

## The differences and similarities between ancient and modern furniture

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**Abstract** Furniture has evolved significantly over millennia, reflecting changes in materials, technology, culture, and societal needs. Ancient furniture, exemplified by Egyptian thrones, Greek klismos chairs, and Roman couches, was primarily handcrafted from natural materials like wood, ivory, and precious metals, emphasizing ornamentation, status, and durability. In contrast, modern furniture prioritizes functionality, mass production, ergonomics, and sustainability, utilizing industrial materials such as metal, plastic, and engineered wood. This article examines key similarities—such as core functional purposes (seating, storage, sleeping) and cultural symbolism—and differences in design, construction, and accessibility. Drawing from historical analyses and regional traditions, including Uzbek wood carving practices, the study highlights how ancient influences persist in contemporary design while modern innovations address contemporary lifestyles. The comparison reveals furniture as both a practical necessity and a mirror of human progress.

**Keywords:** ancient furniture, modern furniture, design evolution, materials and construction, cultural symbolism, Uzbek traditional carving, ergonomics, mass production.

**Introduction** Furniture, derived from the Latin *mobilis* (movable), encompasses movable objects designed for human activities such as sitting, sleeping, working, and storage. Its history spans from prehistoric settlements to the digital age, serving as a testament to technological advancement, artistic expression, and social hierarchy. Ancient civilizations produced elaborate pieces that signified power and ritual, while modern furniture responds to urbanization, globalization, and efficiency demands. This study compares ancient (primarily Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Central Asian traditions) and modern furniture, identifying enduring similarities and transformative differences. By integrating global historical sources with Uzbek cultural perspectives, the analysis underscores furniture's role in shaping daily life and interior environments.

**Relevance of Work** In an era of rapid urbanization and sustainable design trends, understanding the historical trajectory of furniture is crucial for designers, architects,

and consumers. Ancient techniques inspire eco-friendly and culturally resonant modern pieces, while modern innovations address issues like ergonomics and affordability absent in antiquity. In Uzbekistan and Central Asia, traditional wood carving continues to influence contemporary interiors, blending heritage with global styles. This research is relevant for preserving cultural identity amid globalization, informing educational curricula in applied arts, and guiding sustainable manufacturing. It bridges archaeological insights with practical design applications, highlighting how past practices can mitigate modern environmental challenges.

**Purpose** The primary purpose is to systematically analyze the differences and similarities between ancient and modern furniture across materials, construction methods, stylistic features, functionality, and cultural significance. A secondary aim is to incorporate Uzbek literary and cultural sources to contextualize regional traditions, demonstrating how Central Asian carving techniques parallel or diverge from global ancient practices while informing modern Uzbek furniture production.

**Materials and Methods of Research** This qualitative study employs a literature review methodology. Primary materials include archaeological records, museum artifacts, and historical texts: *Ancient Furniture: A History of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Furniture* by Gisela M.A. Richter; *Ancient Egyptian Furniture* by Geoffrey Killen; and *History of Interior Design and Furniture* by Robbie G. Blakemore. Uzbek sources comprise *Madaniyat Tarixi* (History of Culture) by A. Mavrulov and I. Dehqonov, supplemented by descriptions of traditional wood carving. Modern references draw from design evolution studies and contemporary analyses. Methods involve comparative analysis, chronological classification, and thematic categorization (function, materials, style). Data synthesis identifies patterns without quantitative metrics, ensuring cultural sensitivity in Uzbek contexts. No primary fieldwork was conducted; reliance on secondary scholarly and online archival sources ensures reliability.

**Results and Discussion Similarities** Both ancient and modern furniture share fundamental purposes: providing seating, sleeping surfaces, storage, and work areas. Core functions—such as beds for rest, tables for dining or work, and chairs for seating—remain unchanged, adapting only to ergonomic and spatial needs. Culturally, furniture symbolizes status and identity in both eras. Ancient Egyptian pharaohs' thrones and Central Asian palace beds reflected power through ornamentation; similarly, modern luxury pieces (e.g., designer sofas) signify wealth. Both incorporate decorative arts: ancient inlays of gold and ivory parallel modern veneers or carvings.

In Uzbekistan, traditional low *hon-taht* tables and modern modular sets both facilitate communal living, rooted in carpets and platforms for floor-based activities. Furniture in both periods reflects environmental adaptation—ancient use of local woods mirrors modern sustainability focus.

**Differences Materials and Construction:** Ancient furniture relied on natural, locally sourced materials: wood (walnut, sycamore), ivory, bronze, gold, and stone. Egyptian pieces featured intricate inlays; Greek and Roman examples used marble or woven branches. Construction was entirely handcrafted, often by skilled artisans using simple tools, resulting in unique, durable but labor-intensive items. In Uzbekistan, 9th–10th century carved columns and chests from walnut or juniper exemplified relief and openwork techniques (*islimi* floral patterns, *baghdadi* geometry), assembled without nails in *panjara* lattices. Modern furniture employs industrial materials—steel, plastic, plywood, glass, and composites—for lightness and affordability. Machine production, including CNC carving and modular assembly, enables mass output (e.g., IKEA systems), contrasting ancient permanence. Uzbek modern furniture blends European lightweight styles with national ornate carving, using varnished or oiled woods selectively.

**Design and Style:** Ancient designs were ornate and symbolic—Egyptian thrones with animal motifs (paws, sphinxes), Greek klismos chairs with curved backs, Roman curule seats. Emphasis was on monumentality and ritual. Central Asian palace thrones used precious metals and stones. Modern design prioritizes minimalism, clean lines, and functionality (Bauhaus influence, mid-century modern). Ergonomics emerged post-20th century, with adjustable heights absent in antiquity. Rococo curves gave way to Empire symmetry and 20th-century rationalism (metal tubes, detachable modules). Uzbek traditional *hon-taht* low tables and multi-tier *lavhi* bookstands contrast with contemporary modular bedroom/kitchen suites.

**Production and Accessibility:** Ancient pieces were elite or custom-made, limited to nobility (pharaohs’ inlaid beds survived due to dry climate). Commoners used simpler benches. Production was artisanal and slow. Modern furniture is democratized through factories, enabling affordable sets for apartments. Sustainability (recycled materials) and modularity address urban mobility—features unknown anciently. In Uzbekistan, palace carvings signaled prosperity; today, workshops (Kokand, Khiva, Tashkent schools) produce souvenirs alongside mass-market items.

**Cultural and Regional Context:** In *Madaniyat Tarixi*, ancient Egyptian “*badiiy mebel*” (artistic furniture) alongside vessels and carved boxes illustrates applied

decorative arts from the Old Kingdom. Uzbek traditions emphasize carpets over heavy furniture, evolving into hybrid European-national styles. Ancient influences (e.g., animal-leg tables) subtly appear in modern motifs, but industrialization has shifted focus from permanence to adaptability.

**Conclusion** Ancient and modern furniture converge in serving essential human needs and embodying cultural values, yet diverge profoundly in materials, production scale, and design philosophy. Ancient handcrafted opulence gave way to modern functional efficiency, while Uzbek carving traditions bridge eras by inspiring contemporary sustainable and culturally rooted designs. This evolution underscores humanity’s adaptability. Future research could explore digital fabrication’s impact or eco-friendly revivals of ancient techniques. Understanding these dynamics aids designers in creating harmonious, heritage-informed spaces.

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