



FOLDING STOOL

BEARS THE FOLDS OF THE PAST,
PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The British
Museum



Free Entry

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AUGUST 14TH 2025
ROOM 24



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هل نظرت يوماً إلى قطعة أثاث في بيتك وتساءلت: كم يحمل فيها من روح حضارة عمرها آلاف السنين؟

يُعرض اليوم في قاعة الحياة اليومية بالمتحف البريطاني مقعد خشبي قابل للطي يُعد من أرقى نماذج الأثاث المصري القديم. يُرجّح أنه عُثر عليه في إحدى المقابر بطيبة (الأقصر حالياً) خلال عشرينيات القرن التاسع عشر، ثم اشتراه هنري سولت، الدبلوماسي البريطاني والمقتني المعروف، عبر دار سودبي في لندن ضمن مزاد عام ١٨٣٥ (وذلك قبل صدور قانون حماية الآثار) تحت الرقم ٦٥٨.

تُظهر تفاصيل هذا المقعد من الأرجل القابلة للطي المنتهية برؤوس بط أو إوزة مطعمة بالعاج مهارة فائقة تعكس ذروة تطور حرفة النجارة في عصر الدولة الحديثة. فالنجارة لم تكن مجرد مهنة، بل فناً قائماً على دقة الصنعة وتنوع الخامات المحلية والمستوردة، وتقنيات التجميع الدقيقة دون استخدام المسامير.

لم يكن الأثاث في مصر القديمة مجرد وسيلة للجلوس، بل كان تجسيداً للمكانة والهوية، ومحملاً برموز دينية واجتماعية. واليوم، تواصل هذه التصميمات القديمة إلهام المصممين حول العالم. يُعرض هنا نموذج حديث لكرسي معاصر استلهمت خطوطه وتفصيله من المقعد المصري القديم المعروض، بما في ذلك الأرجل المائلة والنهايات المنحوتة.

هذا التفاعل بين الماضي والحاضر لا يُجسّد فقط استمرارية الحرفة، بل يعكس أيضاً قدرة التصميم المصري على تجاوز الزمن، ليبقى حياً في الذاكرة والبصيرة.



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Have you ever looked at a piece of furniture in your home and wondered how much of an ancient civilization's spirit it carries?

Now on display in the daily life gallery of the British Museum is a remarkable wooden folding stool, one of the finest surviving examples of ancient Egyptian furniture. It is believed to have been discovered in a tomb at Thebes (modern-day Luxor) during the 1820s, and was acquired by British diplomat and collector Henry Salt through Sotheby's in London, listed as Lot 658 in the 1835 auction. (Before the issuance of the Egyptian Antiquities Protection Law)

This stool, with its refined folding legs ending in duck or goose heads inlaid with ivory, showcases the peak of ancient Egyptian carpentry during the New Kingdom. Woodworking in ancient Egypt was more than a craft—it was an art. Carpenters selected both local and imported woods and used precise joinery techniques without nails, demonstrating exceptional skill and creativity.

In ancient Egypt, furniture was more than a functional item—it reflected social status, identity, and religious symbolism. Today, these timeless designs continue to inspire modern designers. Displayed here is a contemporary reinterpretation of the ancient Egyptian folding stool, echoing its elegant lines, angled legs, and sculpted terminals. This creative dialogue between past and present is not just a revival of form; it affirms the enduring vitality of Egyptian craftsmanship and its relevance in today's design landscape.



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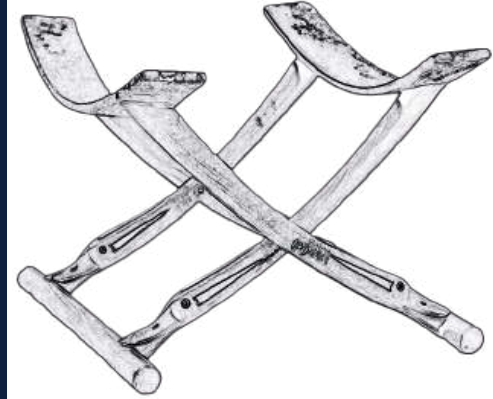


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كرسي مطوي

بحلول الدولة الحديثة، أصبح الكرسي القابل للطي قطعة أثاث شائعة في المنازل والمقابر. ويُرجح أن هذا الكرسي كان ضمن مقتنيات مقبرة أحد الأفراد الأثرياء، حيث يُظهر مستوى عاليًا من الحرفية في صناعة الأثاث المصري القديم. وتتميز أرجله بنحت يمثل رؤوس بط أو إوز، مطعمة بالعاج، ربما ترمز إلى الحياة الجديدة. ولا تزال بقايا جلد المقعد الأصلي واضحة. والجدير بالذكر، أن الكراسي المطوية تُستخدم في مصر حتى اليوم.

