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Landscapes of the ancient Peloponnese. A human-geographical approach

Graham Shipley

Landscape and environment are currently of compelling cultural significance, as fields of scholarly research, sites of artistic creativity and arenas of public concern. As both imaginative representations and material realities, landscape and environment matter as a medium for the expression of complex ideas and feelings, about beauty, belonging, access to resources, relations with nature, the past and the future, making sense of the world and people's place in it.¹

This paper suggests new approaches to the ancient history of the Peloponnese, Greece. It is intended as a spur to discussion rather than the consolidated result of complete work. It proposes that ancient historians could now go further than before in adopting ideas from geographical approaches, which may allow us to investigate – in greater depth than before – aspects such as the meanings and emotions attached to landscapes, the nature of regionalism, and the extent and nature of connections and interactions between regions and smaller units. This suggestion arises from the author's current work on Macedonian power in the Peloponnese. The period this article deals with approximately runs from the defeat of the southern Greeks by Philip II of Macedonia in 338 BC to the Roman intervention in the Peloponnese during the 190s BC. This period of about 150 years saw the southern Hellenic city-states (*poleis*, sing. *polis*) dominated at certain times and to varying degrees by Macedonian warlords and kings. The hellenistic Peloponnese offers scope for a new geographically informed history, not least in view of the frequent observations by the second-century BC historian Polybios about geographical relationships between the Peloponnesian states, and between the Peloponnese and other parts of Greece.

¹ [UK] Arts and Humanities Research Council 2005, *AHRC Landscape and Environment Research Programme Specification 2* (document 4_97234 at www.ahrc.ac.uk).

The Peloponnese

The Peloponnese was one of the heartlands of classical Greek history, containing over 100 poleis including many of the most famous ones. It is a very varied landscape. On one possible scheme of division, based on altitude, one could divide it into (1) the north-eastern highlands and Mycenae furrow, (2) the central mountain 'bones' forming the peninsula, and (3) the south-western lowlands and the hills of Messenia.² Altitude determines the nature of local economies to a large extent, but must be read in its interplay with other physical characteristics. Within each of the three areas there are upland or coastal plains, major and minor river valleys, and mountains of greater or lesser penetrability.

Mineral resources, other than stone, are not plentiful: metal ores are scarce, with possibly only some iron ore in Laconia. The most important agricultural territories are the major coastal and upland plains and those through which flow the rivers Eurotas, Alpheios, and the Messenian Pamisos. Ten key areas that lend themselves to dense human occupation can be distinguished: the three great coastal plains of Argos, Korinthia, and Eleia; the two narrower coastal terraces of Sikyonia and Achaia; two major upland plains in Arkadia; and the valleys of the Eurotas (Laconia), Alpheios (south-western Arkadia and southern Elis) and Pamisos (Messenia). These have been the 'natural' divisions of the peninsula in most periods, and they correspond to the ethnic and political boundaries that were already strongly defined by the late classical period.

A minority of Peloponnesian poleis were on the coast, the major centres in the early hellenistic period being Corinth and Sikyon. A majority of major poleis were inland: Sparta, Messene, Megalopolis, Tegea, Mantinea, and Elis were far from the coast, Argos a few miles inland. The majority of smaller poleis were also located away from the sea. Since many were also at a considerable altitude, pastoral production (based on sheep and goats) was probably almost ubiquitous. Landlocked Arkadia was regarded as the most populous³ but also as containing the harshest⁴

² This scheme is a modification of that in: Admiralty Naval Intelligence Division 1944-1945, *Greece* (Geographical Handbooks, B.R. 516, 516 A-B) 3 vols. ([London]: [Admiralty] Naval Intelligence Division).

³ Xenophon, *Hellenika* 7.1.25.

⁴ Polybios 4.21.

landscape, but while its poleis were mainly small and predominantly pastoral, they were not poor and their military manpower was significant.⁵



Map 1: The Peloponnese around 300 BC. Source: G. Shipley, *The Greek World after Alexander: 323-30 BC* (London and New York 2000) 135, fig. 4.4.

Historical background (338-195 BC)

Sparta's relationship with its neighbours is a recurrent theme in the history of the Peloponnese. Philip II's unexpected redrawing of Laconian boundaries after Chaironeia, was allegedly forced on him by the other

⁵ J. Roy, 'The economies of Arkadia' in: T.H. Nielsen and J. Roy eds., *Defining ancient Arkadia* (Copenhagen 1999) 320-381.

