LACONIAN AND MESSENIAN PLAQUES WITH SEATED FIGURES: THE SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSION

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The characteristic terracotta plaques with seated figures accompanied by snakes were created for local use, as they are hardly ever found outside Laconia and Messenia. They served a type of cult, the heroic, as shown by both their widespread distribution in this region and their complete absence from divine sanctuaries. Their generalised and standardised iconography made them versatile offerings that could be used in various contexts, with the seated figure acquiring the identity of the locally honoured hero in a specific sanctuary setting. Distribution patterns also show variety. In Laconia, plaque findspots show this type of offering was favoured much more in the region inhabited by the homoioi. By contrast, the Messenian plaques, offered both at Bronze Age tombs and at urban sanctuaries, must have been dedicated primarily by perioikoi. The similarities between Laconian and Messenian types of plaques need not be correlated with the contested ethnic identity of the Messenians. Rather, they should be attributed to the flexibility and variety in their use. The Messenian cults that attracted plaque dedications honoured heroes not necessarily because they were Achaeans, but because they were celebrated local mythical or historical figures. Creating a link with the past through heroes was a well-established way to articulate a strong local and communal, but not necessarily ethnic, identity.

INTRODUCTION

Terracotta dedicatory offerings, found in abundance throughout the Greek world, are expressive products of human cultic behaviour. They can thus shed light not only on the nature and character of the divine or heroic recipients but also on the associated cult practices. In addition to their value in a religious sense, terracotta offerings also have a social value. In particular, types featuring a distinctive local iconography can often give us glimpses of the process by which dedicators constructed their social and cultural identity, and help us understand the social and political functions of local ritual practice.

This article concerns the characteristic terracotta plaques depicting seated figures often accompanied by snakes, which were used as votive offerings throughout Laconia and Messenia from the sixth through to the fourth century BC. It will argue that the plaques were employed in hero cults of local mythical or historical personalities, with the seated figure acquiring the identity of the locally honoured hero or heroine in a specific sanctuary setting. These heroes, who could have been worshipped by all residents of Laconia and Messenia, helped forge a strong communal and civic, but not necessarily ethnic, identity.

PLAQUES WITH SEATED FIGURES

Mould-made terracotta relief plaques are one of the most characteristic types of votive offerings in Laconia. Fabric, manufacture, style and iconography indicate that these plaques were produced locally, probably in or near Sparta (Salapata 1993, 189). Many such plaques were discovered with other offerings in two votive deposits excavated at Amyklai, the fifth home of Sparta, located about five kilometres to the south and a short distance south-west of the famous Amyklaion sanctuary.¹

¹ The first deposit was excavated in the late 1950s/early 1960s (see references in Stibbe 1991; Salapata 1993, 189); the second deposit was discovered in 1998 (Themos et al. 1998, 173). On the manner of display of the plaques, see Salapata 2002a, 26–31.
Among the various subjects depicted on the Amyklaian plaques, the most dominant is that of a seated man holding a drinking cup, usually a kantharos, and often accompanied by a snake (Fig. 1), a type created in the late sixth century BC (Salapata 1993; Salapata 2006, 542, 553–4). Other types include an attending figure, either a woman with oinochoe and offerings (Fig. 2) or a boy with strainer and oinochoe (Fig. 3). Later variations show a female with a sceptre seated next to the man (Salapata 2002b, fig. 3), or even represented alone, again accompanied by a snake (Salapata 2002b, fig. 4). Plaques with seated figures show a wide spectrum of quality and size, ranging from large, detailed images to small and simplified versions (Fig. 4 a–b).

Literary, epigraphic and archaeological evidence clearly associates the Amyklaian deposits with the sanctuary of Cassandra (known in Laconia as Alexandra), which allegedly contained the graves of Agamemnon and Cassandra (Pausanias 3.19.6; Salapata 2002b). Pottery shows that a heroic cult was practised there since at least the early seventh century. This cult is related to a variant tradition that placed the palace, and therefore the murder of Agamemnon and Cassandra, not in the Argolid as the tragic poets said, but in Laconia. Sixth-century Spartan aspirations for leadership over the Peloponnesian probably enhanced the pre-existing local tradition and cult; thus, by promoting Agamemnon, the ‘lord of men’ in Homer, to the role of a Laconian hero personifying the glorious past and symbolising local history and identity, Sparta would have nicely mirrored and legitimised her ambitions for a Peloponnesian alliance and, at the same time, would have undermined any Argive claim (Salapata 2011, 41–3).