الدولة الحديثة (١٥٥٠ - ١٠٦٩ ق.م)، طيبة (الأقصر الآن)، مصر، خشب/ عاج، EA2477.



Folding Stool

By the New Kingdom, the folding stool had become a fashionable piece of furniture in both homes and tombs. This particular stool, likely from the tomb of a wealthy individual, reflects the high level of craftsmanship in Egyptian furniture making. It features legs ending in carefully carved duck or goose heads, inlaid with ivory, symbolizing a new life. Traces of its original leather seat remain. Remarkably, folding stools continue to be used in Egypt today.



New Kingdom (1550-1069 B.C), Thebes (Luxor now), Egypt, Wood /Ivory, EA2477.



From Nature to Furniture

Egyptian Carpentry: A Legacy Carved in
Wood and Time

من الطبيعة إلى الأثاث
النجارة المصرية: هوية محفورة في
الخشب والزمن



©Nina M. Davies

Sources of Wood

The ancient Egyptians relied on local trees like sycamore and acacia for making furniture and coffins. They imported high-quality timber such as cedar and ebony from abroad for luxury items, reflecting its economic, religious, and artistic significance.

مصادر الخشب

اعتمد المصريون القدماء على الأشجار المحلية مثل الجميز والسنط في صناعة الأثاث والتوابيت، واستوردوا أخشاباً فاخرة كالأرز والأبنوس لاستخدامها في الصناعات الخشبية الراقية، مما يدل على أهميتها الاقتصادية والدينية والفنية.



©Cairo Museum JE46722



©after Newberry, plate XXIX

The Journey of Wood: From Forest to Workshop

In ancient Egypt, carpentry began with carefully selecting straight, solid wood. Trees were cut with bronze axes and manually sawn. Precise joints were used for assembly, and the wood was dried, inlaid, and coated, with animal glue in use since the Fifth Dynasty.

رحلة الخشب: من الغابة إلى الورشة

في مصر القديمة، بدأ عمل النجارين باختيار الخشب الصلب والمستقيم بعناية، ثم قُطعت الأشجار بفؤوس برونزية ونُشرت يدوياً. استُخدمت وصلات دقيقة للتجميع، وحُفّف الخشب وزُيّن بالتطعيم والطلاء، مع استخدام الغراء الحيواني منذ الأسرة الخامسة.



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Tools that Shaped Heritage: The Craft of Carpentry in Ancient Egypt

Carpentry tools played a key role in furniture-making since the Predynastic Period. Their uses ranged from cutting and shaping to smoothing. They are known from tomb scenes and real examples found in various sites. Craftsmen skillfully used tools like adzes, lathes, and polishing stones to shape and finish wood surfaces.

أدوات صنعت التراث: حرفة النجارة في مصر القديمة

لعبت أدوات النجارة دورًا أساسيًا في صناعة الأثاث منذ عصور ما قبل الأسرات، وتتوّعت مهامها بين التقطيع والتشكيل والتنعيم. عُرفت من خلال مناظر المقابر ونماذج وجدت في مواقع مختلفة، واستخدمها الحرفيون بدقة لتشكيل الخشب وتسوية أسطحه باستخدام أدوات كالقنادوم والمخرطة وأحجار الصقل.



©Courtesy of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian and Sudanese Archaeology, UCL



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The Folding Stool: The Evolution of Furniture Design in Ancient Egypt

The design of stools in ancient Egypt evolved significantly, with various styles used in both daily and religious life. Early stools were made from stone blocks and tree trunks, but by the New Kingdom, the folding stool appeared with a refined and practical design, featuring decorative elements like duck-head ends inlaid with ivory.