Peloponnesians out of hatred for the Spartans. Yet Sparta led the Peloponnesian city-states in a military rising against the Macedonians in 331 – partly, no doubt, with the ulterior motive of re-establishing Spartan hegemony in the Peloponnese, overthrown by the Thebans forty years before. The consequence, however, was predictable: the Macedonian regent, Antipatros, invaded the Peloponnese in 330 and re-established control.⁶

A second Greek revolt after Alexander's death in 323, but this time without Spartan participation, led to a harsher regime of control. That, however, broke down when Antipatros's son, Kassandros, and his appointed successor as regent, Polyperchon, conducted a series of offensives against each other as they sought overall control of the Peloponnese. Polyperchon courted popularity by relaxing Macedonian controls, and Kassandros's brutalities allowed another successor of Alexander to exploit Kassandros's unpopularity in the name of Greek freedom. Antigonos Monophthalmos, together with his son Demetrios Poliorketes, thus succeeded in gaining control, but this in turn was overturned in 301 when they were defeated in Asia by a coalition of their enemies.

His father now dead, Demetrios spent much of the 290s seeking to rebuild control, but a greater prize, control of Asia, drew him away from Greece. His son Antigonos Gonatas was left in charge of the Peloponnese. A further Spartan-led rising in 280 may have prompted the refounding of the Achaian league, based on several poleis in the northern Peloponnese, as a protection against Macedonian power. Despite this, Gonatas retained control after finally securing the Macedonian throne (277/6). He may have installed a number of garrisons and puppet dictatorships in the northern Peloponnese, though not all the tyrannies that are attested were necessarily pro-Macedonian.

A fourth concerted challenge to Macedonian domination in the 260s, in the Chremonidean war, resulted in a disastrous defeat for the Greeks. Again a number of tyrannies arose, some of which may have been pro-Macedonian and sustained by cash or military backing. Yet, just at the point when Macedonian power seemed firmly consolidated, it began to dissolve. The Achaian league grew in power from the late 250s on. Some cities

⁶ Details can be found in: F.W. Walbank, A.E. Astin, M.W. Frederiksen and R. M. Ogilvie eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History* 7.1: *The Hellenistic World* (second edition; Cambridge 1984); A.E. Astin, F.W. Walbank, M.W. Frederiksen, and R.M. Ogilvie eds, *The Cambridge Ancient History* 8: *Rome and the Mediterranean to 133 BC* (second edition; Cambridge 1989).

expelled their tyrants and joined the league, other tyrants quit their posts, and the main Macedonian garrison, at Corinth, was captured in 243.

If, as alleged, Gonatas now made a treaty with the Aitolians for the partition of Achaia, he had not given up on the Peloponnese. His successors in the 230s and 220s had to cope with both the Achaian league, whose membership by now extended beyond the borders of Achaia itself, and a resurgent Sparta under two reforming kings, their reigns separated by some six years. The first of them, Agis IV, was unsuccessful and was quickly murdered, but the second, Kleomenes III (reign c.235–221), came close to re-establishing Spartan domination over the Peloponnese. He was defeated in 222 or 221 by a paradoxical, though pragmatically inevitable, coalition between the Achaians and their long-standing enemies, the Macedonians.

That would have seemed to make the Achaian league the controller of the Peloponnese on Macedonia's behalf, but the situation was complicated by the entry of Roman power onto the scene. Rome's successive wars with Philip V of Macedonia (212–205, 201–197) were accompanied by frequent local conflicts and regime changes. By the time Rome removed Macedonian power from the Peloponnese soon after 200, it must have been a rather battered landscape.

Landscape

Before we consider the landscape history of the Peloponnese in this period, it is appropriate to say a few words about approaches to 'landscape' itself. Some theorists have constructed an opposition between (a) dividing landscape in two, e.g. natural versus cultural landscape, as if the latter is imposed upon the former (the 'explicit' approach to landscape), and (b) viewing it as 'an entity that exists by virtue of its being perceived, experienced, and contextualized',⁷ (the 'inherent' approach). Now while most philosophers, particularly in the English-speaking tradition, would agree that the best working hypothesis to get us through life is that there 'really is something out there', accepting this proposition would not entail approval of the 'explicit' approach to landscape. The important claim made

⁷ W. Ashmore and A.B. Knapp, 'Archaeological landscapes. Constructed, conceptualized, ideational' in: W. Ashmore and A. B. Knapp eds., *Archaeologies of landscape. Contemporary Perspectives* (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford 1999) 1–30, there 1; cf. P. van Dommelen, 'Exploring everyday places and cosmologies. Constructed and conceptualized' in: Ashmore and Knapp, *Archaeologies of Landscape* 277–285, there 277–278.

by the 'inherent' model is not that the landscape does not really exist – in the sense of a material setting for human and animal activity, we all accept that it does – but that, in so far as we can say anything meaningful about it, we are constrained by our perceptions, just as ancient writers were by theirs. Material setting and human (or animal) activities need not be treated as one and the same thing, but *discourse* about the two of them should be treated as parts of one and the same thing; what could be called a spectrum of description.