The dedication of the first plaques indicates an intensification of the cult at the Amyklai sanctuary from the late sixth century on. The iconography fits well with the identification of the recipients as Agamemnon and his consort, the prophetess Cassandra. The stock image of a seated figure with cup, and its variations, would have denoted the ideal mythical hero as known primarily from epic poetry, with the kantharos referring to wine consumption during feasting. The woman, seated by herself or next to him, assumes the role of his consort Cassandra, with the sceptre alluding to her priestly status and especially her prophetic abilities (Salapata 2002b,
142–3; Salapata 2011, 52). The commonly occurring snake, which appears also in other media from the sanctuary deposits, would have referred to the heroic nature of the couple, who are frequently accompanied by attendants and adorants (Salapata 2002b, 142–3; Salapata 2006, 552–3).

Fig. 2. Terracotta plaque with seated man holding kantharos and staff, and accompanied by female attendant and snake from Amyklai. Sparta Museum no. 6231/1.

Fig. 3. Terracotta plaque with seated man holding kantharos and accompanied by boy attendant and snake from Amyklai. Sparta Museum no. 6229/1.
Plaques with seated figures, many made in the same (or derivative) moulds as those from Amyklai, have been discovered at various other Laconian sites both as isolated finds and as part of comparable votive deposits. They have been found in more than 30 sites throughout Sparta, but with major concentrations to the south and east of the acropolis hill, especially in the kome of Limnai (Fig. 5).
Fig. 5. Map of Sparta showing findspots of terracotta plaques with seated figures.

(e.g. Wace 1905–6; Flouris 2000; Steinhauser 1973–4; Pavlides 2011, 563–8; Tosti 2011; Salapata in press, Appendix 1). An example found in a deposit in Stauffert Street is illustrated in Fig. 6. Far fewer have been discovered in other Laconian sites (Fig. 7; Salapata in press, Appendix 1), for example at Angelona (Wace and Hasluck 1904–5; Stibbe 1991, 9, 38, 43, fig. 31 no. a4).

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2 See also the reports of the local ephoreia published in the Ἀρχαιολογικῶν Δελτίων. However, vagaries of rescue excavations may have partly influenced these concentrations. Question marks on the map indicate presence of plaques whose subject is not confirmed (potentially they could represent seated figures).
Fig. 6. Terracotta plaque with seated man holding kantharos from deposit on Stauffert Street in Limnai, Sparta. Sparta Museum no. 13471. After Flouris 2000, pl. 29.

Fig. 7. Map of southern Peloponnese showing findspots of terracotta plaques with seated figures.
The iconography of the plaques is closely related to a series of more than 50 stone reliefs discovered throughout Laconia but mainly in and around Sparta (Fig. 8). These reliefs encompass an astonishingly broad range of dates, beginning in the third quarter of the sixth century, a little earlier than the plaques, and lasting through the Hellenistic period into Roman times (Andronikos 1956; Stibbe 1991; Hibler 1993; Salapata 1993; Salapata in press, chapter 4 and Appendix 2). As I have argued in detail elsewhere (Salapata in press, chapter 5), the eclectic iconographic type of the seated figure holding a cup and accompanied by a snake was created in Laconia during the third quarter of the sixth century based on regional, panhellenic and foreign (Egyptian and Near Eastern) prototypes, which were modified according to Greek aesthetic and cultic requirements. Remarkably, this iconographic type remained basically the same through the centuries, although in a stylistically updated form.

