ONE

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Excavated pieces of Late Classical and Hellenistic furniture in Greek archaeology traditionally have been published in urban studies that cover a wide range of geographical areas and material culture. These studies focus mainly on the architecture of the houses and the urban layout into which they fit. They include interdisciplinary studies, site publications (Delos, Olynthos, Thasos, Eretria, and Halieis in chronological order of publication), edited collections, and excavations reports (Macedonia). Furniture is, in most cases, summarily published in catalogue form, a point I will discuss in greater detail later. True furniture studies, on the other hand, can be found only in a handful of publications, of which only two are devoted solely to furniture. A brief overview of both urban and furniture studies follows.

URBAN STUDIES

One of the most recent and comprehensive *interdisciplinary studies* on architecture, ranging from urban planning and housing to cooking and textual sources, is that of W. Hoepfner and E. L. Schwandner, *Wohnen in der klassischen Polis*, 1986–1989. This study is the first monograph on domestic affairs since B. Rider's work on *The Greek House* in 1916, which was based almost exclusively on literary sources. Hoepfner and Schwandner's series created a scholarly trend and influenced new studies on domestic issues. Their reconstructions, although hypothetical, have provided visual assistance to those studying the topic. Although some of their radical conclusions have been

overturned by recent scholarship, their work remains a significant first source on sites that have not yet been restudied in detail.

Falling into the same category of scholarship and interpretation is Elena Walter-Karydi's work on the Greek house, originally published in German under the title *Die Nobilitierung des Wohnhauses. Lebensform und Architektur im spätklassischen Griechenland* (1994). Her book is dedicated to late Classical houses and, in particular, the emergence of houses with a peristyle court in the late fifth century B.C. Apart from architecture, two sections on textiles and furniture offer a brief overview of the visual evidence on the subject and underline the need for decoration in the house.

Moritz Kiderlen's book on lavish urban houses (*Megale Oikia. Untersuchungen zur Entwicklung aufwendiger Griechischer Stadthausarchitektur Von der Früharchaik bis ins 3. Jh. v. Chr*, 1995) explores the developments of one particular category of domestic architecture and traces the origins of palatial structures in early Archaic Megara Hyblaia and the Homeric epos. Kiderlen considers only houses with a ground area of 400 square meters or more in his discussion because, as he believes, changes in domestic architecture blur particular characteristics of aristocratic living.

Lisa Nevett's recent book on *House and Society in the Ancient Greek World* (1999) belongs to the same body of interdisciplinary thought. Based on architecture and spatial organization, her work extends to gender areas and regional differences in the *oikos*. She dismisses textual or literary evidence as insufficient for the social structures of domestic space and aims for a "more abundant and direct form of evidence," namely the archaeological material. This was a necessary starting point for a new set of questions that had to be asked at that time to move the discussion on domestic issues forward. Her study uses examples from Olynthos, Sicily, and southern Italy and extends from the late fifth to the middle of the third century B.C. She explores the nature of the Greek *oikos*, reviews earlier studies on Greek households (especially Olynthos), and attempts an interpretation of the material culture – all the while remaining selective with the objects she engages in her discussion. Her study concludes with a consideration of the origins and development of the Classical *oikos*. One of Nevett's important conclusions is that, with the exception on the *andron*, the rooms in private houses did not have specific uses and were not restricted to specific individuals, classes, or sexes but were rather "multifunctional."

Finally, one of the latest and most comprehensive studies concerning domestic architecture is an examination of Delian houses by M. Trümper (*Wohnen in Delos: Eine baugeschichtliche Untersuchung zum Wandel der Wohnkultur in hellenistischer Zeit*, 1998). Although the movable objects are excluded from the study, Trümper's reanalysis of Delian architectural features, the variation of house forms, the ethnicity of their inhabitants and the recapitulation of

the most currently accepted chronologies is a very important tool for every student of Greek domestic archaeology. Appendix IV provides a brief summary of Trümper's most recently proposed dates for the houses and insulae mentioned in her book and latest articles. The complexities of chronology are discussed in greater detail in her studies and are apparent in the chart compiled here.

Furthermore, one should mention her most recently published articles in the edited collection of B. Ault and L. Nevett, *Ancient Greek Houses and Households*, on the subject of the more modest categories of housing found in late Hellenistic Delos, and in *MDAI* on the House of the Seals (2005). The first article is especially important for the way that Delian "luxury" is overemphasized in scholarship. As Trümper points out, the majority of the Delian living units are not only smaller in size but also less well equipped than the average Classical house in cities like Olynthos, Priene, Piraeus, and Miletos. Her second article on the House of the Seals is an attempt to discuss formation processes and house assemblages with the scanty information typically available.

