into few hands, and this has also been badly regulated by the laws; for the lawgiver made it dishonourable to sell a family’s existing estate, and did so rightly, but he granted liberty to alienate land at will by gift or bequest; yet the result that has happened was bound to follow in the one case as well as in the other. [...]. As a result of this although the country is capable of supporting fifteen hundred cavalry and thirty thousand heavy-armed troopers, they numbered not even a thousand.²

¹Cf. Vidal-Naquet ³2005: 32, Detienne 1970: 147, Jourdain-Annequin 1985: 490f., Loraux 1986: 154f., Loraux 1997: 251, Lévêque & Claval 1970: 186 and Garlan 2007: 256.

²As above, the English translation is borrowed from the *Perseus* website.

In this context it seems out of question that in the 4th century BC all Spartans would be rich landowners, as in the Plato's dialogue, who would have constituted, thanks to their wealth as well as their virtuous behaviour, a homogeneous aristocracy. By this time, there should be, in addition to some very important landowners, also those of modest and poor disposition, threatened with social degradation (*hypomeiones?*).

So, ultimately the comparison of both literary evidences – Platonic and Aristotelian – leads us to conclude that it is accurate to see the recourse to chattel slavery in Sparta as a consequence of the land accumulation. Such accumulation is located within a narrow circle of important landowners, in the first half of the 4th century BC, in other words two centuries before Polybius. Progressively as the great aristocratic estates were expanding, they needed more and more agrarian workers, which the rigid system of helotic serfdom attached to *klaroi* could not provide. Their solution was to turn toward the chattel slaves market for a supply of agrarian workers at the same time that this market was also expanding.

Thus it can be argued that the same evolution would have taken place in Crete where, according to the Polybius' testimony (6.46), there should be also infinite land accumulation. Due to the absence of definitive and conclusive evidence, the question concerning the chronology of this process, namely whether it started a long time before Polybius (as in Sparta), must remain open.

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Abbreviations

- *Please note: the abbreviations not explained below are those commonly used.
- BNP on-line A*: Ch. F. Salazar (ed.), *Brill’s New Pauly on-line. Antiquity* (H. Cancik & H. Schneider [eds], *DNP. Antike*).
- ICret*: M. Guarducci (ed.), *Inscriptiones Creticae*. Roma 1935–1950: La Libreria dello Stato. Vol. I: *Tituli Cretae mediae praeter Gortynios*. Vol. II: *Tituli Cretae occidentalis*. Vol. III: *Tituli Cretae orientalis*. Vol. IV: *Tituli Gortynii* (the Arabic figure which follows, after a dot, and without any space, the Roman figure of the volume indicates the number of the toponymic chapter, except the volume IV dedicated only to Gortyn).