المقعد المطوي: تطور تصميم الأثاث في مصر القديمة

من تصميم المقاعد في مصر القديمة بتطور واضح، حيث تنوعت أشكالها واستخدمت في الحياة اليومية والدينية. بدأ استخدامها بكتل حجرية وجذوع أشجار، ثم تطور في الدولة الحديثة ليظهر المقعد القابل للطي بتصميم دقيق وعملي، تميز بعناصر جمالية مثل رؤوس البط المطعمة بالعاج.



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Carpentry: A Renewed Heritage and a Living Craft

Carpentry is a traditional craft that endures due to its adaptability and preserved manual nature. Practiced in local workshops with simple tools and inherited techniques, it balances function and aesthetics, supports economic sustainability, preserves cultural heritage, and continues to inspire modern designers.

النجارة: إرث متجدد وحرفة مستمرة

النجارة حرفة تقليدية مستمرة بفضل قدرتها على التكيف مع العصر مع الحفاظ على طابعها اليدوي. تُمارس في ورش محلية بأدوات بسيطة وتقنيات موروثة، وتوازن بين الوظيفة والجمال، كما تسهم في الاستدامة الاقتصادية والحفاظ على التراث الثقافي، وتلهم المصممين المعاصرين.



Sit Like Egyptians



Sit Like Egyptians

Folding Stool, Thebes (Luxor now), Egypt, New Kingdom (1550-1069 B.C.).

Made of wood, inlaid with ivory.

Probably from the tomb of an important and wealthy individual, the stool reflects the high level of craftsmanship in ancient Egyptian furniture-making.

Department of Egypt & Sudan, EA 2477, Gallery 61.