Edited collections of articles that deal with household activities have also been produced. P. Allison's *Archaeology of Household Activities* (1999) is a compilation of case studies ranging from pre-Roman Britain, Classical Mayan, Greek, and Roman to colonial Australia and the Americas. The essays presented in this book have an artifact-based approach to both the material and textual evidence for household activities. In addition, the recently published collection entitled *Ancient Greek Houses and Households* (2005), edited by B. Ault and L. Nevett, offers fresh insight into the chronological, regional, and social diversity of Greek households.

Excavation reports on Greek houses were further enriched in 1988 with a monograph on Halos, in Thessaly, by H. Reinders and the Dutch Institute. This publication is a single-volume presentation of the site including its residential and public areas. Seven houses have been uncovered and the architecture and contents of one house (the House of the Coroplast) have been published. The initial phase of this house is dated, according to its pottery, to the first quarter of the third century B.C. Based on existing evidence, the house shows signs of abandonment (for unknown reasons) at around 260 B.C. A whole section in the Halos publication is devoted to town planning, the paleogeography of the coastal area and the enceinte of the city. The history of the site is outlined up to the Byzantine period, when a fort was built.

Ultimately, however, scholars working on urban or household studies draw most of their information from multivolume *site publications* that deal with specific geographical areas in Greece (Athens, Corinth, Delos, Eretria, Halieis, Halos, Olynthos, Thasos). Archaeological knowledge has been significantly augmented by these reports from important areas where houses

have been excavated. Although the main focus of these studies is architecture and pottery, most, though by no means all, of the reports record movable objects (other than pottery) found inside the houses. Unfortunately, the stratigraphic locations and dates of these pieces of furniture and furnishings are rarely given and, when the pieces are mentioned, they are traditionally presented as lists of "minor objects."

This system of publication directly from the field notes has created a certain scholarly mentality where "minor objects" are usually presented in a catalogue format including information on their material and dimensions alone. The disassociation of these objects from their primary context (for example, the room and stratum in which each was found or any associated objects found in conjunction) in these publications has created an irreversible result: No subsequent scholar can ask any further questions about this material since most of the extant information concerning it exists solely in a list of objects, with little reference to the rest of the study. In addition, precise stratigraphic detail is impossible, since the excavation technique at some of the sites was often to remove "passes of earth over a large area, up to one or two houses in extent" at a time (Olynthos and Delos).[1] For these reasons, it is impossible to tell whether an artifact was found on the floor or in some other context, information critical for dating and analyzing small objects, which can easily be trampled into an earth floor. Occasional discrepancies between the publications and the field notes should also be taken into account.[2]

Other than the issues of dates and locations, a scholar is often faced with the problem that only a select group of recorded finds is presented. Not all objects reach publication.[3] Vases of any kind, coins, and recognizable metal objects receive the limelight in contrast to "smaller" and unidentifiable pieces of furniture, in which this study is interested. To aggravate the situation, this incomplete presentation has introduced biases into the records, since certain categories of household objects are underrepresented in publications. Even the title "minor objects" itself, used frequently for small pieces of ivory, bronze, glass or traces of wood, passes a qualitative judgment.

We lack, therefore, much information concerning the main body of household objects, and this is something to keep in mind when we attempt to draw any conclusions, compare any sites, or use any statistical analysis in relation to these objects. One should be very careful especially when comparing the material excavated from various sites, for two main reasons: (1) different areas are excavated with different techniques (methods of soil removal, extent of excavation trenches, selection of objects to discard etc.), which are often not mentioned in the final publications, and (2) different methods of cultural processes (i.e., destruction vs. simple abandonment of a site) both have a major impact on the amount, location, and state of preservation of household objects in ways that were not always understood by the excavators. Because of these

gaps in methodology, we can reach only very general conclusions regarding the amount of furniture and furnishings in a house and especially issues concerning the use of the rooms. Second-story assemblages are almost impossible to distinguish, and the formation processes that have taken place have left their own impression in excavated Greek houses, far from the so-called Pompeii Premise, now also questioned.[4] As Penelope Allison successfully proves, "not only are 'most sites … not like little Pompeiis' (Schiffer 1985; p. 38). Pompeii itself does not conform to the eponymous ideal."[5]

