

# MEDIEVAL FURNITURE

## PART I: Ancient Tables



(Part I of a three-part series presenting photos and plans drawn from extant tables of the middle ages. Unless noted, the photos and text come from the following source: A.S. Levetus, *Ancient Tables* (New York: John Lane, 1905) vol. 26, pp. 309-316.)

It's often difficult to find examples of ancient furniture. Much of what has survived remains in private collections or out of reach in the storage facilities of major museums.

I recently discovered a series of articles by A.S. Levetus documenting ancient chairs, tables and beds in private collections. The articles, printed at the turn of this century, included the photographs in this piece, and you may read his discussion in detail by referring to the original source.

In the next three issues, I intend to draft plans for some of the furniture shown, and I welcome any plans you may develop from the photos. Subsequent issues will include similar plans for tables and beds (among other things.)

In this, the first section, we will look at ancient tables. In the article, Levetus explains why surviving tables of the high middle ages (or earlier) are so rare. I quote him at length:

"The reason is not far to seek, for, like chairs, they are easily removable and easily destructible. Fashion, too, has played a considerable part in their disappearance. To make room for the more modern forms—space being limited—tables as well as chairs were either relegated to the garrets or presented to the peasants by the lords of the castle: They had served their time and gone out of fashion."

Most surviving examples of early tables tend to be of the "Bock" or trestle variety. You will find two

sets of plans for trestle tables in this issue, the first from an earlier time, and the second a 15th Century version. Both came from the same original need, according to Levetus:

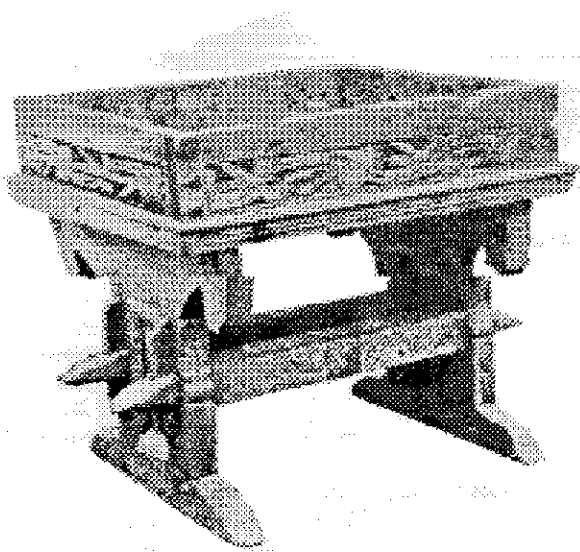
"The trestles in olden times were of various forms, some being of simple supports, which were carried in and out at mealtimes, the table itself being placed upon them, and the whole being hidden by the long flowing drapery of the tablecloth."

The later trestle tables, while more elaborate and heavier, adhered to the same principles. They had to be rugged and sturdy, yet break down easily—the same thing many modern medievalists look for in their portable furniture.

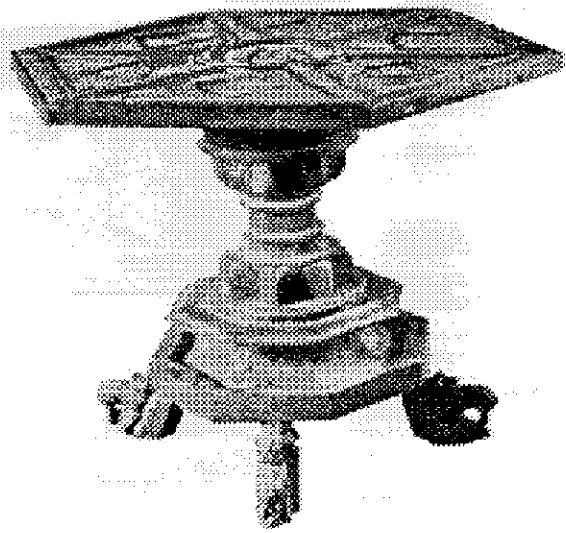
The plans you will find on the following pages will not specify the type of lumber you should use. In general, I advocate using an inexpensive pine or fir for SCA portable tables. It will see rough use, and an expensive oak table will be as likely to suffer damage as a less expensive—but nice looking—softwood table. Also, I find softwoods much easier for carving. If you have any skill in carving, you may want to add ornamentation to your period furniture.

And if you don't know how to carve, look for an article on basic wood carving in a future issue of *Sacred Spaces*.





Fragment of Gothic Table, 15th Century



Armorial Table, ca. 1490

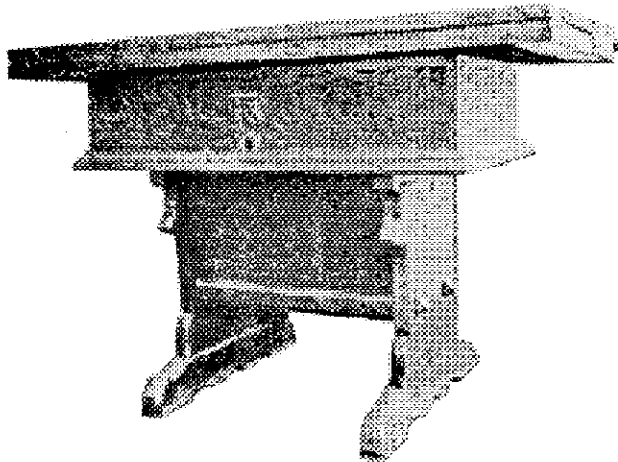
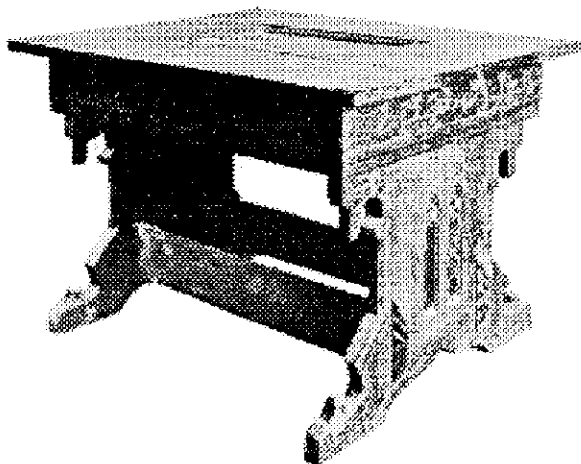


Table with folding top, 15th Century



A Gothic Table, CA. 1500



Above : An Oak Gaming Table, height 2 feet 8 inches; length 3 feet (English) dated CA. 1535.

"The top opens in two leaves, supported and kept in position by sliding bars; the fram forms a shallow cupboard, in which the cards, chessmen, etc. were kept. The panels are carved with medallioned heads. . . made for the ladies of the house."

Source : Macquoid, Percy. *A History of English Furniture* (London: W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1919), p. 45.