CHAPTER XLVI

HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE

Much less large furniture has been found at Pompeii than is ordinarily supposed. In not a single sleeping room has a bed been preserved; and in only one of all the dining rooms have sufficient remains of the dining couches been found to make it possible to reconstruct them. Beds, couches, chairs, and tables were ordinarily of wood, which crumbled away, leaving slight traces. Reference has been made elsewhere to the marble tables standing in the atrium, and occasionally in other parts of the house. Tables of bronze are infrequently met with, while bronze chairs are almost as rare as bronze couches.

Wood was not a suitable material for many classes of smaller articles, and these, made of bronze, clay, glass, or stone, are
found in great numbers. Such are the lamps, the bronze lamp stands, the kitchen utensils, the table furnishings, and the toilet articles of bronze, ivory, or bone.

The wooden frame and end board of one of the dining couches just mentioned was completely charred, but the form was clearly indicated, and the woodwork has been restored (Fig. 188). The couch is now in the Naples Museum, as are also the other articles of furniture illustrated in this chapter.

The half figures on the front of the end board, shown more plainly in the detail at the left of the illustration, were cast; the rest of the mounting was repoussé work. The bronze on the side toward the table was inlaid with silver. The end boards were placed at the head of the upper couch and the foot of the lower one (p. 263); the middle couch did not have a raised end. The mattress rested on straps stretched across the frame. The dining room in which the couches were found adjoins the tablinum of a house in the seventh Region (VII. ii. 18).

The carved marble supports of a gartibulum are shown in Fig. 191; a complete table of a plainer type is seen in Plate VII. An example of a round marble table, found in 1827 in a house near the Forum, is presented in Fig. 189. The three legs are carved to represent those of lions, a lion’s head being placed at the top of each. A table of similar design was found in the peristyle of the house of the Vettii, with traces of yellow color on the manes of the lions (p. 326).

Among the best examples of ornamental carving is the marble table leg in the form of a sphinx, found in the second peristyle of the house of the Faun (Fig. 190). Effective also is the bold carving of the gartibulum in the north atrium of the house of Siricus (VII. i. 25).

Small tables or stands of bronze supported by three slender legs were called tri­pods. The top was flat, but not infrequently surrounded by a deep rim, making a convenient receptacle for light objects. The rim of the example shown in Fig. 191 is ornamented with festoons and bucrania, while the upper parts of the legs are modelled to represent winged sphinxes. This stand was not found in the temple of Isis, as is often stated, but probably in Herculaneum.

The bisellium, the ‘seat of double width,’ was a chair of simple design without a back, used in the Theatre and Amphitheatre by members of the city council and others upon whom the “honor of the bisellium” had been conferred. The remains of one with bronze mountings have been restored. The restoration, however, does not seem to be correct in all particulars, and instead of presenting it we may refer the
reader to the somewhat conventional bisellium carved on the tomb of Calventius Quietus (Fig. 242).

The lamps are found in a great variety of forms. The essential parts are the body, containing the oil, which was poured in through an opening in the top, and the nozzle with a hole for the wick (Fig. 192). Hand lamps were usually provided with a handle, hanging lamps with projections containing holes through which the chains could be passed.

The opening for the admission of oil was often closed by an ornamental cover (Figs. 195, 196). In front of it, near the base of the nozzle, was frequently a much smaller orifice through which a large needle could be inserted to pick up the wick when it had burned out and sunk back into the oil, and air could be admitted when the cover was closed.

The material of the lamps was clay or bronze. The bronze lamps were more costly and ordinarily more freely ornamented. Those of clay were left unglazed, or covered with a red glazing like that of the Arretian ware; lamps with a greenish glaze are occasionally found.

The light furnished by the wicks was dim and smoky. A more brilliant light was obtained by increasing the number of nozzles. Lamps with two nozzles are often found. These were sometimes placed at one end, the handle being at the other; sometimes in the case of hanging lamps, at opposite ends, as in the example shown in Fig. 193.

