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THE PRODUCTION OF FURNITURE IN
THE ARAB REPUBLIC OF EGYPT*

by

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History of furniture

Furniture was used in Egypt since seven thousand years ago. It was first used in Pharaonic times when their own characteristic style was developed. They used to make their own thrones, chairs, chests, beds and dining tables. Most of their furniture was ornamented, especially in the thrones with inlaid gold, silver, copper and turquoises.

Time passed and with the Islamic era the Arabic style appeared and was widely used in Egyptian furniture. This period extended for nearly a thousand years.

Later on the French and English styles with their dignified lines and fantastic appearance predominated and until now they are widely produced and preferred in Egypt. So far these styles represent almost fifty per cent of the total furniture manufactured in Egypt.

Within the last fifty years, the modern style with its vast and fast developments and with its simple design and straight lines became more popular. This was due to intensive construction of modern buildings which necessitated taking into consideration space, height and facilities of these buildings.

The share of each of the above mentioned styles in the present total production of furniture can be represented as follows:

- 60 per cent modern style
- 30 per cent French and English styles
- 10 per cent Arabic (Islamic) and other styles

Materials, machines and labour skills

In Egypt the furniture industry uses mostly undecorated natural wood like beech, oak, ash and walnut in different percentages. Wood based panels such as blockboards and plywood, particle board, and to a very smaller scale, hardboard are used. Besides, boards are covered with decorative veneer like mahogany (especially Sapele), oak, walnut, bubinga, etc. For furniture in the French styles, the rose wood veneer is preferred because of its class and very lovely appearance. Spruce and pine are widely used in modern furniture.

Machines now used in Egypt in most cases are the traditional ones such as the circular saw, planer, thicknesser, moulder and mortiser. Through these machines are simple they help to meet the production needs. Because

of the recent developments, modern and more advanced machines are urgently needed. As far as manpower is concerned, Egypt enjoys an advantageous situation. There are approximately 70,000 workers in this sector, distributed as follows:

- 20 per cent machine workers
- 30 per cent skilled workers specialized in classical styles
(English, French and Arabic styles)
- 50 per cent skilled workers specialized in modern style

Due to the fact that these workers perform most of their work manually, they need a long time to finish their product and consequently production is relatively costly. If skilled workers are supplied with small multi-purpose machines, productivity can be raised by at least seventy per cent. Besides, technical institutes graduate well trained carpenters and young boys are also trained in workshops. So it can be said that problems concerning manpower in this industry are solvable provided that a rational planning is introduced to make use of modern technology and training programmes to graduate skilled workers are established.

Problems of the furniture industry in Egypt

We can summarize these problems in the following three main categories:

1. shortage of modern machines;
2. shortage of man-made panels;
3. shortage of fittings.

Egypt is in urgent need of modern machines for producing furniture. Not only single machines are needed but also complete lines with their modern conveyors and finishing apparatus.

Egypt needs to make a great effort to produce a high quality furniture to meet the demands of modern life. We must take care of treating sawn-wood especially kiln seasoning. For painting we must use new apparatus such as curtain coating machines complete with dryers. As for the veneer I suggest to decrease its thickness to 0.4 mm to lower costs.

As for fittings we still use the traditional old ones which impede any trend towards mass production.

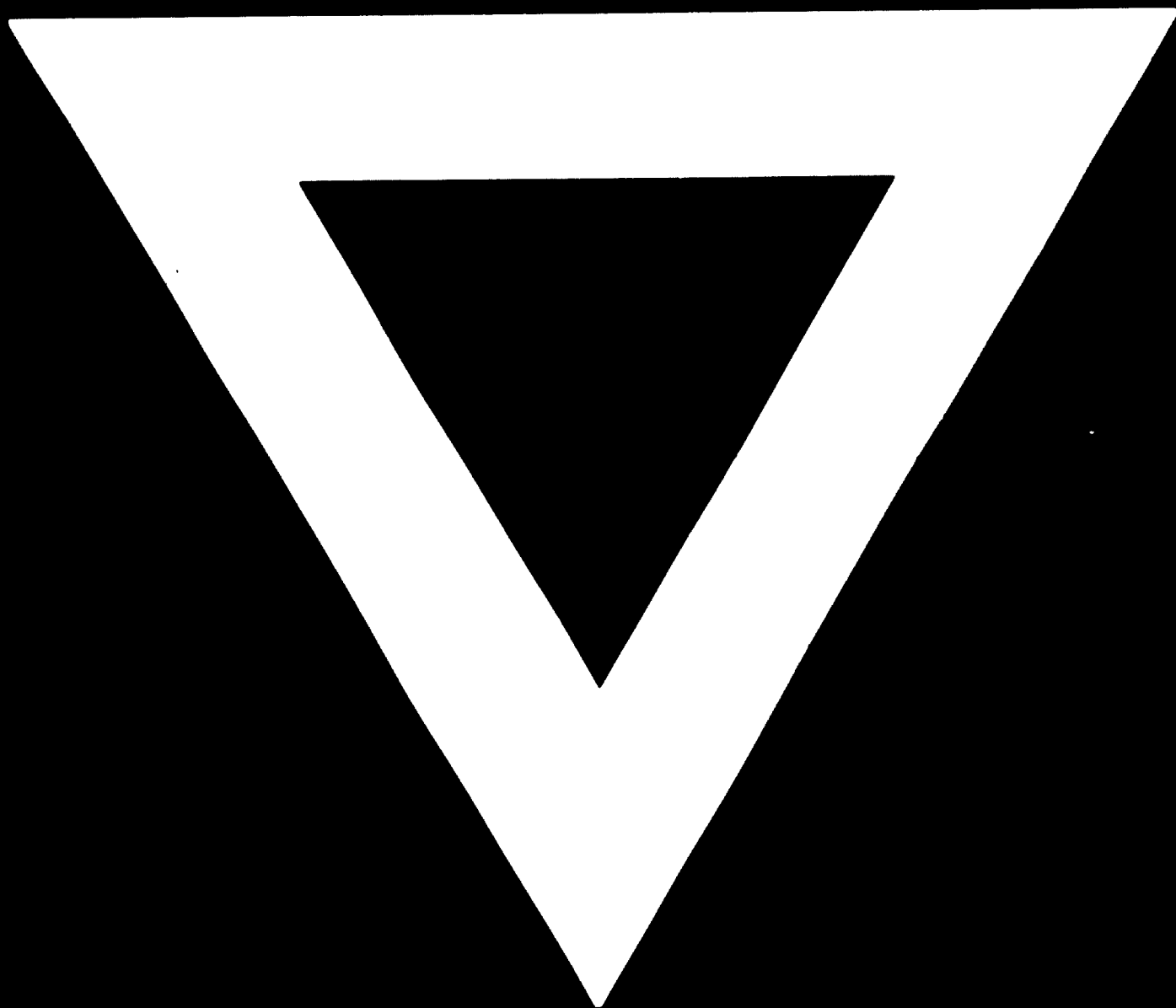
So we can say that the lack of machines and fittings beside the unsuitability of materials in quality and shortages of supply quantitatively

are towards the successful development barriers of the furniture industry.

As a result of the recent open-door economic policy, we hope to attract foreign capital to improve this industry, to arrive at the international level and to follow the advanced countries.



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