

MYCENAEAN, HITTITE AND MESOPOTAMIAN TABLES “WITH NINE FEET”¹

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The growing interest in Mycenaean palatial banqueting practices, culminating in the 2004 Mycenaean Feast volume, greatly facilitates the understanding of important aspects like the political and social roles of Mycenaean feasting (Wright 2004). New data enables us to connect for the first time the archaeological finds in Pylos with Linear B evidence for specific feasts. Such is the case for the Pylos Tablets Ta 642, 713, and 715, which list 11 tables (*to-pe-za* sg. *to-pe-zo* dual) made of stone or wood, richly decorated and inlaid (Palmer 1963, 345-348; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 339-342; Palaima 2004, 235). They are part of an inventory of vessels, implements, and furniture recorded as preparation for a feast of investiture (Killen 1998; Speciale 1999; Palaima 2004, 232-235). In room 7, the annex to the archive room, in which the Ta series was found, the excavators describe a heap of burnt bones and in the western corner, close beside them, 11 miniature kylikes, with a bronze sword and a spearhead were found. The finds were described as “remains of a sacrifice and dedicatory vessels” (Blegen and Rawson 1966, 93). Recent research by Stocker and Davis established that additional 11 miniature kylikes were found, altogether corresponding to the 22 seats mentioned in the Ta series (Stocker and Davis 2004). These were probably arranged in pairs with the 11 tables mentioned in the same series, in a manner seen in the throne room fresco. Furthermore, the bones found in Room 7 (Isaakidou, Halstead, Davis, and Stoker 2002, 88, 90) represent ten or more cattle, perhaps also corresponding to the 11 tables mentioned in the text. It is thus likely that the event in preparation for which the Ta series was compiled was a sacrificial feast. At this feast 10 or more cattle were sacrificed, most likely bulls, as in Un 2, Un 138, and the frescoes from rooms 5 and 6.² Such a feast was a grand event of an impressive scale: “The slaughter of this many cattle on a single occasion would have provided sufficient meat to feed hundreds of individuals” (Blegen and Rawson 1966, 93).

¹ I am much indebted to Dr. Yoram Cohen for his resourceful advice during the preparation of this paper and numerous useful comments on the translations of the different texts, as well as pointing me to the Nuzi text. Prof. Itamar Singer and Dr. Marie-Luise Nosch kindly read the text and added valuable insights. All remaining mistakes are mine alone. Abbreviations used: *CAD*= *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago 1956ff.*, *CHD*= *The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago 1980ff.*

² A reconstruction of the fresco from room 5 (the throne room; McCallum 1987, Pl. IX; Carter 1995, 296, fig. 18.8) shows that the famous Pylos banqueting scene included not only drinking but also an ox sacrifice. A fresco from the vestibule of the throne room (room 5) shows a procession of figures bearing grain trays, vases and boxes, a large bull, most likely a sacrificial bull, stepping before them, probably heading toward an open cult place (McCallum 1987, 78-87, 119-120).

If so, are the tables mentioned in the Ta series luxurious dining tables used for serving food to pairs of banqueters? The adjectives *e-ne-wo-pe-za/zo* (adj. fem. nom. sg./dual in Ta 642.1, 3; 713.1, 3; 715.1, 3) and *we-pe-za* (adj. fem. nom. sg. In Ta 713.2) that describe eight of the eleven tables mentioned in the Ta series, contribute to our understanding of their shape and function. The Greek etymology *ἐννεφό-πεζα, “with/of nine feet” and *ἕξ-πεζα “with/of six feet” baffled the scholars. How can there be such a table with nine or six feet? Ventris and Chadwick argued that “... we should consistently read ‘with nine feet’, which seems an improbable design” (Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 239). They then suggested no less than five alternatives to the understanding of the tables, which can be “nine-feet long”, have “nine fields of panels”, are “nine sided”, “with nine-fold border”, or “with three supports, but with triple and double extremities”. However, no consensus was reached, while more than twenty scholars have expressed their opinion on this problematic term (cf. Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 500; Aura-Jorro 1993, 218; Speciale 2000, 233).