Lamps with several nozzles are not infrequently met with. The shape is often circular, as in two of the examples presented in Fig. 194, one of which had six wicks, the other twelve. Sometimes a more ornamental form was adopted. Lamps having the shape of a boat are not uncommon; the one represented in Fig. 194 was provided with nozzles for fourteen wicks.

The hanging lamps were sometimes made with a single nozzle, as the curious one having the shape of a mask shown in Fig. 197, at the left; sometimes with two nozzles (Fig. 193). Bronze hanging lamps with three arms, each of which contained a place for a wick, are occasionally found; an example is given in Fig. 197, at the right. Still more elaborate are those with a large number of nozzles, as the one represented in the same illustration, which had nine wicks.

The name of the maker is often stamped upon the bottom of the lamp, sometimes in the nominative case, as Pulcher, in the example given in Fig. 192, more often in the genitive and in an abbreviated form.

The variety displayed in the ornamentation of lamps was as great as that manifested in the forms. Ornament was applied to all parts,—the body, the handle, the cover, and even the nozzle. The covers of the two bronze lamps shown in Fig. 196 are adorned with figures. On one is a Cupid struggling with a
goose. The chain attached to the right hand of the figure on the other is fastened to a hooked needle for pulling out the wick.

The object of which we give a representation in Fig. 198, often erroneously classed as a lamp, is a nursing bottle, *biberon*.

![Three hanging lamps and a nursing bottle](image)

The material is clay, and the figure of a gladiator is stamped on it, symbolizing the hope that the infant will develop strength and vigor. On some bottles of this kind the figure of a thriving child is seen, on others a mother suckling a child.

Three kinds of supports for lamps may be distinguished according to their size: lamp standards, which stood on the floor and ranged in height from 2½ to 5 feet; lamp holders, not far from 20 inches high, which were placed on tables; and small lamp stands, also used on the table. The general term *candelabrum* was originally applied to candle holders containing several candles (*candelae*). Such candle holders have been found in Etruscan graves, but the candelabra met with at Pompeii were all designed to carry lamps.

The lamp standards, of bronze, are often of graceful proportions and ornamented in good taste. The feet are modelled to represent the claws (Fig. 199) or hoofs of animals. The slender shaft rises sometimes directly from the union of the three legs at the centre, sometimes from a round, ornamented disk resting on the legs. Above the shaft is usually an ornamental form, a sphinx, as in our illustration, a head, or a vase-like capital sustaining the round flat top on which the lamp rested. Occasionally the shaft is replaced by a conventional plant form.

Adjustable standards also occur; the upper part slides up and down in the hollow shaft of the lower part, so that the height can be changed at will.

The bronze lamp holders were sometimes designed to support a single lamp (Fig. 200). Frequently the main part divides into two branches, each of which sustains a small round disk for a lamp; often the arms or branches were designed to carry hanging lamps. The example shown in Fig. 201 is from the villa of Diomedes.

In the lamp holders conventional plant forms are more frequently met with than in the standards. The trunk of a tree with spreading branches is especially common (Fig. 202).

The lamp stands, which resemble diminutive bronze tables, are found in a pleasing variety of form and ornament. The top is sometimes a round disk resting on a single leg supported by three feet; sometimes, as in the example presented in Fig. 203, the legs are carried to the top, and the intervening spaces are utilized for ornamentation.
The lamp seen in this illustration is the same as that shown more clearly in Fig. 196, at the right.

Kitchen utensils of bronze and red earthenware have been found in great quantity; table furnishings more rarely. A group of typical examples is presented in Fig. 204. The forms are so similar to those of the utensils found in modern households that few words of explanation are needed.

The pastry mould (s) is of good size and neatly finished, and must have left a clear impression. Besides the two types of table spoons illustrated here (n, r) a third is represented by examples found at Pompeii, the cochlear, which had a bowl at one
end and ran out into a point at the other. The point was used in picking shellfish out of their shells, the bowl in eating eggs.