This, then, is not to claim that ancient peoples, such as the Greeks, did not distinguish between 'the' natural landscape and its humanly conditioned manifestations – what we might call its archaeology – but that the two frames of reference may have interpenetrated to a degree that modern westerners may find surprising. One archaeologist cites the example of Etruscan cemeteries that were modelled on domestic architecture; they were sometimes even laid out like settlements, and were thus 'part of the same landscape as that inhabited by the living'.⁸ Thus, among other pitfalls to avoid, we should not – except as a heuristic device – separate 'the Greek landscape' into an economic landscape, a military, a sacred, and so on; for this is a modern typology and it certainly will not conform to the divisions that the Greeks used, if they used any at all. Nor should we regard the relationship between human societies and landscapes as one in which the former simply impose their design upon the latter (in this connection, the example of overlapping use rights on the same land is also instructive).⁹ Certainly we should not do so if we wish to understand fully the relationship between archaeological remains, the societies that produced them, and the way this relationship was conceptualized in the past.

It seems far from certain, in fact, that Greeks had a concept of landscape, that they drew a line somewhere along that spectrum of description. *Gê*, one Greek word for the Earth, does not equate to 'landscape', since it includes the physical ground and the totality of that. *Chôra* refers generally to the territory of a polis. Horden and Purcell have even gone so far as to propose dissolving the town–country boundary as

⁸ Van Dommelen, 'Exploring everyday places and cosmologies' 282.

⁹ H. Forbes, 'The uses of the uncultivated landscape in modern Greece. A pointer to the value of the wilderness in antiquity?' in: G. Shipley and J. Salmon eds., *Human Landscapes in Classical Antiquity: Environment and Culture* (London and New York 1996) 68–97. Forbes explains that, in some areas and under certain conditions, it is permissible to graze animals, gather firewood etcetera on another person's land, while mountainsides are sometimes owned in common.

being unhelpful; one may agree with this at least from the point of view of someone writing ecological history.¹⁰

Another way of viewing the ‘spectrum of description’ of landscape is to consider that landscape is not only more than physical geography, more than the archaeological evidence for settlement patterns. It also subsists in the dynamic social interactions and relationships among those who move over the land, and consequently by their perceptions and ideas about the physical setting and how this relates to relationships. Landscape is not solely physical geography plus settlement pattern, but is to be viewed as a locus of social interaction and simultaneously a frame for the inscribing of emotion and meanings. Yi-Fu Tuan has explored the ‘experiential perspective’ of human (or ‘humanistic’) geography through the polarity of ‘space and place’ – space as an initially unknown realm that connects or separates, that ‘we perceive and construct’, that ‘provides cues for our behaviour’;¹¹ place in the sense of a location that has an ascribed meaning or personality, a location to which loyalty can attach. One aspect of his ideas worth developing in a Mediterranean context is where people draw the line around their particular places or ‘fields of care’.¹² This is more likely to be a locality than an over-arching entity such as a nation; certainly, in English regions such as Yorkshire, Cornwall, and my own homeland in the North-East (Northumberland and Durham), people often identify themselves more strongly with their region than with England or Britain. England is famously a rich landscape of dialects, where it is possible, for example, to identify a person who uses the word ‘sandshoe’ (instead of ‘plimsoll’, ‘gymshoe’, or the recently imported ‘trainer’) as coming from a particular part of the North-East.¹³ It is interesting to explore the balance in ancient Greece between loyalty to locality, polis, region and over-arching structures such as Hellas or *tò Hellēnikon* – literally ‘the Greek thing’, more appropriately ‘the Greek community’.¹⁴

Another thought-provoking aspect of Tuan’s portrayal of ‘space and place’ is the notion of spaciousness and crowding: what causes us to feel

¹⁰ P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The corrupting sea. A study of Mediterranean history* (Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts 2000) 90–101.

¹¹ Y.-F. Tuan, ‘Space and place: humanistic perspective’ in: C. Board et al. eds., *Progress in geography. International reviews of current research* 6 (London 1975) 211–252, there 215.

¹² Tuan, ‘Space and place’, 241–245.

¹³ P. Trudgill, *The dialects of England* (Oxford 1999) 109–110.

