



An Archeological and
Historiographic Study of
Messenia and Ancient
Identity

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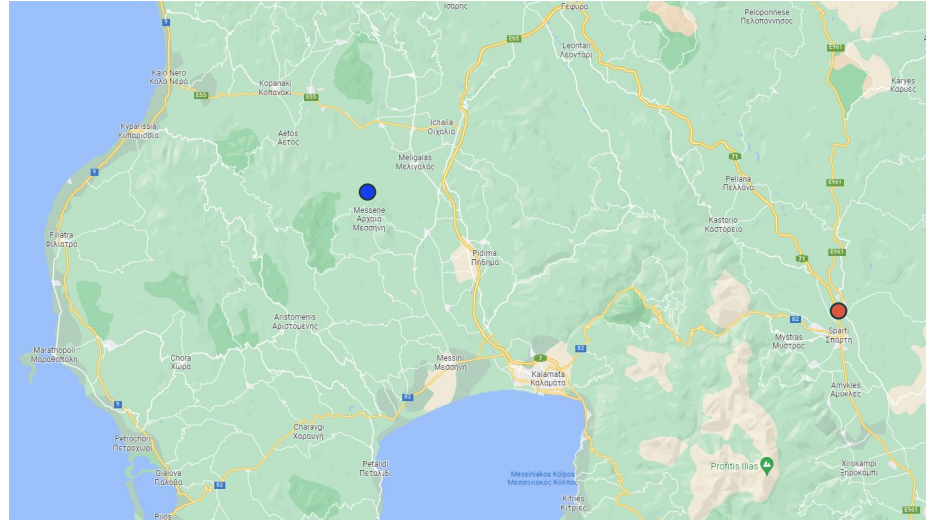


Ancient Messenia

Located to the North-West of Sparta with the ancient center nestled in a fertile valley at the base of Mt. Ithomi. The population of this region was enslaved and exploited by the Spartan state for 300 years from 800 BCE - 601 BCE. Sparta named the Messenians helots forcing them into labor, military service, and other forms of systematic oppression.

Why Messenia?

The helots have been consistently overlooked within the classics while ignoring how integral the Spartan-Helot relationship was to the ancient state. I believe that to move forward in classical and Spartan studies the preconceived notions and ancient memory that still impacts modernity be challenged. Furthermore the field of the Classics has often perpetuated colonialist ideals and through my research I am attempting to challenge some of these beliefs in regards to the ancient world.



- - Ancient Messini
- - Sparta

Methods of Research

My primary form of research has been through close readings of the Pausanias' *Descriptions of Greece*, primarily book 4. This is the primary ancient source of writing on the ancient Messenians.

I have conducted readings and research into Frantz Fanon's (*Black Skin White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth*) frameworks and insights into the relationship between colonized and colonialist peoples, which is the lens in which my final thesis will study Messenian history.

I conducted archeological research as well through travelling to the ancient city of Messini and working on an the start of a new excavation site under supervision of Dr. Petros Themelis and the HERC program. Through experiencing the remains of the this ancient city I have been able to more closely understand the state development and structure, cultural practices, and the world in which Pausanias saw the city.

Furthermore secondary sources from Nino Luraghi, Paul Cartledge, Petros Themelis, and Jan Assman have all provided nuanced and insightful arguments and research that have led me through this research.

Frantz Fanon and colonial identity

Fanon's works contain a powerful and nuanced understanding of the formation of identity and the psychological, cultural, and historical impacts of colonization. In my research of Messenian history and the relationship between Messini and Sparta I am testing if Fanon's modern framework and insights can be applied to ancient colonialism.

Fanon's frameworks center upon systematic othering and fabrication of an imposed identity from the colonial state, as well as the colonial states obsession with enforcing manufactured identities. I am still in the process of unpacking Fanon's framework and studying Messenian and Spartan identities however at this moment in time his framework is providing a much clearer image of Sparta as a colonial state.

Pausanias the myth-historian

Pausanias *Descriptions of Greece, Book 4* provides an overview of Messenian history from pre-helot to the Roman era. However he explicitly skips the 300 years of enslavement and much of his pre-liberation histories are of mythic heroes and state creation stories.

Following liberation Pausanias' writings are accurate and have been used as a guide map for contemporary archeology, for better or for worse. Which Susan E. Alcock has written on the problematic adherence to Pausanias descriptions in *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Ancient Greece*

I believe that Pausanias' writings, while providing valuable information post-liberation, are a furthering of the Spartan othering of helots.

The Archeological process

While participating in the excavation in Ancient Messini I was able to learn, hands on, how the archeological process works. We were taught how to survey, record findings and dig sites, trench methodologies, cataloguing, basic epigraphy, and restoration.

The act of being at the site also has led to a deeper understanding of the religious and civic practices of Messini, all providing insight into the development of Messenian identity and their relationship to Sparta.