Reliefs and plaques with seated figures conform to the same basic types (single man alone, single man or couple accompanied by woman or boy attendant) and follow a similar stylistic development. The series of plaques probably started as an inexpensive and quickly made alternative to the larger stone reliefs (Salapata 1993), but the religious significance of all these votive types must have been the same, with symbolic value most important: as long as the type of offering was appropriate, material, size and quality of execution were probably secondary (cf. Andronikos 1956, 301; Kyrieleis 1988, esp. 215). The persistence of the imagery for more than five centuries with a clear stylistic evolution but few variations indicates that the scheme was fixed by tradition and expressed an important aspect of local religiosity.

**Distribution**

Terracotta relief plaques in general are widely distributed in the Greek world, showing they were not restricted to particular deities or sanctuaries (Salapata 2002b, 25–6). Plaques with seated...
figures, however, were created for a specific local use, as they are hardly ever found outside Laconia and Messenia, an area greatly influenced by Sparta, as I will discuss later.

The vast majority of plaques with seated figures were found in Sparta and Amyklai. Their distribution in votive deposits throughout the city (Fig. 5) emphasises their total absence from major divine sanctuaries such as those of Athena Chalkioikos, Orthia and Apollo Amyklaios, all of which have been extensively excavated, and also from the more recently excavated sanctuary of Zeus Messapeus at Tsakona, to the north-east of Sparta (Catling 2002). This absence seems related to the nature of the recipients of these votives and can be explained if this type of offering was reserved for heroes, like Agamemnon and Cassandra at Amyklai (Salapata 1993, 194; Salapata in press), with the similar iconographic types showing their affinity. This also seems to be true for the related stone reliefs of pre-Hellenistic times, whether they were dedicated to heroes of the mythical past or to exceptional historical personalities (like Chilon). Their dedication to a range of different heroes would account for both their widespread distribution (Fig. 8) and their complete absence from divine sanctuaries. Support for this interpretation comes from plaques (and reliefs) associated with earlier burials, which must have been the centre of a heroic cult (see further below).

The wide regional distribution of reliefs and plaques with seated figures corresponds to the pattern of small local shrines commonly scattered throughout the Greek countryside and especially Laconia, an area exceptionally rich in hero shrines. Pausanias mentions more than 50 such hero shrines in Sparta proper and about 25 more in other Laconian sites (Stibbe 1978, 7–8; Hibler 1993, 199).

The image of the seated man, woman or couple accompanied by a snake was generic enough to allow dedicators to offer it to different heroes in Laconia, so in a specific sanctuary setting the general image of the seated figure would have been ascribed the identity of the locally honoured hero (Salapata 1993, 194).

Plaques with seated figures and hero cults
As a diverse class of superhuman being, heroes were honoured by a variety of social groups and for different reasons. The Spartan interest in their heroic past goes back at least to the early seventh century, as the cult of Agamemnon at Amyklai shows. Some heroic figures may have been worshipped privately and informally by members of specific professional categories or by leading families, because the mirage of egalitarianism among the homoioi does not mean absence of differentiation in social, economic and political matters. Down to the Classical period some families had managed to enjoy more status and prestige than others (Hodkinson 2000, 399–445;

5 Unfortunately, in these other cases clear evidence for the identity of the cult recipients, such as inscriptions or literary testimonies, is lacking, so specific identifications are impossible or contested: e.g. hero of Astrabakos, either in the Heroon by the River Bank (Wace 1905–6, 288, 293) or in square O13 (Stibbe 1989, 87, 89; see also Flouris 2000, 159–60).

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7 The image of the seated man, woman or couple accompanied by a snake was generic enough to allow dedicators to offer it to different heroes in Laconia, so in a specific sanctuary setting the general image of the seated figure would have been ascribed the identity of the locally honoured hero (Salapata 1993, 194).

8 Stone reliefs have been found in a wider range of Laconian places than plaques, with almost half of them from outside Sparta. The vast majority, however, have been found in later (Roman or Byzantine) contexts or built into modern structures: Stibbe 1991; Salapata in press, Appendix 2.

9 In fact, a few stone reliefs have been found together with or near plaques: e.g. Gitiada Street (Fig. 5 no. 8; Flouris 2000, 133–4) and nearby Bougadi plot (Fig. 5 no. 9; Steinhauer 1973, 166).