¹⁴ On the construction and development of Hellenic identity, see e.g. J.M. Hall, *Hellenicity. Between ethnicity and culture* (Chicago 2002).

that a space is crowded?¹⁵ Was the Peloponnese, with over 130 city-states in an area two-thirds the size of the Netherlands, perceived as densely settled? Certainly it was densely inscribed with history and (real or fictive) memory; and, as Tuan puts it, habitual routes acquire ‘density of meaning’.¹⁶

Ancient authors, of course, do not write human geography in any modern sense. The Greek geographical writer Strabo, writing as the Roman empire consolidated its Mediterranean-wide power (late first century BC–early first century AD), presents a Peloponnese that is a landscape of poleis mapped with ancient myths, remembered or culled from what was by now a ‘classical’ literature of the period from Homer to Demosthenes. His forays into landscape description are brief and mostly prompted by classical texts recalled. Thus he compares the agricultural resources of Messenia with those of Laconia on the basis of quotations from the old poets Euripides and Tyrtaios.¹⁷

Over a century later, another Greek living in the Roman empire, Pausanias, uses the Peloponnese, as he uses Attica and central Greece, as a way of constructing classical Greece. For him, this includes the early periods down to the second century BC, some 300 years before his day, but little that is closer to his own time.

His work is organized as a tour of the poleis and extra-urban sanctuaries of Achaia, with some interest in topography, but little in the intervening countryside. His concern for objects after 150 BC is slight, although contemporary monuments attracted his attention, especially the benefactions of Hadrian.¹⁸

Pausanias’s travelogue of Greece in the Antonine era is evidence of the density of mythical associations and meaningful retelling of collective memories in regional landscapes.¹⁹ It is a prime example of ‘density of meaning’ in a landscape; he moves through ‘space’, typically from town to town, between ‘places’ of religious significance, while within a polis he

¹⁵ Y.-F. Tuan, *Space and place. The perspective of experience* (1977; reprint London and Minneapolis 2001) 51–66.

¹⁶ Tuan, *Space and place*, 182.

¹⁷ R. Baladié, *Le Péloponnèse de Strabon. Étude de géographie historique* (Paris 1980) 172.

¹⁸ A.J.S. Spawforth, ‘Pausanias (3)’, in: S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth eds., *Oxford classical dictionary* (third edition, Oxford 1996) 1129.

¹⁹ S.E. Alcock, J.F. Cherry and J. Elsner, *Pausanias. Travel and memory in Roman Greece* (New York 2001).

constructs urban space, similarly, as a series of spatial relationships between mostly sacred spots. The inhabitants of a landscape gain what Tuan calls 'spatial expertise' not shared by visitors; this is especially true in complex societies. Pausanias seems to have been favoured with rich expositions of the spatial webs of memory and meaning in the landscapes he visited.

Previous work on Peloponnesian landscapes

Many aspects of the ancient Peloponnese and its regions have been studied intensively, but there have been surprisingly few overall treatments of the peninsula as an entity since Ernst Curtius's monumental and, for its time, hugely advanced geographical history²⁰ – though he had scarcely any archaeological evidence and had to rely, like travellers (even well-informed ones)²¹, almost entirely on ancient literary sources. There are exceptions in more recent scholarship, such as Baladié on Strabo's representation of the Peloponnese and, for the later Roman period, Avraméa.²² Most often, historians and archaeologists of the past couple of generations have focused on particular regions, though in recent times one can point to syntheses of particular social and political formations,²³ surveys of cult sanctuaries,²⁴ or studies of regional and polis identity.²⁵ Studies of regional economies and

²⁰ E. Curtius, *Peloponnesos. Eine historisch-geographische Beschreibung der Halbinsel*, 2 vols. (Gotha 1851-52).

²¹ For example: W.M. Leake, *Travels in the Morea* 3 vols. (London 1930; reprint Amsterdam 1968); and W.M. Leake, *Peloponnesiaca. A supplement to travels in the Morea* (London 1946; reprint Amsterdam 1967).

²² Baladié, *Le Péloponnèse de Strabon*; A. Avraméa, *Le Péloponnèse du IV^e au VIII^e siècle. Changements et persistances* (Paris 1997).

²³ For example Luraghi and Alcock on the helots of Messenia: N. Luraghi and S.E. Alcock eds., *Helots and their masters in Laconia and Messenia. Histories, ideologies, structures* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London 2003).

²⁴ R. Hägg ed., *Peloponnesian sanctuaries and cults (Proceedings of the 9th International Symposium at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 11–13 June 1994)* (Stockholm 2002).