FURNITURE STUDIES

Turning to those reports that actually discuss domestic furniture in significant detail and in its primary context, first place should be given to Delos, the first of the sites to treat the subject comprehensively. Déonna's work on the island, part of a series of reports, is the only monograph from an excavated site to be devoted solely to furniture. Volume 18 of the *Exploration Archéologique de Délos*, *Le Mobilier Délien* (1938), presents the furniture found on Delos in houses, public buildings, and sacred areas. It constitutes a monumental source of information, where, unfortunately, the dates and the exact location of the objects found are not recorded. The main aim of the publications from Delos was to record the architecture, and thus little attention was paid to the artifacts themselves. Nevertheless, the grouping of the portable artifacts and their highly organized presentation in Volume 18 is priceless. A reanalysis of this material from Delos with a cross-check between the field notes and the primary publication (Volume 18) on furniture is currently much needed.

The Delian publications were recently augmented by Volume 38, *L' Îlot des Bijoux, L' Îlot des Bronzes, La Maison des Sceaux* (2001), which presents the greater part of the north quarter of the excavated area of the island, around the bay of Skardhana. This publication focuses on topography and architecture, although some objects of furniture are mentioned. The dating problems that the excavators faced during their analysis of the various superimposed layers of habitation are well discussed and prove the complexity of the site of Delos as a whole. The proposed chronologies for the excavated houses of the insula of Skardhana all fall in the second century B.C. with remains that extend well into the Imperial era. The study concludes with a discussion of the sociology of the houses and their inhabitants.

Second place should be given to the monumental publication by J. Walter Graham and D. Robinson of Olynthos, a site that offers a much richer corpus of domestic implements than any other Greek site and one which belongs largely to a single destruction level. According to the excavators, its history falls between 432 B.C. (*anoikismos* – North Hill district) and 348 B.C.

(destruction by Philip). The settlers who returned to the destroyed city made little historical or archaeological impact and thus the objects excavated are what survived Philip's plundering.

Three volumes are devoted to the domestic sections of the site, where furniture finds its place in a few entries:

Volume 8 on *The Hellenic House* by D. Robinson and J. W. Graham (1938) gives a description of individual houses, their features and large movable equipment and offers general conclusions about the layout and organization of the houses. Among the items presented in the study are *pithoi*, basins, altars, millstones, mortars, olive crushers, and treading floors.

Volume 10 by D. Robinson (1941) presents the metal and minor finds (the "Miscellaneous Objects") in an attempt to present "an original contribution to Greek life," as stated by the author. Volume 10 is the first effort to present a holistic idea of Greek life inside the house through statuettes, reliefs, jewelry, toilet articles, implements, household furnishings, tools, weights, and "miscellaneous objects" (such as keys and bells).

These two volumes were the beginning of a more systematic study of domestic finds that were given a separate treatment in scholarship. They were followed by Volume 12, *Domestic and Public Architecture*, by D. Robinson (1946), which deals with certain blocks of houses (A, B, Villa section, South and North Hill districts). This volume presents a general list of finds without any synthesis. Certain types of artifacts, such as loom weights, are not systematically published. For the first time, however, a comprehensive treatment of the literary sources concerning the house is published in an appendix. This appendix was a pioneering work that was much later undertaken again by G. Husson in *Oikia, Le vocabulaire de la maison privée en Ègypte d' après les papyrus grecs* (1983). Her study in domestic vocabulary deals with Egyptian papyri of the third century B.C. to the seventh century A.D. with an excellent commentary that covers contemporary Greek domestic equivalents.

Robinson's work on Olynthos was recently restudied by N. Cahill in his dissertation, *Olynthus: Social and Spatial Planning in a Greek City* (1991), and his recently published book, *Household and City Organization at Olynthus* (2002). Cahill's work is a reanalysis of Robinson's results combined with a thorough study of the previously mentioned publications, the preliminary reports and the unpublished field books housed in the University Museum at the University of Mississippi. His goal was not to give detailed information about each of the artifacts found inside the houses but to record a general description, a context, and references to the field notes and original publication. He reconstructed, where possible, the artifact assemblage for each room adding a great number of "new" finds from the field books to the scholarship. He reexamined the stratigraphy of the site and investigated the various formation processes, something that was not explicitly recorded by

the excavators. Cahill looked at the assemblages room by room to determine where the original floor levels were, which objects had been found on the floors and which in other contexts. He is very cautious to note for the reader that the context in which the finds appeared might be rather different from their everyday context in the houses, something that should always be kept in mind when dealing with everyday domestic finds.