10 E.g. Wace 1905–6, 288–94; Flouris 2000, esp. 4, 13–18, 152. See Fig. 5 nos. 1, 3, 5–7, 16 and perhaps 4; for more details, see Salapata in press, Appendix 1 nos. 3, 5, 6, 7, 9–11, 21, 48.

11 Of course some of these would be post- Classical but there would also be others extinct by Pausanias’ time.

12 The cult of Menelaos and Helen near Sparta was also founded in the 7th century: Antonaccio 1995, 155–66, 197.

13 E.g. the cooks and waiters of the syssitia may have practised the cult of Maton and Keraon: Taita 2001, 71.
Christesen 2010, esp. 51, 60), and one of the methods to maintain and legitimise their elite status could have been the forging of connections with heroes of the past from whom they claimed descent.

The "kome" of Limnai was the earliest region of Sparta to be occupied and is rich in Protogeometric and Geometric burials (Kennell and Luraghi 2009, 240). In association with such tombs, various deposits have been found, some dating as early as the seventh century, with several containing terracotta plaques among the finds (Fig. 5 nos. 1, 3, 5–7; for more details, see Salapata in press, Appendix 1 nos. 3, 5, 6, 9–11; Pavlides 2011, 563–5). The concentration there of such deposits may indicate that an ancestral burial ground became the focus of heroic cults from early in the Archaic period, some of which may have survived until the time of Pausanias’ visit (Pausanias 3.16.6). Some cults would have been established not long after the burials, while others would have developed when graves were discovered by chance during later building activities (Pavlides 2011, 562–9). Some of these private or familial cults may have been appropriated and formalised by the state, so that these heroes were eventually worshipped by the entire community, as was the case in other regions (cf. Mazarakis Ainian 1999, 36; Taita 2001, 69–70).

Other heroic cults were newly created in the Archaic period and were community-oriented from the beginning (cf. Wees 2006, 376–7). Important local individuals of the mythological and historical past, like Agamemnon and Chilon, represented the values and ideals of the entire polis (Pavlides 2011, 561–2), and, by honouring these kinds of heroes who transcended individual families, the Spartan state sought to discourage family allegiances and foster a strong communal civic identity that bound not only the homoioi but also the perioikoi (cf. Hall 2000, 87–8). The perioikoi formed a distinct status-group within the Lacedaemonian polis that lacked full political rights. They were, however, ethnically and culturally indistinguishable from the homoioi, and integrated into the political and military structure of the polis (on the perioikoi see Hall 2000; Mertens 2002; Nafissi 2009, 123–4); in addition, they worshipped the same divinities, adopted similar cult practices and participated in important festivals of the polis, as Spartiates attended festivals in periwigic regions (Parker 1989, 145; Shipley 1997, 203; Mertens 2002, 288; Luraghi 2008, 143). Group solidarity and strong communal civic identity constructed through links with ancestors or heroes would have been crucial during the Archaic period, as Sparta aspired to bolstering her position in the Peloponnesian and claiming its leadership.

All these various heroic cults could have been well served by the reliefs and plaques with seated figures. The original but adaptable iconography could be applied in different cases, and, most importantly, this peculiarly Laconian class of votives would have differentiated local Laconian heroes from all others.

This distinctive Laconian iconography influenced terracotta plaques produced in Messenia, a region under Spartan control for centuries. Such plaques were dedicated along with other offerings at urban sanctuaries in ancient Messene, and also at Bronze Age cemetery sites, especially in the area of Pylos and near Kalamata (Fig. 7) (see e.g. Messene: Themelis 1993, 49–55; Themelis 1998; Voidokilia: Peppa-Papaioannou 2012). They clearly depend thematically and typologically on the Laconian plaques, with some evidently made in the same or derivative moulds (Fig. 9). However, production in local clay suggests that these were not imports but that moulds, or plaques from which new moulds could have been manufactured, were imported from Laconia (Peppa-Papaioannou 2012, 103–8).