²⁵ For example on Messenia: N. Luraghi, 'Becoming Messenian', *Journal of hellenic studies* 122 (2002) 45-69; N. Luraghi, 'Helots called Messenians? A note on Thuc. 1.101.2', *Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002) 588-592. On Arkadia: T.H. Nielsen, 'Arkadia: city-ethnics and tribalism' in M.H. Hansen ed., *Introduction to an inventory of Poleis* (Copenhagen 1996) 117-163; T.H. Nielsen, 'The concept of Arkadia: the people, their land, and their organisation' in: Nielsen and Roy, *Defining ancient Arkadia*, 16-79; C. Morgan and J. Hall, 'Achaian poleis and Achaian colonisation' in: Hansen, *Introduction to an inventory of Poleis*, 164-232.

monetization are enjoying a revival.²⁶ Intensive archaeological field surveys have also taken place, some based on parts of a region (e.g. the Laconia Survey, covering circa 2 per cent of Laconia,²⁷ and smaller projects, e.g. the Asea Valley Survey²⁸), non-intensive surveys covering a whole region (notably the Minnesota Messenia Expedition²⁹) and projects that combine intensive with non-intensive approaches to cover areas of middling scale between locality and region (Southern Argolid Project;³⁰ the Greek survey of western Achaia;³¹ Pylos Regional Archaeological Project).³²

But there is still a lack of studies of such aspects as myths and memory related to Peloponnesian landscapes (though see Van Dyke and Alcock and also Buxton for a possible approach;³³ among relatively few studies of networks of meaning, Arkadian religion has been studied by Jost³⁴). There are few studies of regionalism in the ancient periods. Little work has yet been done on routes and connectivity as explored by Horden

²⁶ C. Grandjean, *Les Messéniens de 370/369 au I^{er} siècle de notre ère: monnayages et histoire* (Paris 2003); J.A.W. Warren, *The bronze coinage of the Achaian League. Currency for a federal ideal* (forthcoming).

²⁷ W.G. Cavanagh, J. Crouwel, R.W.V. Catling and G. Shipley with P. Armstrong et al., *Continuity and change in a Greek rural landscape. The Laconia survey 2: Archaeological Data* (London 1996); W.G. Cavanagh with P. Armstrong et al., *Continuity and change in a Greek rural landscape. The Laconia survey 1: Methodology and interpretation* (London 2002).

²⁸ J. Forsén, and B. Forsén, *The Asea Valley Survey. An Arcadian mountain valley from the Palaeolithic period until Modern Times* (Stockholm 2003).

²⁹ W.A. McDonald, 'Minnesota Messenia expedition' in: D. R. Keller and D. W. Rupp eds., *Archaeological survey in the Mediterranean Area* (Oxford 1983) 273.

³⁰ M.H. Jameson, C.N. Runnels and T.H. van Andel with M. H. Munn, *A Greek countryside. The southern Argolid from Prehistory to the Present Day* (Stanford, California 1994).

³¹ A.D. Rizakis and R. Dalongeville et al. eds., *Le Bassin du Péïros et la plaine occidentale* (Athens 1992).

³² J.L. Davis, S.E. Alcock, J. Bennet, Y.G. Lolos and C.W. Shelmerdine, 'The Pylos Regional Archaeological Project, part I: overview and the archaeological survey', *Hesperia* 66 (1997) 391-494; J.L. Davis ed., *Sandy Pylos. An archaeological history from Nestor to Navarino* (Austin 1998).

³³ R.M. van Dyke and S.E. Alcock, 'Archaeologies of memory. An introduction' in: R. M. Van Dyke and S. E. Alcock eds., *Archaeologies of memory* (Malden, Massachusetts and Oxford 2003) 1-13; R. Buxton, *Imaginary Greece. The contexts of mythology* (Cambridge 1994).

³⁴ M. Jost, *Sanctuaires et cultes d'Arcadie* (Paris 1985); and M. Jost, 'The distribution of sanctuaries in civic space in Arkadia' in: S. E. Alcock and R. Osborne eds., *Placing the gods. Sanctuaries and sacred space in Ancient Greece* (Oxford) 217-230.

and Purcell.³⁵ Inter-regional trade remains to be explored for post-classical periods.³⁶

Peloponnesian unity or disparate regions?

Horden and Purcell ask of the Mediterranean, ‘Is it a worthwhile subject of study?’, and state that their overall aim is ‘to discover whether it has unity and distinctiveness, and what kinds of continuity are involved’.³⁷ Indeed, they identify the unity of the Mediterranean as rather tenuous before the late medieval period.

