

# Thronos: Historical Grammar of Furniture in Mycenaean and Beyond

Edited by Rachele Pierini, Alberto Bernabé, and Marco Ercoles (Eikasmos Quaderni Bolognesi di Filologia Classica, Studi 32). Bologna: Pàtron Editore 2021. Price not available. Pp. 264. ISBN 9788855534673 (paper).

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This book arose from an unusual (in academic terms) event, when an academic scholar (Rachele Pierini) met the founder and director of a modern design company (Eugenio Perazza). According to the volume's preface, designers and classicists coexist and intersect, since "designers observe phenomena and convey the core part of their message into a new form through a different material, [just as] classicists use these same mechanisms in working with words and texts" (vii).

Drawing on the Pylos Ta series of Linear B tablets, the earliest appearance of Greek furniture terminology and craftsmanship, the Homeric poems, the sacred inventories from the Acropolis at Athens, the fifth-century Athenian dramatists, the astrological texts of the Hellenistic period, and the New Testament, the present volume compiles 21 articles in English, Italian, and Spanish on furniture in textual sources. The volume is divided into two sections: the first, entitled "In Mycenaean," examines in 12 articles what has been accomplished in Mycenaean studies so far in terms of "Prototypes" and "Materials" and aims to propose new approaches and interpretations. The nine articles of the second section, "And Beyond," discuss the evolution of Mycenaean prototypes through the centuries, and the roles and functions of furniture in historical times and in various literary genres.

The first subsection, "In Mycenaean: Prototypes," consists of nine articles. The introductory article by Francisco Aura Jorro is a critical review of the Pylos Ta series' bibliography. The author discusses the series both within the Linear B corpus and as a distinct assemblage. The next articles concentrate on specific Linear B entries: Giulio Scozzari discusses the ritual use of *e-ka-ra*, the Greek *eschara* (hearth). The author proposes that the sanctuary inferred by the tablet PY Ea 102 may be comparable to the Dionysus shrine at Ayia Irini on Kea (28) or that at Ayios Konstantinos near Methana (28). Tablet PY Ta 709 refers to portable hearths of a different

design, possibly for ritual purposes, but without mention of their material; here the author asserts that they were of bronze. Ambra Russotti discusses the entry *ti-ri-po* (tripod) in various Ta series tablets (32–33); with information from iconography and the Homeric poems, the author analyzes various occurrences of the word and proposes several interpretations for the appearance of tripods on the tablets as a whole, highlighting the information provided (or not) by the ancient scribes. Russotti and Scozzari both stress the fact that the scribes did not record the material of certain objects.

Three further articles deal with the entry *to-pe-za* (table). Juan Piquero analyzes the Mycenaean vocabulary on tables in the Ta series and discusses the context of their use. The author examines certain types of tables (with nine or six legs?) and "dismountable" tables (taken apart for storage), including their materials and decoration, and ultimately connects them with official banquets held in the palace (49). A certain type of table is also related to sacrifices, Piquero concludes by highlighting the importance of seal representations for the iconographic analysis of Mycenaean tables. Alberto Bernabé focuses on the structure of Mycenaean inventories by ingeniously comparing the Mycenaean lists of tables and their descriptions on the tablets with a modern furniture catalogue to show "possible reasons behind the different choices in communication strategies" (56). The Mycenaean scribe economized language and selected the most characteristic features to describe objects, using one or two characteristics to identify the object and considering any further detail of the decoration unnecessary (58). Both the ancient and the modern "catalogues" use nominal style and a selective description of the most important features of tables. Naturally, the differences lie in the *raison d'être* and the addressees of the texts. The final article on tables, by Paolo Sabattini, raises the possibility of three- rather than four-legged tables in the Mycenaean records, based on a proposed new etymology,

a possible parallel in the Mycenaean textile vocabulary, iconography, and archaeology.

Two further articles concentrate on the entry *to-no* (chair). Fátima Díez Platas raises the issue of the scarcity of chairs in the archaeological record and attempts to analyze the surviving miniature examples. In this effort, the author goes as far as suggesting that these models represent “reproductions’ of potentially real chairs that could also be considered virtual constructions without a real model underneath” (81). Although the reasons for creating furniture in a miniature format (an issue that puzzles scholars of later periods as well) must have varied according to specific contexts (sacred or funerary), certainly all miniatures were based on real models. Also, the fact that chairs may have been constructed partially of wicker, leather, or fabric does not automatically make them “everyday, crafted objects . . . suitable for nurses or babies” (83).

Carlos Varias deals with a *hapax*, the term *to-no-ek-te-ri-jo* (PY Fr 1222), a word that possibly refers to a ritual in which the throne is a religious symbol of power. The final article of this subsection, by Massimo Perna and Raimondo Zucca, is a comparative analysis of the Mycenaean *ta-ra-nu* (footstool) and its archaeological evidence.

The second subsection, “In Mycenaean: Materials,” consists of three articles. The first, by Rachele Pierini, deals with the wooden furniture on the Pylos Ta series and on the Un 718 tablet, and their ritual use in a festival for Poseidon. Pierini treats the subject in a thorough way, studying the evidence from Room 7 of the Archives Complex at Pylos and meticulously reviewing the textual, archaeological, and iconographic data. Her suggestions on the different uses of tables in ritual and royal dining (as altars and cutting boards) are a welcome addition to the discussion, although we should be wary that iconography is not always as clear as we might wish.