Like the Laconian plaques, the Messenian plaques with seated figures have been connected with heroic cults. For example, the cult at the earlier shrine at the Demeter sanctuary in Messene has been

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14 Since Limnai was sparsely built up in Roman times, several of these heroic shrines were preserved in later years: Steinhauer 2009, 275. The pattern of hero shrines built over earlier (Mycenaean and Geometric) graves was found elsewhere in Greece, for example, Corinth (Williams 1981, 410; Tofi 1981, 220) and Athens (Lalond 1981). See further examples in Mazarakis Ainian 2007–8; Pavlides 2011, 564.

15 Messenia was part of the Lacedaemonian state from the late 8th century until 369 BC, when it was liberated by the Theban Epameinondas who founded a new capital, Messene, at the foot of Mount Ithome.

16 Still, some types appear to have been new creations: Themelis 1998, 173–4 and fig. 35.
been attributed to Leukippos and his daughters (Themelis 1993, 52–4; Themelis 2000, 27; Zunino 1997, 257–62, 290), and the cult at the Asklepieion court to Asklepios and Messene, worshipped there as mythical pre-Dorian rulers of Messenia at least since the time of liberation in 369 BC (Themelis 2000, 5–24, Themelis 2003, 9; Luraghi 2008, 234, 270, 275).

However, while the finds at the Demeter sanctuary do indicate a hero cult, nothing allows a specific identification (cf. Boehringer 2001, 274–7, 282, 352; Luraghi 2008, 126). On the other hand, the plaques at the Asklepieion court may indeed at some point have been offered to Asklepios and Messene. Asklepios was probably a newcomer, since his panhellenic cult expanded from the late fifth century onwards (Riethmüller 2005, 76–7). The iconography of the plaques from the sixth to the fourth century remained unchanged, implying there was no change in the deities worshipped, but because the iconography is not very specific and the seated figure resembles Asklepios (especially because of the snake), his identification with this iconography may have arisen from an earlier, possibly healing, local hero.

Several plaques with seated figures and other subjects (riders, banqueters and warriors) from Voidokilia on the Messenian west coast were found in and around a small Early Hellenistic building located inside a Bronze Age cemetery, pointing to its use as a shrine (Antonaccio 1995, 80–1; Korres 1985, 164–5). The excavator argued that the tholos tomb there was intact and visible during historic times and the area of this prehistoric cemetery was selected by later inhabitants of the area for ancestor cult or perhaps cult specifically to the hero Thrasymedes, son of Nestor. Other groups of plaques, mainly depicting banqueters, are associated with cults at or near Bronze Age tombs in Messenia (Salapata in press, Appendix 1, nos. 56, 57, 60); this is a

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17 Themelis also associated the deposit next to the gymnasion propylon with a shrine of Aristomenes, since most of the plaques there depict the hero as banqueter or warrior: Themelis 2000, 34–40; Themelis 2003, 20. For Aristomenes, see Zunino 1997, 268–74; Luraghi 2008, 88–94.

18 Korres (1988, 313–14) compared it with shrines such as that in the Corinthian agora; cf. Alcock 1991, 453.
distinctive local cult practice that differs strongly from Laconia, where such cults connected with Bronze Age tombs did not exist.19

Identity of dedicators
The dedication of Messenian plaques at heroic sanctuaries and their similarity to those found in Laconia contribute to the long-running debate on the Messenians’ ethnic identity. Did the Messenians have a collective consciousness and distinct identity that they managed to preserve during the centuries of Spartan subjugation, and which was resurrected with the founding of Messene (Zunino 1997, 253, 297; Alcock 2002, 32–75; Themelis 2003, 6)? Or, did Messenian identity emerge only during the fifth century in opposition to Spartan domination, as an articulation of the distinction within the Spartan social system (Hall 2003; Luraghi 2008)?