Although his efforts are bound, due to the state of the original evidence, to contain errors, they remain an enormous undertaking. Cahill often attributes objects found on the ground to shelves or other pieces of furniture. Even if the remains of such furniture are not mentioned by the excavators, Cahill's approach is the beginning of a new way of thinking and analyzing domestic material. His work extends to the formation of a new CAD plan of the site based on unpublished information concerning domestic architecture and city planning. His database and plans of houses with objects plotted on them will be available in digital format in the near future.[6]

Yet another important contribution to the body of scholarship is Cahill's evidence for variety among the Olynthian houses and his disapproval of the extreme case put forth by Hoepfner and Schwandner in *Haus und Stadt*, where it was claimed that, as originally planned, all the houses at Olynthos were essentially identical. Cahill successfully proved the variability of the city's domestic layout and the "alternative" economies that were exercised. This is an important point we will touch upon in the last chapter.

Other recent publications that mention excavated furniture come from Eretria and Thasos. Y. Grandjean worked on three houses excavated in the Silenus Gate district and published Volume 12 of the *Études Thasiennes*, under the title *Recherches sur l' habitat Thasien à l' époque grecque* (1988). This publication is oriented mainly toward architecture, occasionally mentioning furniture and containing partial inventories of the different rooms during successive phases of occupation. The Silenus Gate district was founded around 500 B.C. and abandoned around 250 B.C. ("due to external force," as noted in the publication). One of the main issues in Thasos is the fact that the houses had been emptied prior to their abandonment.

Two volumes are devoted to domestic issues from the site of Eretria: Volume 8, devoted to a specific area, the *Le Quartier de la Maison aux mosaiques*, prepared by P. Ducrey, I. Metzger and K. Reber (1993) and Volume 10, *Die klassischen und hellenistischen Wohnhäuser im Westquartier* (1998), prepared by K. Reber. Both volumes form an important contribution to our understanding of domestic housing. They present, in a very analytical fashion, evidence for architecture, pottery, sculpture, and furniture with references to their original location. These are among the few reports that have ever paid close attention to the evidence of disintegrated furniture. Thanks to the excavator's attention, we are now able to reconstruct storage furniture

(such as shelves and cupboards) with increased degrees of probability in certain areas of the house. Appendices complete the study of certain groups of objects, including the one by E. Kassapoglou (Volume 10) pertaining to issues of domestic cult. Here again, not all the finds from the House of the Mosaics (destroyed by fire around 270 B.C.) and the Classical-Hellenistic houses in the West Quarter, dated between the fourth and the first centuries B.C., have been published.

The most recently published houses at Halieis in the Southern Argolid are the work of B. Ault, published as part of the excavation series of Ancient Halieis (*The Houses, the Organization and Use of Domestic Space*, Volume 2, 2005). All five excavated houses date to the latest phase of occupation at Halieis, during the fourth century B.C. Since Ault's study is primarily interested in household οἰκονομία, the presentation of the domestic finds concentrates on water supply, kitchen and bathroom installations, storage pithoi, loom weights for home textile production, and, of course, pottery. Halieis appears to have been abandoned early in the third century B.C., possibly due to the activities of Antigonos Gonatas. The excavators at the site have collected, identified, and recorded every type of material by stratigraphic unit.

The only synthetic *monograph* about furniture and furnishings prepared thus far is by G. Richter, *Furniture of the Greeks, Etruscans and Romans* (1966). This study, impressive and comprehensive for its time, is based solely on visual and textual evidence in an attempt to give a history of furniture and furnishings through ancient times. Richter was able to collect and analyze a vast amount of visual and literary material, an already laudable work made even more so when one considers it was produced at a time when computers and specialized databases were not yet available.

Ethnographic studies on vernacular furniture are an additional source of information on domestic living and the use of furniture, and will thus be mentioned occasionally in this study. The essence of true vernacular furniture is based on "a complex interaction between localized design, construction techniques, available materials and the particular ergonomic and social needs of the community" as stated in the *Dictionary of Art*, Volume 11 (J. Turner, ed. 1996).

Ethnographic research conducted in Greece has shown that the quantity of domestic furniture is not consistent throughout Greece, but varies from region to region, and it is within this notion of regionalism that Greek vernacular furniture reflects history, geography, and economy.[7] Some houses might have more furniture than others, depending on the need, the time spent inside the house, the financial status of the family, the size of the house, and so on. Vernacular studies have shown that furniture for single-story dwellings or small-sized rooms often made use of the walls, rather than the floor space.