In order to solve this problem, some valuable insights may be gained by looking at other Late Bronze Age Hittite and Mesopotamian descriptions of tables. The problem of tables, similarly inlaid with ivory and ebony, with seemingly too many feet also arose the curiosity of the Hittitologist Hans Güterbock, while dealing with the Hittite inventory CTH 246.1= KUB 42: 37, later edited by Košak (Güterbock 1971, 4; Košak 1982, 151; Siegelová 1986, 70). Lines 8-9 read:

(8) 4 ^{GI}BANŠUR 9 ĞİR ZU, AM.[SI

(9) 9 ĞİR ^{GI}ESI 4 1/2 KÜŠ 2 ŠU.SI ĞÍD.DA

Güterbock translated:

“four tables, nine (of their) feet (made of) iv[ory]...

nine (of their) feet (made of) ebony, four and one half cubits, two inches long”

He wondered “... *did two of the four tables have five legs each, or how else does one account for two times nine feet?*” He suggested, as a solution to the problem of matching between the number of tables and the number of feet, that the feet of the tables were counted separately from the tables themselves. This would give a total of 18 feet altogether, which would have to be divided among four tables. Obviously, 18 does not divide by four, hence Güterbock thought that nine was a scribal mistake for eight, thus intending to record 16 legs which divide by four tables. However, it is evident that even this solution was not entirely satisfactory for him.

Košak who edited the full text, accepted Güterbock’s translation, and offered no additional comments (Košak 1982, 151-152). Güterbock’s translation for this passage also appears in the Hittite dictionary under *pata*- 2 b as a foot of furniture (CHD/P: 235). Symington relates to the same problem, without offering a decisive solution (Symington 1996, 115). She makes, however, an illuminating suggestion: The tables were disassembled and stored in a container, just as an ivory bed with its four gilded legs with lion paws that is recorded in KBo 18.175 (rev. col. V 13f.) as the contents of a large chest or basket (^{GI}PISAN), which also contains various textiles (Košak 1982, 11-13).

Mesopotamian sources that illuminate this problem are not easily found, as there seems to be little reference to the number of feet each table had. Salonen in his seminal survey of Mesopotamian furniture according to written sources brings

only few references to the feet of the tables, none relating to their number; and argues, based on archaeological finds and iconography, that most tables in the ancient Near East had one, three or four feet (Salonen 1963, 175-176, 200-201). However, important evidence relating to tables with nine feet comes from a document SMN 549 lines 5-9, from the city of Nuzi:

90 GIŠ.MEŠ *še-pi-tum a-na* 10 GIŠ^{ba-aš-šu-ri-ti} SUM^{nu} 9 GIŠ^{še-pi-tum}

“90 (wooden) feet given to 10 (wooden) tables, 9 (wooden) feet (each)” (Pfeiffer and Speiser 1936, 50, 124-125; CAD/Š/II, 302a). The text clearly counts both feet and tables, and leads to the unavoidable conclusion that in this case nine feet are associated with each table. Speiser, who first translated the text, commented in a manner similar to Güterbock’s reaction to CTH 246.1= KUB 42:37 “Line 8 must be taken with the preceding three as a gloss explaining the setting aside of ninety leg pieces for ten tables. Even then the ratio of nine to one remains puzzling” (Pfeiffer and Speiser 1936, 50, 125 note 1; CAD/Š/II, 302a). Perhaps to solve this problem, he translated *še-pi-tum* as “leg pieces”, providing, as we shall demonstrate below, an important clue for the study of the Hittite and Pylian tables.

If indeed the Hittite, Linear B, and Akkadian texts speak of nine feet that are connected to single tables, what can we learn about the shape of the tables?

Combining the information from these texts provides new data that may be used to contradict some of the explanations offered for both the Pylos and Ḫattuša tables.

1. The number nine refers only to the number of feet. It does not refer to the length of the table, as suggested by Chadwick, since the length is given in the Hittite text. Similarly, the clear connection between feet and the number nine in both Ḫattuša and Nuzi texts also negates the use of this number as the number of the sides or decoration of the Pylian tables.

