

The Egyptian Furniture in Khedivial Cairo from Locality to Globality

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Abstract:

Egyptian furniture underwent major changes in the second half of the 19th century, under the combined effect of khedivial developmentalism and increased European investment in Egypt at that time. The term "Egyptian furniture" refers not only to furniture inspired by ancient Egypt but more generally to furniture designed in Egypt and representing the Egyptian facade at the time. For a closer look at this subject, we chose the furniture produced by the Italian cabinetmaker "Giuseppe Parvis", a name that is well known in Egypt and very well-identified on the international art market thanks to his pieces that are constantly on display. This Italian designer created furniture of his invention inspired by the city's monuments, artistic furniture much appreciated and sought-after by the local elite and the larger Western market. As a result, he became Khedive Ismail Pasha's designer and ambassador of Arab-style design, with the ability to transpose Egyptian furniture from the local to the global at the time. Parvis was not the only European cabinetmaker in Cairo in the 19th century, a label that tends to become generic; he is credited with all that is known in the 19th century as Arab furniture, arabesque furniture, or Arab-style furniture.

Studies of Egyptian furniture in Khedivial Cairo (second half of the 19th - early 20th centuries) are rare, despite its importance and rich production. Also, although a rich production of Parvis furniture continues to circulate to this day between East and West, little research has been carried out into the original creations of this period. The aim is to present a precise and innovative study of the rich production of Egyptian furniture in Khedivial Cairo (second half of the 19th - beginning of the 20th centuries), to gather the essential information available concerning the woodworking environment, the types of furniture already in existence, and the context in which the Parvis furniture invention was born, to illuminate the distinctive style created in Cairo by "Giuseppe Parvis", to determine the fundamental characteristics of Parvis furniture through selected examples and to study the impact of Parvis' creations at the time of Khedivial Cairo on Egyptian furniture and its ascent from locality to globality. The research highlights the international renown that Egypt had acquired thanks to the furniture created by Giuseppe Parvis in Cairo, as well as the primordial impact of certain skilled Western cabinetmakers and designers resident in Cairo in the 19th century in shaping the history of furniture design in Egypt. In terms of methodology, a historical approach involves a study of woodworking and craftsmanship in Egypt in the early 19th century, information on the artistic training and career of Giuseppe Parvis, and factors favoring the rise of the Parvis style locally and globally. Using an analytical and descriptive approach, we will describe and analyze a selection of the "Parvis Style" furniture to follow the progression of its creation. To conclude: In the first half of the 19th century, furniture-making and woodworking in Cairo were very rudimentary. The furniture seen in Cairo's mosques and mansions was rare; the "Kursi Asha" and the "Sarir Hendi" were the two main pieces of furniture mentioned in 19th-century posthumous inventories. For domestic use, Parvis created furniture inspired by Cairo's monuments, adopting an exclusively local style, and harmoniously integrating Arab decoration with the furniture's Western function. This original, precocious furniture was highly prized and sought after by the local elite and major Western markets. Parvis developed an extremely successful line of historicist furniture, both in the Islamic (the focus of our research) and Egyptian (antique - since 1884) styles. The following factors contributed to the success of the "Parvis" designer in Cairo: an environment eager for furniture creations, Parvis's perfecting of the art of sculpture, his work and apprenticeship with "Michel Victor Cruchet", the founding of a cabinet-making workshop in Cairo (1859), countless creations for the villas and palaces built at the time, the support of Khedive Ismail and permission to enter all of Cairo's Islamic monuments, design of Carnets collecting details and drawings of the most remarkable ornaments of Arab art, support from "De Martino"; the former Italian consul in Cairo, the exhibition of his works at the subsequent Universal Exhibitions of 1867 and finally the publication of a book documenting them. The descriptive-analytical study of a selection of Parvis furniture has enabled us to determine the fundamental characteristics of his furniture: his furniture is Western in an Egyptian look, embodies the fusion of Italian art and the lines of Arab art, monumental with meticulous detail, aimed at high and low-end means, materializes pure Arab style, employs stained woods to create colorful furniture, uses recycling and reuse and lends itself to imitation. The furniture invented by Parvis was the fruit of both the tradition and modernity of a country capable of welcoming and incorporating foreign influences. It is an icon of the neo-Islamic, neo-Mameluk style that flourished at the end of the 19th century. Parvis was a protagonist of the first industrialization of a country contested by the major European powers. The

Arabic-style furniture produced in Parvis' Cairo workshops is a tribute to Egyptian industry, and Parvis has enjoyed great success with both local and international customers. East and West thus appear to be the ingredients of his winning formula, capable of satisfying diverse aspirations, which ensures the merit of Parvis and its ascent from locality to globality, and the presence of other designers following in his footsteps.

Keywords :

Giuseppe Parvis, Parvis style, Arabesque style.

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