Clearly the Peloponnese, as a peninsula, lends itself, more obviously than the whole Mediterranean, to being treated as a unity; but although the Peloponnese is sometimes treated as an entity (e.g. Strabo 8. 1. 1; 8. 1. 3, ‘the acropolis of Greece’), it is usually done in passing except for navigational purposes. No ancient author, I think, seriously attempts to characterize the peninsula as a whole in depth, or to identify common features, interactions within this frame, and differences between its parts. Usually, when not presented as a simple land-mass with particular dimensions, it appears in the guise of a group of political-ethnic entities not separate from a wider collection of more of the same (Hellas). For example, the navigational text of the mid-fourth century known as Pseudo-Skylax enumerates the circumnavigation of the known world’s coasts in a region-by-region manner as far as the Peloponnese, through it, and after it. The author makes only passing notes on the Peloponnese as a unit – ‘from here begins the Peloponnese’ (40), ‘here ends the Peloponnese’ (55) – which do not delay his region-based narrative.

Fortunately for us, in archaic and classical literature the regions of the Peloponnese are fairly clearly defined (with only occasional demarcation disputes). Sometimes they are defined ethnically; Pseudo-Skylax himself includes the statements ‘after Arkadia is the *ethnos* of Messene’ (45) and

³⁵ Horden and Purcell, *The corrupting sea*; though see: G.D.R. Sanders and I.K. Whitbread, ‘Central places and major roads in the Peloponnese’, *Annual of the British School at Athens* 85 (1990) 333–362; G.A. Pikoulas, ‘The road-network of Arkadia’ in: Nielsen and Roy, *Defining ancient Arkadia*, 248–319, with map 3 at end of the volume.

³⁶ See J.N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece* (London and Tonbridge 1977) and others on the early periods; note, however, C. Chandezon, *L’Élevage en Grèce (fin Ve–fin Ier s. a.C.): l’apport des sources épigraphiques* (Bordeaux 2003).

³⁷ Horden and Purcell, *The corrupting sea*, 9.

‘after Messenia is the *ethnos* of Lakedaïmon’ (46). Most of the Peloponnese is composed of regions to which ethnic unity (within overall Hellenic ethnicity) is attributed, though there are exceptions such as the one-polis territory of Sikyon: thus ‘after Corinth is the polis of Sikyon, with a coastline of 120 furlongs’ (41). Ethnic identity (in this sense) was often expressed by inhabitants of these regions through religious activities involving multiple poleis, such as at pan-Arkadian rural sanctuaries or in activities involving more than one polis. The constituents of Arkadian ethnic identity are explored by Nielsen, who has also shown how ethnic identity could be manufactured or massaged, e.g. in the case of the short-lived region of Triphylia, between western Arkadia, northern Messenia, and Eleia.³⁸

The regional ethnicities asserted in the ancient texts were (with the probable exception of Triphylia) of very long duration. Overwhelmingly the political–ethnic subdivisions of the classical period were still the same in hellenistic and Roman times. See how Pausanias, in the second century AD, marks his passage from one region to another: ‘As you descend from this road there is a shrine of Latoan Apollo, and after it the boundary-stones (*horoi*) of the Megarians with Corinthian territory . . .’ (end of book 1). ‘On it [Mount Parnon] is the boundary of the Lakedaïmonians with the Argives and Tegeates, and at the boundary are stone images of Hermes . . . After the images of Hermes it is now Laconia’ (end of book 2–start of book 3). That there was usually a specific, well-known boundary between two political–ethnic regions is proved by a limiting case. Moving from Laconia to Messenia, he says: ‘The boundary of the Messenians that marks the part of their own land reassigned by the emperor [Augustus] to the Laconian [district] beside the territory of Gerenia’ (which he puts in Laconia), ‘is the gorge known in our day as Choirios’ (4. 1. 1). He is working with a model of land division that purports to make political reality conform with ethnic identity, and identifies certain changes as violations of that code.

Thus far the attempt to elucidate Peloponnese-wide historical unities would seem to be ill-favoured. As geographically informed historians, however, we are entitled to take a more holistic view than the Greeks and to ask whether, and if so how, the regions of the Peloponnese may have influenced developments within each other. If we do identify a unity in diversity, however, we cannot stop at the coast: we have to treat the

³⁸ T.H. Nielsen, ‘Triphylia: an experiment in ethnic construction and political organisation’ in: T.H. Nielsen ed., *Yet more studies in the ancient Greek Polis* (Stuttgart) 129–162.

Peloponnese in its context, just as we treat its regions in theirs. Freitag attempts this exercise for the north shore by treating the gulf of Corinth as a unit and looking at cultural transit across and along and out of and into the gulf.³⁹ The kind of unitary study to which one might aspire would need to do the same thing for the other faces of the Peloponnese, such as the west coast and its interactions with the Adriatic.