2. Tables that have a number of feet that is a multiple of three seem to occur together, yet the number of feet have no bearing on the length of the table. In the same Hittite text, (a) table(s) with three feet appear(s) in line 10:

[x]x GIŠ^{BANŠUR}-ma 3 GİR GIŠ^{ESI} 4 1/2 KÛŠ x[ŠU.SI GÍD.DA

“and x tables (each with) three feet (made of) ebony, 4 1/2 cubits x[inches long]”

Such a combination bears much resemblance to the terms *we-pe-za* and *e-ne-wo-pe-za* of the Pylian tables, and perhaps may be used as supportive evidence that the Pylian tables grouped together were similar in size.

3. A common trait of both the Nuzi and the Ḫattuša texts is the reference to the feet as separate from the table-top. In Ḫattuša the feet are unattached to the plate of the tables or the beds to facilitate storage (Symington 1996, 115). Furthermore, KBo 18.175 indicates that all parts of the same piece of furniture were kept together, suggesting that CTH 246.1= KUB 42: 37 records the contents of a large container with tables and all their feet grouped together. The Nuzi text records only the feet, without the plates of the tables. However, these feet form “sets” of nine parts each that are intended to be later assembled into ten tables.

4. In the Pylian tables *we-pe-za* and *e-ne-wo-pe-za* appear as clear adjectives describing single tables, and are not a reference to the total sum of feet belonging to several tables. Thus, in the Hittite text, 9 GİR, “nine (of their) feet”, as suggested by Güterbock, may be replaced by 9 GİR= “(each with) nine feet”.

The entire passage in CTH 246.1= KUB 42: 37 (l.c.) lines 8-10 may be read:

- (8) 4 ^{GIŠ}BANŠUR 9 ĠİR ZÙ.AM[.SI... ^{GIŠ}BANŠUR]
 (9) 9 ĠİR ^{GIŠ}ESI 4 1/2 KÙŠ 2 ŠU.SI ĠÍD.DA
 (10) [x]x ^{GIŠ}BANŠUR-ma 3 ĠİR ^{GIŠ}ESI 4 1/2 KÙŠ x[ŠU.SI ĠÍD.DA]

“four tables (each with) nine feet (made of) iv[ory... x tables] (each with) nine feet (made of) ebony, 4 1/2 cubits, 2 inches long, and x tables (each with) three feet (made of) ebony, 4 1/2 cubits x [inches long]”

5. The possibility that three, six, and nine feet supported tables of the same size in both the Hittite and perhaps also the Mycenaean world may indicate that the number of feet was not directly connected to the burden that the table had to carry. The figure of 4 1/2 cubits, two inches for the Hittite tables suggests a table less than 2 m long.

How can these observations help in reconstructing the shape of the Mycenaean tables and their use? The two most plausible options for interpretation remain

A. The tables had nine and six feet.

B. The tables had three supports, but with triple and double extremities for each feet (Palmer 1963, 347) or with double and triple legs ending in a single foot (Gray 1969, 53; Krzyszkowska 1996, 96).

Several problems may hinder the choice between these options based on archaeological finds and ancient iconography. First, the written evidence suggests that they were made the tables with nine feet were rather rare in the Bronze Age, and the fact that they were made of perishable materials further lessens the chances of finding an example in excavations. Furthermore, the representation of a number of feet larger than three may be a difficulty for the artists of the Bronze Age, who did not use perspective in two-dimensional art media. Still, a convincing case for the existence of tables with six and nine feet is made by Speciale who argues that Minoan and Mycenaean seals that depict sacrificial tables with two or three feet, actually depict, in frontal perspective, tables with six or nine feet (Speciale 1999; 2000). This conclusion is strengthened by her presentation of a seal from Mycenae that shows a sacrificial table with six feet (Speciale 2000, 6, pl. II; Krzyszkowska 1996, 95, fig. 4) (Fig. 1:3). However, her argument that *e-ne-wo-pe-za* or *we-pe-za* are thus sacrificial tables is less convincing, as it is hardly likely that delicate and precious objects as inlaid wooden tables or ivory (inlaid?) tables would be sturdy enough to support a live bull during sacrifice.

Furthermore, no actual tables remaining from the ancient Near East seem to have more than four feet, although some beds seem to have more feet, as the Egyptian beds with six and eight legs from the tomb of Tutankhamun (Baker 1966, 104-105, figs. 136-137), and the beds with six feet from Santorini (Doumas 2000 [2003] 200, figs. 123-124).

