

History of Carpentry and Joinery

History of Carpentry and Joinery – Study Notes

1. Origins & Prehistoric Beginnings

Period	Region / Culture	Key Developments
Paleolithic (c. 2.5 Ma – 10k BP)	Early humans worldwide	Simple wooden tools (clubs, spears) made by shaping branches; fire-hardening techniques.
Neolithic (c. 10k – 4k BP)	Fertile Crescent, Europe, Asia	First permanent settlements → need for shelters, furniture, storage. Introduction of adze and stone sharpened axes for rough shaping.
Bronze Age (c. 3300 – 1200 BC)	Mesopotamia, Egypt, Indus Valley	Metal tools (bronze adzes, chisels) enable finer work; early mortise and tenon joints appear in timber frames of granaries and temples.
Iron Age (c. 1200 – 500 BC)	Europe, Near East	Iron tools (saws, hammers) improve speed and precision; development of dovetail and lap joints in furniture and shipbuilding.

2. Classical Antiquity (c. 500 BC – 500 AD)

Civilization	Contributions
Ancient Egypt	- Mastery of large-scale timber framing for tombs and temples. - Use of mortise and tenon and peg joints. - Early treatises on timber selection (e.g., <i>Papyrus of Kahun</i>). - Refined joinery for temples, theatres, and furniture.
Greek City-States	- Introduction of column-driven timber roofs. - Philosophical writings (Vitruvius, later) discuss wood properties. - Standardized carpenter's guilds (collegia). - Widespread use of clamping, gluing (animal-based glues), and metal fasteners.
Roman Empire	- Architectural manuals (e.g., <i>De Architectura</i> by Vitruvius) detail joinery methods.

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Civilization	Contributions
China (Han Dynasty)	- Development of complex frame joints for timber architecture (e.g., dougong brackets). - Early use of lamination to increase strength.

3. Early Medieval Period (c. 500?–?1000)

- **Northern Europe:** Timber?frame houses (post?and?beam) dominate rural construction.
- **Viking Age:** Advanced shipbuilding using **clinker** (overlapping planks) and **seamless mortise?and?tenon** frames.
- **Monastic Workshops:** Spread of knowledge through scriptoria; production of liturgical furniture (altars, choir stalls) with intricate **crown?moulded** joinery.

Key Point: Knowledge transmission relied on apprenticeship and oral tradition; written manuals were rare.

4. High & Late Middle Ages (c. 1000?–?1500)

Development	Description
Guild System	Formal carpenters' guilds appear in major cities (e.g., London, Paris, Cologne). They regulate training, quality, and trade secrets.
Architectural Evolution	Gothic cathedrals require massive timber roofs; introduction