The two long ladles were used in dipping wine out of the mixing bowl into the cups. The ancients ordinarily drank their wine mingled with water; for mixing the liquids they used a large bowl of earthenware or metal, which was often richly ornamented. The mixing bowl presented in Fig. 205 was found in a house on Abbondanza Street, near the entrance of the building of Eumachia. It is in part inlaid with silver, and nearly twenty-two inches high.

Hot water was often preferred for mixing with wine, and small heaters of ornamental design were sometimes used upon the table. The ancient name for these utensils is *aulepsa*, 'self-cooker'; the appropriateness of it is apparent from an example found at Pompeii, in which the coals of fire were entirely concealed from view.

This heater (Fig. 206) has the form of an urn. In the middle is a tube, the bottom of which is closed by a diminutive grate; the arrangement is shown in the section at the right. In this tube the coals were placed, and when the water in the urn was hot, it could be drawn off by means of a faucet at the side. Back of the faucet is a small vertical vent tube.

In some cases the appearance of a heater was more suggestive of its purpose. One (Fig. 207) has the form of an ordinary brazier, the water being heated in the hollow space about the fire pan. In another instance (Fig. 208) the brazier is ornamented with towers and battlements like those of a diminutive fortress; the faucet can be seen in our illustration, on the left side.

An interesting group of toilet appliances for the bath was found in the Baths north of the Forum (Fig. 209). Hanging from a ring were an unguent flask, four scrapers (*stigiles*), and a shallow saucer with a handle in which the unguent was poured out when it was to be applied. One of the scrapers is repeated in a side view at the right, and both side and front views of the unguent saucer are given.
Small articles of toilet are discovered in a good state of preservation. The forms in most cases do not differ greatly from those to which we are accustomed.

The fine comb seen in Fig. 210 a is of bone; the two coarse combs (Fig. 210 b and Fig. 214 d) are of bronze.

The ends of the hairpins were often ornamented with figures. The specimens shown in Fig. 211 are of ivory. The designs in which female figures appear are in keeping with the use, but the ornamentation for the most part seems excessive.

The toilet boxes, of glass or ivory, were used for a variety of purposes. Of those presented in our illustrations, one (Fig. 211, at the right) probably contained perfumed oil. The round glass box (Fig. 212) was used for cosmetics, as was also the ivory box seen in Fig. 214, the outside of which is carved in low relief.

The mirrors were of metal, highly polished. The one seen in Fig. 214 was designed to stand upon a dressing case; the other three (Fig. 213) are hand mirrors. The frame of the rectangular mirror is modern; whether or not this had a handle is not clear.

Jewellery of gold and silver and other small objects wrought in the precious metals have now and then been found. A characteristic example of the jewellery is the large gold arm band in the form of a serpent, with eyes of rubies, found in the house of the Faun (Fig. 215). It weighs twenty-two ounces; to judge from the size, it must have been intended for the upper arm.

Much more important, from the aesthetic point of view, are the cups and other articles of silver designed for table use. As these do not differ essentially from objects of the same class found elsewhere, we should not be warranted in entering upon an extended discussion of them here; a few examples must suffice.

Of the three cups with repoussé reliefs shown in Fig. 216, one
(a) has a simple but effective decoration of leaves. Another
(c) presents the apotheosis of Homer; the bard is being carried
to heaven by an eagle, while on either side (detail in d) sits an
allegorical figure — the Iliad with helmet, shield, and spear, and
the Odyssey with a sailor’s cap and a steering paddle. On the
third (d, detail in Fig. 216 e) we see a male
and a female Centaur, with Bacchic emblems,
conversing with Cupids posed gracefully
on their backs. This last is one of a pair found in 1835.
The Boscoreale treasure contained a hundred and three speci-
mens of silver ware, undoubtedly the collection of an amateur.

Of the purely decorative pieces the finest is the shallow bowl
(phiale, patena) 8½ inches in diameter, with an allegorical represen-
tation of the city of Alexandria, in high relief (Fig. 187). The
city is personified as a female divinity — alert, powerful,
majestic. Upon her head are the spoils of an elephant; the
trunk and tusks project above, while the huge ears, hanging
down behind, are skilfully adjusted to the outline of the god-
ess’s neck.