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THE FOLDING STOOL'S JOURNEY: MADE WITH SKILL, TREASURED FOREVER



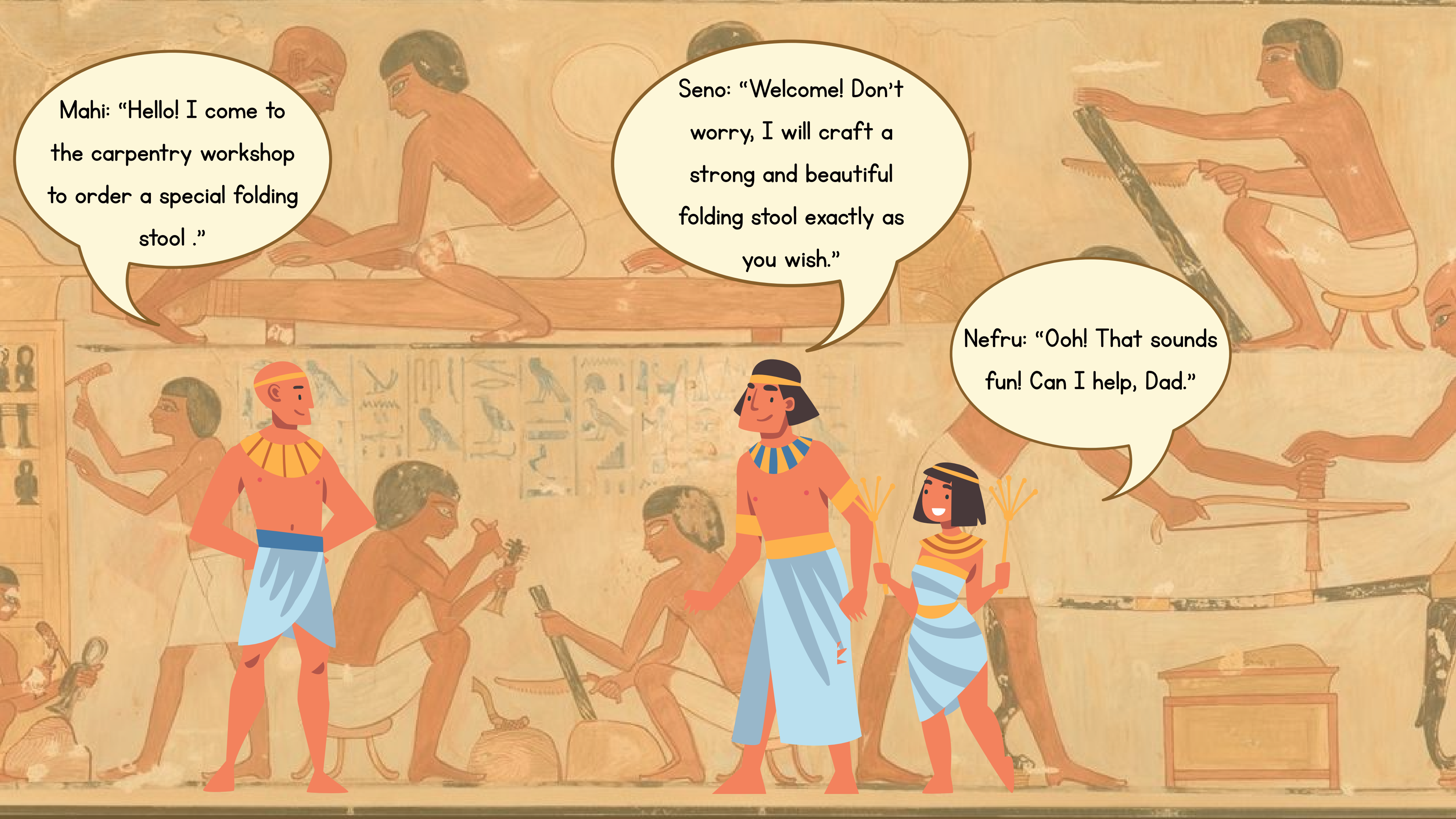
Characters

- **Seno** - The head carpenter. He leads the workshop and knows how to make fine furniture.
- **Nefru** - Seno's curious daughter. She loves learning how things are made.
- **Mahi** - A nobleman preparing for his afterlife. He orders a special folding stool.
- **The Workers** - Skilled hands who each have their own role in making the chair.
- **The Mother** - Nefru's kind and supportive mother at home.





"In Thebes, by the Nile River...
Our story begins thousands of years ago, in the
time of kings, when people believed that death
was the start of a new life.
A nobleman is getting ready for his journey to
the afterlife. He dreams of a special folding
stool to take with him to his tomb."

The background is a wall painting in an ancient Egyptian style, depicting a carpentry workshop. Several figures are shown working on wooden beams and furniture. Overlaid on this are three modern cartoon characters: a man on the left, a man in the center, and a woman on the right. They are all wearing traditional Egyptian clothing like kilts and collars. Speech bubbles are placed near each character, containing their dialogue. The overall scene is a blend of ancient art and modern storytelling.

Mahi: "Hello! I come to the carpentry workshop to order a special folding stool ."

Seno: "Welcome! Don't worry, I will craft a strong and beautiful folding stool exactly as you wish."

Nefru: "Ooh! That sounds fun! Can I help, Dad."

Seno: "We have local wood:
acacia, sycamore, willow...
Or imported: ebony, cedar,
cypress.
Which one do you want?
And what design?"

Mahi: "I choose cedar!
It's strong, and lasts a very long time!
Let the legs be like a goose or duck
head—They bring new life in the
afterworld!
And don't forget... inlaid the head by
ivory!"



EBONY



CEDAR



CYPRESS



ACACIA



SYCAMOER



Willow



Nefru: "Dad, can you teach me how to make a stool?"



Seno: "Of course, my little one! We start by choosing the right tree."

"And this cedar tree can grow up to 40 meters tall. It also has a lovely pinkish-brown color!"



"Its wood is strong and smells nice—great for boats, chests, statues and special furniture!"



Nefru: "Dad, what happens after we choose the tree?"

Seno: "First, we chop down the tree carefully... by bronze axe. Then the workers slice the logs into big wooden planks by using large saw."



An illustration of a scene in ancient Egypt. In the foreground, a woman named Nefru, wearing a blue and white striped dress and a yellow headband, holds two golden fans. She is looking towards a man named Seno, who is standing and looking back at her. Seno is wearing a red tunic, a blue skirt, and a yellow headband. In the background, there are four workers in a workshop, each performing a different task: one is using a saw, another is using a bow, a third is using a mallet, and a fourth is using a sanding block. The workshop is filled with various tools and materials. The sky is orange with a large white sun and several birds flying. The ground is a mix of light and dark orange.