According to one view, Messenian cultural and religious traditions survived during Spartan domination and found expression mainly in the cults at Bronze Age tombs. These cults began in the eighth century and continued sporadically in Archaic and Classical times, flourishing again after independence (Korres 1985, 163, 168; Korres 1988, 312, 325; Musti and Torelli 1991, 270; Alcock 2002, 146–52, 165–7).20 They presumably honoured ancestors and local heroes, and are seen as a form of resistance by the Messenians to ethnic assimilation by the Spartans; thus, they are associated with a feeling of nationalism and regional identity which was oppressed but not quenched during Spartan rule. According to this view, then, a link to the heroic Achaean past would have united the Messenian population and created a sense of Achaean identity in opposition to the Dorian identity of the Spartiates. The implication is that the Messenians regarded themselves, or were thought of, as having pre-Dorian or Achaean heritage (see Hall 2003, 155–62).21

A second view questions the notion that Messenia had a cohesive and distinct regional and political identity before the Spartan conquest in the eighth century. This view argues that Messenian identity was constructed consciously, starting in the fifth century, either among the Messenian diaspora or in the context of the peri-oikic revolt in the 460s, and building up after liberation with largely invented traditions.22 Laconian and Messenian helots were not pre-existing homogeneous ethnic groups enslaved early on and en masse within their own territories;23 they were instead impoverished members of the community taken into servitude somewhat later. Their subservient status and ensuing resentment and hatred over their exploitation by the Spartiates would have been enough to foster solidarity among the Messenian helots, who then started fabricating a nationalist history. Thus, this view argues that the notion of ‘the Messenians’ was a gradual development over centuries, emerging out of a broader Laconian identity (Luraghi 2008, 202, 229, 339; cf. Patterson 2003).24

It does seem likely that the idea of Messenia as an ethnic or territorial unit was not something that already existed and managed to survive under Spartan domination, but instead arose during the Spartan conquest and was indeed a by-product of that subjugation. Archaic Messenia appears to have been integrated with the Lacedaemonian state, with the population culturally and ethnically almost completely homogeneous with that in Laconia (Luraghi 2008, 134–6). This is shown by the common dialect and alphabet, similar material culture since Geometric times, and closely related cults that continued even after liberation.25 Among the Laconian type of votive offerings found in Messenia are

19 For examples of cults at Bronze Age tombs from elsewhere in Greece, see Antonaccio 1995, 102–26; Boehringer 2001, 47–131.

20 Interest in Bronze Age tombs peaked in the Late Classical period and was sustained through later centuries: Alcock 1993; Kamp 1996; Boehringer 2001, 243–90; Luraghi 2008, 239–45.

21 Contra Patterson (2003), who suggests they were an early wave of the migrating Dорians.


23 In Kennell and Luraghi 2009, 250–2, Luraghi argues for a gradual conquest of Messenia.

24 For a detailed theoretical discussion of the various views, see Siapkas 2003.

25 Luraghi 2008, 108–32, with a review of archaeology in Messenia in ch. 5. Some Messenian sanctuaries date back to the 8th century and show continuity in cult during Archaic and later times; others were established when Messenia was under Spartan control: Luraghi 2008, 133, 144–5, 233.
the plaques with seated figures (as well as several other subjects), many of which are similar to those found at Amyklai and Sparta, and some even produced in the same or derivative moulds.

Who dedicated these plaques in the Laconian and Messenian hero shrines? The low cost, mediocre quality and intensive production over a long period indicate a broad level of participation in such cults. These were popular mass-produced offerings affordable by most dedicators, but not necessarily restricted to the lower socio-economic strata. Rather than just reflecting the financial means or social status of the votaries, the terracotta plaques must have fulfilled a cultic need (cf. Bonias 1998, 104; Baumbach 2004, 5).26

In Laconia, the distribution of plaque findspots shows this type of offering was favoured more in the region inhabited by the Spartiates. Still, the discovery of some plaques in perioikic territory suggests that perioikoi, who were culturally homogeneous with the Spartiates, may also have dedicated such plaques.27 In contrast, the Messenian plaques dedicated to heroes at urban sanctuaries and Bronze Age tombs must have been dedicated primarily by perioikoi, since the homoioi were based in Sparta (Hall 2007, 175). Nonetheless, there are indications that helots may also have dedicated such plaques.28 The Messenian helotic pattern of settlement suggests some independent social organisation and even some social differentiation. Messenian helots lived in agglomerated settlements or extensive estates rather than in small farmsteads dispersed through the countryside as in Laconia (Luraghi 2008, 138–40); thus ‘elite’ overseer helots, who managed the estates of the absentee Spartiates, could well have been involved in such cults (Hodkinson 2000, 125–31; Alcock 2002, 154; Patterson 2003).