Remains of tables, as well as their iconography strongly point to the dominant role of three-legged tables in the ancient Near East and the Aegean.

The find of a small round (52 cm in diameter) table top made of stone and inlaid in Pylos, suggests that even the stone tables from the Ta series (Ta 642.1, 2, 3; 713.1) were of small size and had a rounded top (Blegen and Rawson 1966, 229-230; Krzyszkowska 1996, 95-96; Speciale 2000, 231).

The round, three-legged configuration of a table is found in the Aegean at least as early as the LM Ia, as evident from the two round tables with elaborately carved feet found at Akrotiri. The first, found in room Delta 1 has carved feet and a plate diameter of less than 40 cm (Doumas 1983, 116, fig. 18; Krzyszkowska 1996, 94-95) (Fig. 1:4). The other, from room Delta 18, has curved feet, and is elaborately carved (Doumas 1993 (1994), 88-90, fig. 88). These may be very similar to the dining tables with three feet that are shown on the Pylos throne room fresco showing pairs of dignitaries toasting (Lang 1969, 80-81, pls. 28, 126; McCallum 1987, 94-97, fig. X) (Fig. 1:5).

Tables with three curved legs are seen in Late Bronze Age representations of feasts in Ugarit (Caubet and Yon 1996, figs. 1c, 2a), and are the most common table type in the Colony Period in Anatolia and the later part of the Middle Bronze Age in Syria (Symington 1996, fig. 12). They later become a common trait of Iron Age Phoenician feasting furniture, appearing for example, on the Ahiaram coffin, reliefs from Karatepe, and a pyxis from Nimrud (Gubel 1996, 150).

None of these tables, or indeed any table in the ancient Near East that we are aware of, has multiple ending to each foot, which can support Palmer's suggestion. However, there is more evidence to support Gray's and Krzyszkowska's reconstructions of double and triple legs ending in a single foot for the Pylian tables, in examples of tables used for feasting in the ancient Near East: Old Syrian seals from Kültepe (Özgüç 1965, pls. 12:36, 13:37-39, 14:40; Symington 1996, fig. 10a) and Ebla (Symington 1996, fig. 10b) (Fig. 1:1, 2) show tables with three or four elaborate legs each composed of two or three parts: a vertical, straight element, which descends from the sides of the table top, and a curved element descending from the center of the table top, then curving towards the straight element, both ending in a foot in the shape of an animal paw. The curved element may itself be composed of two or perhaps three parts, as indicated by its sharp angle. Similarly, a stamp seal impression from Boğazköy (Beran 1967, Tl. 3: 136; Symington 1996, fig. 12b) and a cylinder seal from Alalakh (Woolley 1955, pl. 66:137; Symington 1996, fig. 12b) (Fig. 1:6, 7) show feet, which curve in a sharp angle and must have been made from at least two different segments. The representations of tables with curved feet from Ugarit (Caubet and Yon 1996, figs. 1c, 2a) (Fig. 1:8, 9), which may be the closest to the date of the Hittite and Pylian tables, show that the three curved feet are joined by a horizontal element. A bronze stand from Ugarit (Fig. 1:10), shows that this horizontal element is composed of three bars, which extend from each foot and meet at the center (Schaeffer 1956, fig. 232:5; Caubet and Yon 1996, fig. 1b). This design of feet, known in the Aegean as rod tripod, most likely of Cypriot manufacture, was found in Tiryns, a part of the "Tiryns treasure" (Catling 1964, 195). Dismantled for storage, as in the Hittite text, or dismantled for transport, as in the Nuzi text, the Syrian and Ugaritic tables would have had seven or ten parts: the table top and six or nine feet parts.

Accordingly, I would suggest to translate Linear B *e-ne-wo-pe-za* as "with nine leg pieces" while *we-pe-za* means "with six leg pieces".

A pair of large, elaborately carved ivory feet from Thebes may reflect a situation similar to that of the Nuzi feet (Poursat 1977, 33-34; Krzyszkowska 1996, 101). They were found separate from the other parts of the furniture, after having been

manufactured in the palatial workshops or imported as a set from the East. They are, however, not complete feet, missing their lower part that may have been shaped as a hoof (as the one found in Tiryns: Krzyszkowska 1996, fig. 6:3), or a paw.