Furniture manufacturers employed for house furniture are, in most cases, the family members themselves or nonspecialists who were employed in carpentry. This may well have been the case in ancient Greece as well.

It is interesting to note that the scientific, systematic analysis of furniture started in France in the beginning of the 1940s, a few years after the foundation of the *Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires*. Part of the initial study was a survey that included the name of the piece of furniture, its location, description, technique, type (folklore or modern), characteristics (in terms of sociology, economy, and ideology), and placement inside the house and history (i.e., who made it, when, where, for whom, for what price).

A similar approach was attempted in Greece by the Folklore Archive.[8] An initial database was created and furniture was divided into three basic categories based on the needs it answered: furniture associated with sleeping (beds), food (tables), and storage. Since then, other areas of Greece have been studied and various documents have been analyzed in an attempt to research the subject of vernacular furniture. The lack of furniture in certain Greek vernacular houses and the importance of local materials for the construction of furniture are significant. On the other hand, the richness of details apparent in the amount and the description of certain pieces of furniture in Greek dowry documents between the sixteenth and twentieth century A.D. is nowhere paralleled in the ancient Greek world.[9]

Most recently, the National Polytechnic School at Athens published a thorough study on household furniture made between 1830 and 1940.[10] It is a comprehensive work on household furniture with a thorough analysis of the political environment that produced it. The study describes the influences of Greek design during the Turkish occupation and the two World Wars and proves how the political and social situation dictated the types and designs of furniture that decorated Greek houses of the middle class. Such studies on vernacular furniture and furnishings of Greece will be mentioned throughout this study.

Parallel ethnographic studies conducted in neighboring Turkey are also of interest in the scholarly framework of studying domestic interiors. One of these studies, which discusses behavioral issues in the domestic environment, is by M. Dittemore in her dissertation on the village of Zemzemiye, in northwestern Turkey (*Zemzemiye, an Ethno-archaeological Study of a Turkish Village*, University of Chicago, 1983). Dittemore explores both the village itself and the household with its spatial organization and furnishings. The absence of extensive furniture in Zemzemiye's houses makes the multiple use of living space and what the author calls "seasonal migration within the house" possible. Similarly Carol Kramer's study of a contemporary Kurdish village (1979) is important for her discussion on how to evaluate the domestic material evidence as an indicator of wealth.[11]

The aforementioned ethnographic studies are only a few of the many that have been consulted in the process of this research. They all fall under the broader anthropological subject of domestic living and the household unit, as discussed primarily by R. Wilk and W. Rathje in their pioneering article on household archaeology.[12] They laid out the theoretical framework of the *household* "as the most common social component of subsistence, the smallest and most abundant activity group."

WHY STUDY ANCIENT FURNITURE?

As already shown, while the study of Greek houses has in fact advanced considerably in the last two decades, the study of furniture has been considerably neglected, often published collectively along with other "minor objects" in excavation reports. Given the fact that houses are the primary context in which we find furniture, the study of ancient Greek furniture should go hand in hand with the study of domestic complexes. For this very reason, a synthetic and analytical presentation of Greek furniture is long overdue.

Richter's extensive work on the typology of furniture types is the only collective work, albeit forty years old, that may serve as a starting point for studies such as the present one. Richter's chief goal was to present and group the various types of furniture depicted in the visual arts. Her aim was to create a typology for furniture and did so by gathering a considerable amount of visual evidence. My objective, however, is much broader since new excavated material and new questions concerning the reconstruction of interior domestic spaces have now been proposed by architects and art historians conducting research on urban layouts and household organization.

My aim is to draw attention to some of these questions and offer new archaeological evidence for consideration concerning the interior layout of late Classical and Hellenistic Greek houses. Furniture has, until now, been neglected, and its key role in the reconstruction of the interior space of ancient houses overlooked. This book intends to bridge this gap by gathering together physical, visual, and literary evidence on the subject for the first time in scholarship. Focus is given primarily to the physical and literary evidence, since these present the most unexplored areas of the study. All three layers, however, complement each other, and the existence of furniture types that were only suggested by Richter based on visual imagery is now supported by new material evidence that leaves no room for doubt. The progress in urban studies highlights and justifies the placement of furniture inside the house.

Literary evidence is particularly important in elucidating the use of furniture and for providing names for certain furniture pieces, but epigraphic sources are even more valuable yet. The sacred lists, especially the inscriptions