In the fold of her chiton, held by the right hand, and in the
cornucopia resting on the left arm, are fruits of Egypt, among
which grapes and pomegranates are easily distinguished. A
representation of Helios appears in low relief upon the upper
part of the cornucopia; below is the eagle, emblem of the Ptole-
mies. A lion is mounted on the right shoulder of the goddess;
in her right hand she holds an asp, sacred to Isis, with head
uplifted as in the representation described by Apuleius (Met.
XI. 4); facing the asp is a female panther.

Around the group in low relief are the attributes (not all dis-
tinguishable in our illustration) of various divinities — the bow
and quiver of Artemis, the club of Hercules, the sistra of Isis,
the forceps of Vulcan, the serpent of Aesculapius entwined
around a staff, the sword of Mars in a scabbard, and the lyre of

Apollo. A dolphin in the midst of waves (under the right hand)
symbolizes the maritime relations of the city.

The central medallion (emblema) was made separately and
attached to the bottom of the patera. Between it and the outer
edge of the bowl is a band of pleasing ornament, composed of
sprays of myrtle and laurel. The surface of the medallion was
all gilded except the undraped portions of the goddess. The
ears of the goddess were pierced for ear-rings, which were not
found. The date of the patera can not be determined; it is
perhaps as old as the reign of Augustus.

Among the cups, sixteen in number, two are especially note-
worthy. They are four inches high, and form a pair; they are
ornamented with skeletons in high relief, so grouped that each
cup presents four scenes satirizing human life and its inter-
pretation in poetry and philosophy.

Two scenes from one of the cups are shown in Fig. 217. At
the left the Stoic Zeno appears, standing stiffly with his phi-
losopher’s staff in his left hand, his wallet hanging from his neck;
with right hand extended he points the index finger in indigna-
tion and scorn at Epicurus, who, paying no heed to him, is taking
a piece of a huge cake lying on the top of a small round table.
Beside Epicurus an eager pig with snout and left foreleg up-
lifted is demanding a share. Over the cake is the inscription:
τὸ τέλος ἡδονῆ, ‘the end of life is pleasure.’ The letters of the
inscription, as of the names of the philosophers, are too small to
be shown distinctly in our illustration.

No names are given with the figures in the other scene; a
kind of genre picture is presented. The skeleton in the middle
is placing a wreath of flowers upon his head. The one at the
right holds in one hand a skull which he examines contempla-
tively — we are reminded of Hamlet in the scene with the grave-
digger; in the other hand (not seen in the illustration) is a
wreath of flowers. The third of the principal figures holds in
his right hand a bag exceedingly heavy, as indicated by the
adjustment of the bones of the right arm and leg; over the bag
is the word φθόνοι, ‘envyings.’ The object in the left hand is
so light that its weight is not felt; it is a butterfly, held by the
wings, and above it is inscribed ψύχων, a diminutive of ψυχή,
‘soul’; we shall later find another instance of the representation of a disembodied soul as a butterfly (p. 398). It was perhaps the design of the artist to represent the figure as holding the bag behind him while presenting the butterfly to the one who is putting on the wreath.

On either side of the middle figure are two others less than half as large. One, under the butterfly, is playing the lyre; over his head is the word τέφες, ‘pleasure.’ The second is clapping his hands, and above him is a Greek inscription which gives the thought of the whole design: ‘So long as you live take your full share’ of life, ‘for the morrow is uncertain.’

Both cups had evidently long been in use; there are still some traces of gilding, which, however, seems not to have been applied to the skeletons. While the explanatory inscriptions are in Greek, a Latin name, Gavia, is inscribed on the under side of the second cup, in the same kind of letters as the record of weight (p. 508). The Gavii were a family of some prominence at Pompeii; we are perhaps warranted in concluding that the cups were made by a Greek for this Pompeian lady, and that afterward they came into the possession of another lady, Maxima, who formed the collection.