An illuminating description of the use of a luxurious banqueting table can be seen in an account of a banquet held by Zimri-lim, King of Mari, in honor of Ashkur-Addu, King of Karana. Mukannishum, director of the workshops and in charge of the perpetrations, took from the storerooms a silver high-back throne for the king, and an elaborate silver *kaniškarakum*-table (CAD/K: 149-150). He then set the table with gold and silver goblets on stands (Dossin et al. 1964, 40-42; Dalley 1984, 93-95; Durand 1997, 411-413). Can we envisage the great feasts in Ḫattuša and Pylos in the 13th century, when meat, bread, and wine were served to the elite in luxuries vessels, resting upon precious, inlaid tables, which stood safely on three triple feet?

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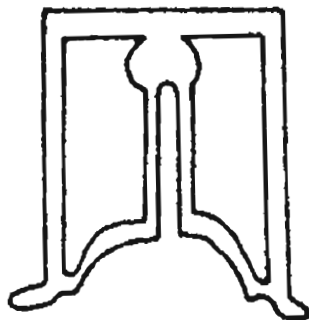
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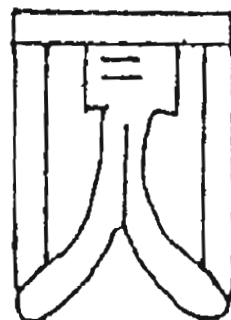
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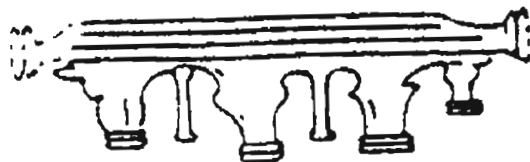
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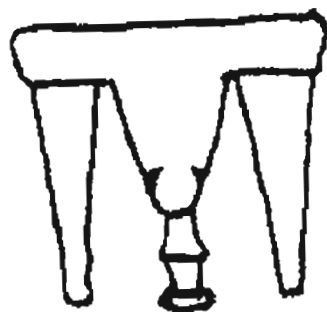
1.1 – Detail of seal from
Kültepe: after Özgüç 1965:
pl. 13: 39.



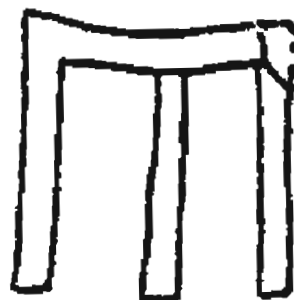
1.2 – Detail of seal from
Ebla: after Symington
1996: fig. 10b.



1.3 – Detail of a seal from Mycenae(?): after
Speciale 2000: pl. II: 6.



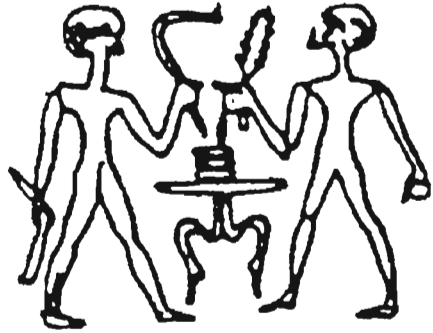
1.4 – A table from Akrotiri: after
Doumas 1983: 116 fig. 18.



1.5 – Detail of the throne-
room fresco from Pylos: after
McCallum 1987: 94-97, fig.
X.



1.6 – Detail of seal impression from Ḫattuša: after Beran 1967: Tl. 3: 136.



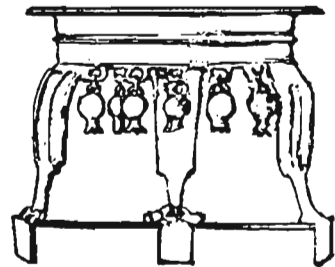
1.7 – Detail of cylinder seal from Alalakh: after Woolley 1955: pl. 66: 137.



1.8 – Detail of a seal impression from Ugarit: after Caubet and Yon 1996: fig. 1c.



1.9 – Detail of a decorated vase from Ugarit: after Caubet and Yon 1996: fig. 2a.



1.10 – A bronze stand from Ugarit: after Schaeffer 1956: fig. 232: 5.