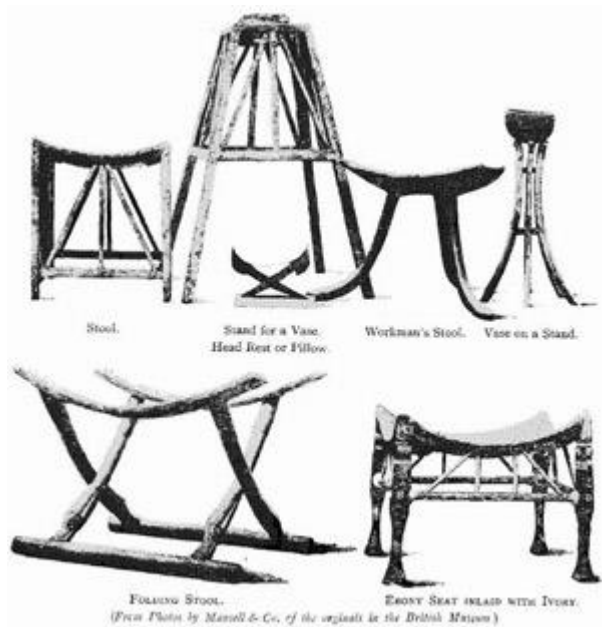


EGYPTIAN FURNITURES

The ancient Egyptians had sophisticated furniture for their time period; tomb paintings show Egyptians using chairs, tables, couches, chests, stools, and beds. In fact, some well-preserved pieces of ancient Egyptian furniture have been recovered from tombs of Egyptian queens, Pharaohs, and other wealthy ancient Egyptians, and can be seen today in museums. There was a big difference between the furniture of peasants and the wealthy and it is largely due to the burial rituals of the wealthy that pieces of furniture from ancient Egypt have been preserved and can be seen today.

Furniture By Class



Most ordinary Egyptians did not have a lot of furniture; the pieces they did have were very simple, and they made the pieces themselves. The most common piece of furniture was a three or four legged low stool covered by leather or wool. The cheapest stools had frames made of reeds and had seats made of woven rushes like the wicker furniture of today. Stools with three flared legs and a shaped wooden seat were commonly used by artisans. Most of the people in the lower classes had chests and baskets to hold their few belongings. Wood was expensive, so the chests were often made of reeds. Tables were not common, not even among the wealthier scribes-they usually squatted on the floor and used a wooden board to write on. Even meal preparation was done on the floor. People sat on the ground on reed mats, pillows or on low stools. Common Egyptians slept on mattresses of wool, straw, reed mats, or the floor.



In contrast, the nobility and royalty of ancient Egypt had much more furniture, and the pieces were of much higher quality and made by artisans. Four legged wooden stools were used by the wealthy as well as the poor, but the stools of the wealthy were much nicer. Stools of the wealthy often had seats made from animal skins, woven leather strips, or plant materials. Some were painted and featured carved animal legs. Ancient Egyptians also used folding stools; one of the most stunning examples of a folding stool is the one found in Tutankhamun's tomb. There are two sets of legs in x shapes that fold. The legs and seat are made of wood and painted in black and white to imitate animal skin. The legs of the stool are painted to look like duck heads.

Chairs and Seating

Chairs were used only by the wealthiest people in ancient Egypt. The higher the status of the individual, the taller and fancier the chair the person sat on was. The rich had chairs painted to look like the carved and inlaid chairs of the queens and pharaohs, but these were cheaply made replicas in comparison. Chairs were usually made of wood and were much like today's chairs except that often they were much lower to the ground. A very elaborate chair from King Tutankhamun's tomb has a scene carved into the back, a bucket seat, lion legs ending in lion paws, and a gold inlay of eagle's wings. Chairs featuring scenes, inlays, heads, animals, carving, and precious materials such as gold and ivory were common among the ruling families.

Tables



Tables were low and usually had four legs, although some had three or even one leg, and were used for games or dining. Most tables were made of wood but some were made of stone or metal. Mehen or "game of the snake" was played at a one legged table inlaid or carved into the shape of a snake, for example. Other small tables were used for playing games such as senet, or to hold plates of food. Offering tables were often made of stone

and sometimes ornately carved. Food for the dead was set upon offering tables - sometimes these were in home shrines, and sometimes they were placed in tombs.

Storage



Storage chests of the rich could be very ornate. They were made of wood or ivory, and elaborately decorated with paintings or inlays of scenes. Some were covered with veneer and had sliding lids, but most had lids that simply lifted off. Very few had hinges. To lock them, strings or rope were tied to a knob on the lid which was then sealed with clay. A chest from King Tutankhamun's tomb features him riding in a chariot and is inlaid with a variety of materials. Chests were used for many purposes and came in a variety of sizes.

Beds



Wooden bed frames were rectangular and slanted downwards, with foot boards. Often the legs of the bed were carved into lions or bulls. At the head of the bed was a headrest consisting of a semicircular upper piece supported by columns affixed to a base. The base of the skull rested on the headrest and may have been more comfortable than a pillow in the heat of Egypt. Leather and fabrics were often used to upholster the bed. Materials were woven through the open part of the frame to support mattresses. The beds of some pharaohs were made of gold and the foot boards were richly decorated. Couches were very similar to beds except they did not have footboards and were shorter.

Influence on Modern Furniture

Egyptian furniture was so well made that most furniture today is designed and made the same way. While the ordinary ancient Egyptian had very little furniture of simple design and low quality, the wealthy had furniture that was highly decorated and of excellent quality. It is interesting to know that even the common people of today can enjoy the luxurious furnishings of the queens and pharaohs of ancient Egypt.