Much of the Archeological site today is post liberation sites and artifacts, with many being Roman.

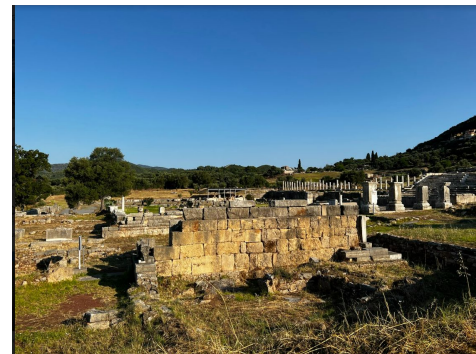
The archeological site of *Αρχαία Μεσσήνη*



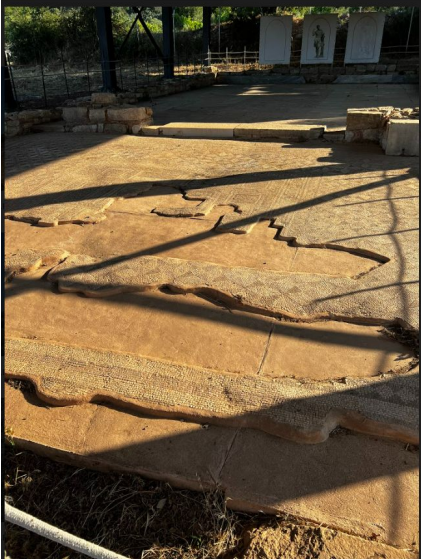
Overlooking the ancient city



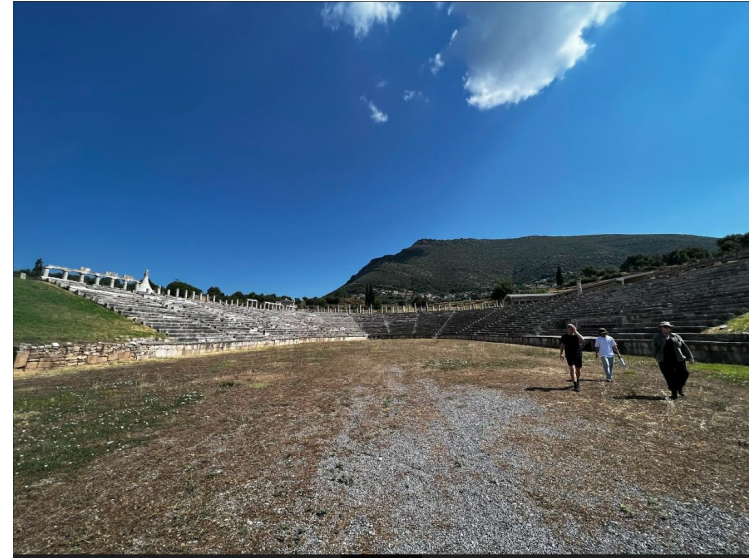
The 2022 HERC Messini
Excavation Team



A view inside the city



Roman mosaics



The Arena



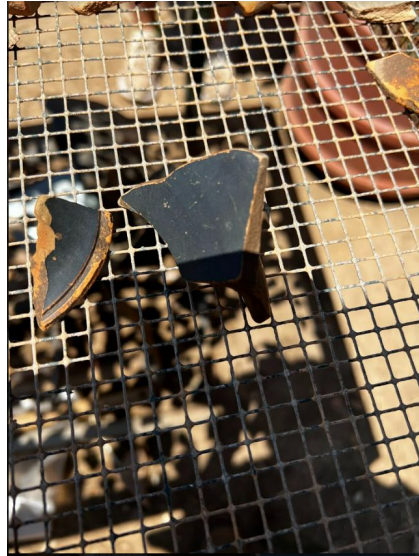
Mausoleum of the Saithidae Family



Artifact Cleaning Station and Shirds



A senior archeologist on site believes this to be the top of a perfume bottle from ca. 300 BCE



Glazed Pottery



Trench B



Artemis Orthia (Roman Recreation)



The Asclepion



The Artemision



Statues of young women found at the Temple of Artemis Orthia



Trench A team



The handle to a Roman or
Byzantine frying pan

Citation

- Pausanias *Descriptions of Greece*
- Susan E Alcock *The Pseudo-History of Messenia Unplugged*
- Jan Assmann *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*
- Nino Luraghi *Ancient Messenians: Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory*
- Richard J. A. Talbert *The Role of the Helots in the Class Struggle at Sparta*
- Paul Cartledge *Toward the Spartan Revolution*
- Susan E. Alcock, John F. Cherry & Jas Elsner. Oxford University Press *Pausania: Travel and Memory in Ancient Greece*
- Petros Themelis *Ancient Messene*
- Paul Cartledge *Thebes*
- Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth*
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- Google Maps
- All photographs taken by Zachary Bukowski and the 2022 HERC Messini Excavation Team