

ZSÓFIA LUKÁCS

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FURNITURE USE AND JOINERY IN HUNGARY IN
THE 15TH-17TH CENTURIES

PROPOSITIONS

The design of 15th -17th century furniture depended upon the furniture use of a given area in the first place rather than on the available techniques or materials of the period. Furniture use was determined by a number of factors such as social position, cultural background, modes of life, the demand for representation, and religious or folkloric beliefs. Thus the establishment of joiner construction and the use of the frame and panel construction were not influenced significantly by the appearance of sawmills.

The forebears of today's cupboards were wall cabins with doors and wooden lining. This structure has been preserved throughout centuries. The idea of originating cupboards/cabinets from two chests placed on one another is groundless.

The fifteenth century Hungarian joiner possessed all the knowledge and equipment which his Italian, French or English contemporaries or even his seventeenth century colleagues did. Yet he applied only those techniques which served best the actual demands dictated by furniture use and economic efficiency. Thus in Hungary a unique culture of furniture, adornment and interior decoration came into existence. It had always been related to the cultures of the neighbouring countries but was never identical with them.

Elements of both the gothic types of furniture and the practice of furniture use were preserved in Hungary from the late Gothic period to the end of the seventeenth century. By the seventeenth century the attitude to furniture design changed. During the late Gothic period joinery and adornment used and relied on the natural characteristics as well as the natural imperfections of the wooden material; while the late seventeenth century approach required the concealment of the wooden inner structure.

The examined period witnesses the split in the joiner profession: the joiner's and the carpenter's works separated. In contrast with other researchers I found that the constructions made by carpenters were not simpler or more primitive than the ones made by joiners. The difference between the joiner and the carpenter did not lie in professional knowledge, new tools, techniques, or materials (such as bone glue), much rather in the demands of their customers. Towards the end of the period, carpentry specialised in the construction of what we consider buildings today, while joinery catered for an increased demand of furniture that concealed the structure.

In order to become familiar with period furniture it is indispensable to interpret all the surviving pieces, pictorial representations and written documents *together* with the period materials and construction techniques; only this will provide us with an authentic picture of period interior and furniture design. Without adequate research regarding period design, materials and techniques typical of the area, visual representation in photographs or paintings cannot serve as the sole ground of authentic interior reconstruction. Only a multi-faceted research, a joint theoretical and practical knowledge will help us understand, copy, or perhaps complete in non-visible areas, the surviving pieces.