Given the classicizing or aesthetic nature of much work in classical archaeology in the past two centuries, not to mention the absence of the right kind of socio-economic data in ancient texts, the potential for identifying regional interaction is still limited, which partly explains the dearth of interesting work.

Connectivity

Connectivity has been identified by Horden and Purcell as one of the defining characteristics of the Mediterranean as a whole, as well as of particular parts of that world. On the broad level, this reflects connections between distant regions. Ceramic studies may have something to offer; my own overview of the hundreds of papers in the series of ‘Scientific Meetings on Hellenistic Pottery’ reveals two or three different Peloponneses: in the north and north-west pottery styles reflect links with Corinth, while in the south the similarities are stronger with the eastern Mediterranean and Magna Graecia.

On a local level, this connectivity can operate at different scales, right down to the level of ‘micro-ecologies’ or ‘micro-environments’, another defining feature of the Mediterranean basin.⁴⁰ Archaeological field survey data can potentially facilitate the identification of such local connectivity. It is possible, given a large enough sample area, to distinguish contrasting simultaneous developments in different parts of a survey area.⁴¹ Early modern data from travellers can also be useful.⁴²

³⁹ K. Freitag, *Der Golf von Korinth. Historisch-topographische Untersuchungen von der Archais bis in das 1. Jh. v. Chr.* (München 1999).

⁴⁰ Horden and Purcell, *The corrupting sea*, 79–80, 84, 123.

⁴¹ For example: G. Shipley, ‘The survey area in the hellenistic and Roman periods’, in W. Cavanagh et al., *Continuity and change in a Greek rural Landscape. The Laconia survey* (London 2002) 257–337.

⁴² Not only Leake and others use such data, but also the earlier version of the cited British handbook contains details of many roads that must go back to medieval and even ancient

As well as evidence of interaction in particular periods, there are geographical continuities that are likely to have operated in the long term. The contrast between coastal and inland poleis, for example, is probably a characterizing feature of Peloponnesian history in all ancient periods. For towns on the sea, inshore sailing provided the easiest means of keeping up local contacts, particularly in Achaia with its narrow coastal plain backed by high mountains. Movement and exchange with places outside the Peloponnese, too, was largely dependent upon seaborne contact across the gulf of Corinth to central Greece, across (or round) the Saronic gulf (e.g. using Methana and Aigina as stepping-stones) to Megaris and Attica (with the Isthmus land-bridge as an alternative), or via Kythera to western Crete, and beyond to North Africa. Aigion, for example, was probably thought of as a stage on the route via Kirrha to Thessaly.⁴³ Longer crossings took people to the Ionian islands and Italy; Polybios notes the strategic role of Kephallenia in controlling access to the Peloponnese from the north-west (5. 3, it 'commands the north-western district of the Peloponnese, and especially Elis').⁴⁴

Towns at the seaward ends of routes, such as Kyllene in Eleia or Gytheion and Boia in Laconia, benefited economically from trade and traffic. They acted as 'gateways', points of entry and outlet for towns in the uplands behind: Gytheion for Sparta; Kyllene for Elis; Sikyon and/or Pellene for Argive Phleious as well as for Stymphalos and other north-eastern Arkadian towns.

Among inland poleis, too, a number exercised key gateway roles. The Spartans fortified Sellasia near their northern border at an early date (archaic according to the Laconia Survey data⁴⁵) to control entry to Lakeldaimon from the north. Similarly Orchomenos, otherwise relatively insignificant, is singled out by Polybios as vital to the Macedonians for control of eastern Arkadia. Phigaleia, on the borders of Eleia (western Arkadia) and Messenia, was torn in different directions, at one time even joining the far-away Aitolian league, despite its cult site of major importance to the Arkadians.

As noted earlier, a perennial question for the peoples of the Peloponnese was the hegemonial role of Sparta, and concern with the

times: Admiralty Naval Intelligence Division, Geographical Section, *A Handbook of Greece* 3 vols. (London: Admiralty/War Office 1918-19).

⁴³ Freitag, *Der Golf von Korinth*, 274-275.

⁴⁴ Translation by E.S. Shuckburgh, *The Histories of Polybios* (London and New York, 1889).

⁴⁵ R.W.V. Catling, 'The survey area from the Early Iron Age to the classical period (c.1050-c.300 BC)' in: Cavanagh et al., *Continuity and change in a Greek rural landscape*, 151-256.