Nefru: "Dad, I see many workers here."

Seno: "Look, Nefru. Everyone here has a special job. Order is the secret to perfect work."

"This is how we make furniture. We drill holes in the wood, bend and shape it carefully, smooth it to be nice, join the pieces tightly, use glue to keep them stuck, decorate it, paint, add soft leather, protect with varnish, and add beautiful inlays like ivory and gems. Then it's all done – the furniture is ready! "



Nefru: "Dad, what kinds of tools do we use to make furniture?"



A&B.

Adzes

C.

Awl

D.

Axes

E.

Bow drill

O&P.

Sharpening stone and oil flask

F&G.

Chisels

K&L.

Saws

M&N.

Scribing and marking tools

Q.

Smooth stone

H&I&J.

Measuring tools

Seno: "We use many tools like...."





Worker: "Just one last step: adding the leather seat, and it will be ready!"

Seno: "Here is the folding stool – carefully crafted."

Nefru: "Wow! It looks amazing!"

"Thanks! That's a great stool."

Nefru: "Mom, today
I learned how a
stool is made step
by step."

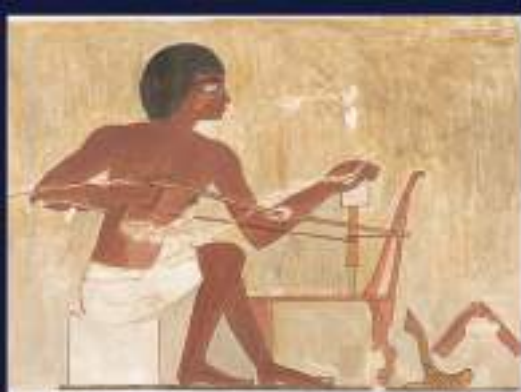
Seno: "Hello! I'm
starving!"

Mother: "Welcome back!
Alright, Nefru, come to
eat... and tell me, what
did you learn today?"

Image Credits

- Page 4: Carpenters at Work, Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), New Kingdom, 18th dynasty (ca. 1504-1425 B.C), © The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain), 35.101.1.
- Page 7 (upper image): Scene of felling trees and chopping the branches by the axes, Egypt, Beni-Hassan, Tomb of Khnum-Hotep III at Beni-Hassan, 12th dynasty; Abdallah Abd Elhamid, M. Woodworking Techniques in Ancient Egypt. In Wood Industry - Impacts and Benefits [Working Title]; IntechOpen, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1006913>; (after Newberry, plate XXIX).
- Page 7 (lower image): Sawing a Plank, Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), New Kingdom, 18th dynasty (ca. 1504-1425 B.C), © The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain), 31.6.18.
- Page 8 A: Trimming Wood with an Adze, Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), New Kingdom, 18th dynasty (ca. 1504-1425 B.C), © The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain), 31.6.28.
- Page 8 B: Carpenter Making a Chair, Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), New Kingdom, 18th dynasty (ca. 1504-1425 B.C), © The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain), 31.6.29.
- Page 8 C: Carpenter with Tools (wooden box represented in front of him), Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), New Kingdom, 18th dynasty (ca. 1504-1425 B.C), © The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain), 31.6.12.
- Page 8 D: Leather Working, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100), New Kingdom, 18th dynasty (ca. 1504-1425 B.C), © The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain), 31.6.14.
- Page 9: Carpentry tools in ancient Egypt; Abdallah Abd Elhamid, M. Woodworking Techniques in Ancient Egypt. In Wood Industry - Impacts and Benefits [Working Title]; IntechOpen, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.1006913>.
- Page 10: Folding Stool, Egypt, Thebes, New Kingdom, © The Trustees of the British Museum (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 licence), EA2477.





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Carpenter Making a Chair, Tomb of Rekhmire.



From the Tomb of Rekhmire.

Trimming Wood with an Adze, the Tomb of Rekhmire.



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Folding Stool



A model of a carpentry workshop from
the tomb of Meket-Re in Thebes.



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A group of woodworking tools