Like other manifestations of a shared culture, the continuity in the cult at Messenian sanctuaries after liberation and the fact that the plaques remain similar to those in Laconia indicate that the residents of Messenia were ethnically indistinguishable from the Spartans (cf. Luraghi 2008, 133, 144–5, 233–9). Still, I believe that the Messenian cults that attracted plaque dedications honoured heroes not necessarily because they were Achaean, but because they were celebrated local mythical or historical figures. Reaching back to the heroic age through heroes was a well-established way to articulate a strong local and communal identity, but not necessarily an ethnic one.29

In conclusion, the similarities between Laconian and Messenian plaques with seated figures need not be correlated with the contested ethnic identity of the Messenians. Rather, they should be attributed to the flexibility and variety in their use. The same types of plaques could be used in separate heroic cults because they depicted versatile, generalised images that assumed their significance from the specific context (cf. Lippolis 2001, 228, 235). Rather than being specific to a particular cult, the plaques with seated figures served a type of cult – the heroic – and could be dedicated by residents of both Laconia and Messenia, whether they were homoioi, perioikoi or helots.

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26 Comparable is the case of the distinctive lead figurines found in their thousands in Laconian sanctuaries: Gill and Vickers 2001; Antonaccio 2005, 109–10.
27 Even helots may have participated in such cults, although we know almost nothing about the religious practices of helots in Laconia, because they are archaeologically invisible: Parker 1989, 145; Luraghi 2008, 202. See below for helotic activity in Messenia.
28 Since both Messenian perioikoi and helots probably engaged in this distinctive local cultic behaviour, and because of their discontinuous pattern before the late 5th century, the cults at Bronze Age tombs, revering ancestors or local heroes, do not seem to have been an expression of anti-Spartan resistance (pace Alcock 2002, 149–52): Luraghi 2008, 144–5, 202.
29 Luraghi (2008, 243–5, 266) believes that during the centuries of conquest some Messenian ethnic consciousness must have been created.
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Λακωνικά και μεσσηνικά πλακίδια με καθιστές μορφές: κοινονικο-πολιτική διάσταση

Τα χαρακτηριστικά πλίνια πλακίδια με τις καθιστές μορφές που συνοδεύονται από χίονα κατασκευάσθηκαν για τοπική χρήση, καθώς δεν έχουν βρεθεί σχεδόν ποτέ εκτός Λακωνίας και Μεσσηνίας. Υποτελούσαν μία ιδιαίτερη μορφή λατρείας, την πορειακή, όπως δείχνει τόσο το ευφέν εξάπλωση της στην περιοχή όσο και τη πλήρη απουσία τους από τις ιερές αρχαιοτήτες σε θεότητες. Χάρη στη γενικευμένη και τυποποιημένη εκκοινωνία τους προσφέρονταν για πολύωνο σκοπούς και μπορούσαν να ανατεθούν σε διάφορες προκλήσεις σε διάφορα πάνω στα παρελθόν διαδράματα της λατρείας.

Στη Λακωνία, από το σημείο στο οποίο διεπέστρεψαν τα πλακίδια συναντάται ότι αυτό το είδος αναθημάτων ήταν πολύ πιθανό να διασπασθεί σε διάφορες περιοχές και να φροντίστηκε για την ενημέρωση και την εκπλήρωση της χρήσης τους. Οι πλακίδια που διασπάρθηκαν αναμένεται να συμβολίζαν ανάμεσα στα λακωνικά και μεσσηνικά πλακίδια και να συνεργάστηκαν αποτελεσμάτως με την επίμονη ιερική ταυτότητα των Μεσσηνίων, αλλά πρέπει να αξιολογηθούν στην ευελιξία και την ποικιλία της χρήσης τους. Οι μεσσηνικές λατρείες που προσφέρονταν αναλογικά με τις πλακίδια δεν αναφέρονταν για την ευελιξία και την κοινοτική αλληλεπίδραση τους, αλλά επιθυμούσαν να συμβολίσουν την επίμονη εθνική ταυτότητα των Μεσσηνίων.