In the second article, part of a larger research project, Eugenio Luján examines the Mycenaean vocabulary related to ivory and its survival in first millennium Greek and more specifically in the Homeric poems. The analysis of the vocabulary shows that most technical terms related to specific techniques or distribution of work have not survived, likely a consequence of the collapse of the palatial system. However, other words from the same stem are employed in relation to ivory, and certain nontechnical terms still exist in later periods but are not employed in relation to ivory work. Luján’s observations are important for issues concerning craftsmanship in this

and later periods. The loss of the technical vocabulary apparently implies a regression in manufacturing.

The final article of this subsection, by Elena Romani, aims to offer a critical perspective of the known interpretations of the entry *a<sub>2</sub>ro[ ]u-do-pi*. The author concludes that the Mycenaean word seems to refer to an inlaid material rather than a decorative pattern, which is usually in the plural.

The second section, “And Beyond,” is devoted to the “Functions” of furniture. It consists of six articles (in English and Italian) for indoor functions, and three articles (Italian and English) for outdoor. Marco Ercoles opens the “Indoor” subsection with a survey of iconographic and literary representations of the “seated *aiidos*” from Mycenaean times to the Classical period. The author observes that a common thread in the imagery of the *aiidos* is the emphasis on the performer himself, his persona and technical ability.

Ana Isabel Jiménez San Cristóbal deals with the appearance of *θρόνος* in poems and Homeric hymns. The author observes that the *thronos* of a renowned person (e.g., Nestor, Achilles, Priam), with the term always in the singular, is elaborately decorated, whereas the *thronoi* of other people (suitors, family members, or common guests) are in the plural, with less elaborate decoration, the descriptions limited to drapes and fabrics. The testimonies of the Epic Cycle emphasize the social uses of the throne. Simonetta Nannini takes a philosophical and archaeological approach to the houses in the *Odyssey*, seeing them as “an amalgam of past and present elements” (198). Renzo Tosi discusses the instances where furniture is mentioned in proverbs in ancient Greek and Latin texts, the New Testament, the Jewish tradition, and modern languages. This article provides welcome information on the linguistic aspect of furniture words used in proverbs, and such research is promising in that furniture reflects social and cultural norms. Emilio Rosamilia examines the thrones inventoried among furniture on the Athenian Acropolis. The author maintains that these pieces of furniture, in analogy to the clearer examples from the Delian and Epidaurian accounts, could be state commissioned (by the sanctuary staff, thus cultic equipment), rather than private offerings, as has been believed thus far. This view needs further investigation, since one of the problems in reading the Acropolis inventories is how to distinguish cultic equipment from private dedications, when the dedicant’s name is customarily not mentioned. Camillo Neri’s article on the *thronos* attested in four passages of the Book of Proverbs documents “the

inexhaustibly exegetical *Streben* and the irrepressible interpretative fantasy of the Greek translator” (226).

In the “Outdoor” subsection, Leonardo Fiorentini deals with the roles and functions of the stool in Cratinus fragment 32 K.-A. Stefano Amendola aims to explain how references to the θρόνος τραγωδικός in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* have influenced the different hypotheses suggested by scholars on the staging of the comic *agon* between the poets Aeschylus and Euripides. In particular, the article shows how the occupation of a real throne on the stage determines an asymmetry between the characters of the two poets that simultaneously highlights each’s authority and credibility. In the final article of the volume, Patrizia Nava writes about Hellenistic astrology and the image of the throne and stool used as a metaphor for “elevation, exaltation, upward ascent and success” of planets and, consequently, of the persons they signify (241).

The volume concludes with indices of Linear B tablets, logograms, and words, followed by indices of places, Greek words, and Latin words.

Overall, this edited volume is a compilation of articles that raise a number of different issues, mainly of linguistic nature, and cover a wide chronological range, which I consider one of its strengths. New interpretations of the well-studied Mycenaean vocabulary are certainly a welcome contribution. However, the section on Mycenaean evidence is, to my mind, presented in a more homogeneous way than the later evidence, which focuses on a variety of materials, literary genres, chronologies, and interpretations. Additionally, the subheading “Functions” for the second part of the volume is distracting since issues of furniture function have already been discussed in the previous Mycenaean section. The further division between indoor and outdoor is not particularly effective. An introductory chapter for each of the sections might have eased this discrepancy and incoherence and would have explained the reasoning behind the divisions.

The volume is certainly targeted toward an academic audience and students of classics with specific interests

in Linear B, classical literature, or ancient furniture. The bibliography is up to date and covers a wide range of issues, although it might have included the recently published proceedings of a workshop held in Vienna (2016), edited by L. Naeh and D. Brostowsky Gilboa, entitled *The Ancient Throne* (Austrian Academy of Sciences Press 2020), which includes articles on Mycenaean *thronoi* with pertinent textual and iconographic evidence.

The publication would also have benefited from thorough English editing in order to avoid some language mistakes and erroneous phrases, and all non-English articles should have had more informative abstracts. The unusual way the bibliography is given, with the initials of the author after the date (e.g., Bernabé 1996 = A. B., *Estructura del léxico. . .*), is nevertheless in accordance with the Eikasmos series’ guidelines. In terms of layout, it is odd that certain articles are arranged in notably different ways: Lujan’s article numbers each paragraph successively instead of using subheadings (as seems to be the norm for the volume); Neri and Tosi use numbers in front of the starting paragraphs of sections instead of subheadings; Jorro starts the first section with the number zero, something entirely uncommon in printed material. The use of Greek for longer excerpts from Homer would have been preferable to transliterations (Nannini), especially in a volume that mainly addresses linguistic issues. Finally, an introduction by the editors discussing the state of scholarship and the various issues raised in the articles (from linguistic interpretations of Linear B words to astrology) would have aided the volume’s cohesion. On the whole, the volume provides thought-provoking discussions on old and new material that will certainly be useful to scholars interested in Linear B and furniture.

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