Eurotas–Alpheios furrow must have been often in their minds. An inscription dedicated at Olympia by the Spartans states explicitly the distance between the two places, perhaps illustrating the Spartans’ mental geography.⁴⁶ The Arkadian towns in the upper Alpheios headwaters were of key importance for all Arkadians and for their northern neighbours. Complementing this topographical node was the area to its west, comprising the northern slopes of the Taygetos range. Here Sparta’s dependent ‘perioikic’ settlements down to the fourth century (Aigys, Malea, Kromnos, Belbina) hardly seem to have been integrated into Lakedaimonian society and geopolitical structures, judging by their obscurity in the historical record. Perhaps they were a relatively late focus of Spartan interest. Or perhaps western Arkadia, lacking a major centre before the foundation of Megalopolis by Sparta’s enemies, seemed so powerless to the Spartans that they invested little in this area and focused instead on the Alpheios route. Another focus of Spartan strategic concern, and no doubt of others’ concern about Sparta, was the Kynouria–Thyreatis region on the east coast, an area perennially disputed with Argos.

All these considerations explain why Philip II could be induced to deprive the Lakedaimonians of these outlying areas – unjustly as it seemed to some – and why successive Spartan leaders, over the following century and more, attempted to use these areas as bridgeheads for expansion and the recovery of lost domains.

Mental landscapes

The myths recorded, or rather retold, by Pausanias may also give insights into the mental maps of ancient times, though filtered through a Roman imperial perspective. But the area of mental landscapes is undoubtedly the hardest on which to get a hold, in the absence of any detailed appreciation of the hellenistic Peloponnese and its landscapes by contemporaries. It may be that a combination of the approaches sketched above – analysing geopolitical continuities, economic interactions, cult networks, the construction of identities, and so on – may enable us to understand how it felt to be in the Peloponnese in the relevant period. The historian may have to adopt the kind of imaginative engagement more often associated with poetry or fiction.

⁴⁶ W. Dittenberger and K. Purgold, *Die Inschriften von Olympia* (Berlin 1896) no. 171.

A modern writer can use landscape to evoke contrasting emotions, the cosmic and the personal. An Atlantic skyscape can counterpoint or reflect the excitement and the terror of war:

The sky is covered by turquoise batik clouds bound together by fine veins. Everywhere a reddish background shows through. Slowly the background begins to brighten and outshine the blue of the clouds. A red glitter takes over the eastern sky, breaking through at every opening. The expanses of cloud are penetrated by brilliant points of light. Then slowly the flashing and glittering grow paler, as though the light were going out. The colors soften; the sun has risen behind the cloud cover.⁴⁷

A description of a lonely landscape can warn us of the harrowing human drama to come:

There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. Those hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa. About you there is grass and bracken and you may hear the forlorn crying of the titihoya, one of the birds of the veld.⁴⁸

Any attempt to recapture the ancient experience of living (and fighting, and dying) in the Peloponnese may, in the end, depend heavily on re-creation, on an imagined phenomenology that can enrich the otherwise dry narrative of military strategy and civil discord.

Landscapes, both local and regional, provided emotional and practical points of reference in the construction of Peloponnesian identities, uniting and dividing according to need. As women and men in Argos watched thunderstorms crashing upon the mountains to the west, did they wonder how the peoples of northern Arkadia were bearing the onslaught? In Laconia it seems certain that the sight of Mount Taÿgetos being lit up by the sunrise – on many days each month, the new sun's rays drench the upper slopes with a dense orangey-pink glow – was an experience that united all those dwelling in the vale of Sparta and the hills to its east, just as

⁴⁷ L.-G. Buchheim, *Das Boot* (English translation; London 1999) 103.

⁴⁸ A. Paton, *Cry, the beloved country. A story of comfort in desolation* (London 1949) 11.

they linger in the memories of erstwhile members of the Laconia Survey team.

When a Macedonian commander, about to invade the Peloponnese, was pondering which route to take, doubtless he did not use staff maps. He drew upon his own physical memories and those of his advisers, juxtaposing in mind the Argive lowlands with the Achaian coast road, the severe passes beyond Thyreatis with the valley route from Phleious to the coast. Irrelevant to him, one supposes, our image of the peninsula – so familiar that we fail to take in its defining features – hanging like a mulberry leaf from the stalk of Corinth. Philip V's Peloponnese was surely no two-dimensional outline on a horizontal map-table, but a mental or visual image occupying his actual and mental gaze at eye level, stretching far to left and again to right. Or, seen from the top of Acrocorinth, it was a carpet of landscape to south and west, with mountain ranges receding into the distance, and invisible valleys between them.