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TOWARDS A HISTORY OF THE ORIGIN AND DIFFUSION OF A LATE RENAISSANCE CHAIR DESIGN: THE *CAQUETOIRE* OR *CAQUETEUSE* CHAIR IN FRANCE, SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND

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This article explores the origin and evolution of *caquetoire* chairs in France and their influence on chairs in Britain. The term *caquetoire* (or the closely related term, *caqueteuse*) derives from the French *caqueter*, meaning to gossip or to prattle. It is applied today in France to tall, narrow-backed, lightly built chairs with open arms and trapezoidal seats; and in eastern Scotland and in the city of Salisbury in Wiltshire to heavily built chairs with many of the same features as the French examples.[1] It is a type well known to students of Renaissance furniture and marked a break with earlier, more heavily built types of chairs. The type is intriguing because it has no obvious antecedents, and because of the differences between the French, Scottish and Salisbury examples. This article discusses the difficulties in identifying *caquetoire* chairs in the historical record; the range of French, Scottish and Salisbury chairs currently referred to as *caquetoires*; and the emergence of the French examples. It then considers some possible predecessors to the type, focusing particularly on a chair shown in a tapestry whose significance has not previously been recognised.

TERMINOLOGY

It is usual to search for the origins of furniture terms in historical documents. In the case of the *caquetoire* chair, this has proved difficult. The earliest uses of the term occur in 1522 ('a seat where one gossips at one's ease'), and in 1548 in the inventory of Catherine de Medici ('small caqueteuse chairs with tapestry').[2] The well-known reference in Henri Estienne's *Apologie pour Hérodote* of 1556 states, 'the ladies of Paris did not hesitate to call "caquetoires" the seats on which once seated, especially around a woman who has just given birth, each one wanted to show that she did not have a frozen tongue'.[3] This makes the point, if the author can be relied on, that the term *caquetoire* was a term used by women, rather than used pejoratively by men. References in inventories and guild statutes refer to the *caquetoire* as a low chair, without arms and with an upholstered seat. Havard and de Reyniès list many sources from 1570 to 1722 that describe it as a seat covered with velvet or tapestry.[4] Thornton refers to a joiners' guild requirement in 1580 to make as one of their 'masterpieces' a 'low chair called *caquetoire*' and Janneau refers to Trévoux's *Dictionnaire*, first published in 1704, which states that the *caquetoire* was a 'low chair with a very high back, without arms,

in which one chatters at ease in the corners of the fireplace'.[5] Janneau concludes that all the early references were to a low chair without arms, since 'the skirt with an ample farthingale kept rigid by an osier hoop could not have fitted between the arms' of what today is called the *caquetoire*.[6] Thornton adds that this 'original' *caquetoire* had a low upholstered seat and a back with an upper upholstered part, and includes a drawing of such a chair.[7] The Estienne and Trévoux references make clear that the original *caquetoires* were women's chairs, and they are important to the historian for this reason.

Eighteenth-century and earlier usage thus demonstrates that the term *caquetoire* referred to a quite different type of chair. Janneau suggests that the term *chaise à bras* was used at this time to refer to both the square-seated chair and the trapezoid-seated, narrow-backed chair, both with open arms (Figures 1–3). He concludes, 'it is remarkable that the most original type of seat produced by the sixteenth century

FIGURE 1.   *Chaise à bras*, France, late sixteenth century, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Photo: author.

FIGURE 2.   *Chaise*, France,
late sixteenth century,
Musée des Arts Décoratifs,
Paris. Photo: author.

was the only one not to have a name'.[8] Thornton's view is that the modern *caquetoire* was 'simply a version of the "great chair" and need not invariably have had a special name' in the sixteenth century.[9] By the late nineteenth century, however, *caquetoire* had taken on its modern use. Bonnaffé writes that 'it is in error that today the imaginary name of caqueteuses has been given to chairs with narrow backs, baluster arm supports and whose seats are quite high off the ground [and] generally take trapezoidal form'.[10] De Reyniès agrees that *caquetoire* was a mistaken nineteenth-century usage, and Thornton blames Havard for perpetuating it.[11] Havard includes several images captioned as *caquetoires* but, despite the large scale of his study, the text fails to explain the term's evolution. Bonnaffé quotes the 1571 inventory of Renée

de Gosbert, which refers to 'walnut chairs of *tallemouse* shape' (this being a triangular cake) as the term used at that time, and his view has proved most influential.[12] Although Janneau disagreed, saying that *tallemouse* refers to the low chair without arms and a triangular [*sic*] seat, he proceeds to caption three pictures of *caquetoire* chairs (with trapezoidal seats) as '"chaises à bras" en facon de tallemouze'.[13] Moreover, the 1571 reference has been taken as the earliest mention of the modern *caquetoire* chair.

Janneau dates his illustrations of such chairs to *c.* 1570 and, in recent years, French publications have dated *caquetoire* chairs to 1570 or later (and often used the *tallemouse* name), whereas they were previously dated to the first half of the sixteenth century.[14] However, the single early reference to the *tallemouse* raises the question of how current the term was. For these reasons the 1570 date is best regarded as hypothetical and the range 1560–70 as preferable. Although there is no early documentary basis for the equation of modern *caquetoire* chairs with women's chairs, this has been inferred from their light construction. This, too, is best regarded as a hypothesis requiring research. Their greater portability could have been made them attractive to men as well.

The term *caquetoire* is no more present in the British historical record than in the French. In 2004 Stephen Jackson wrote that 'scholarship, however, cannot yet tell us whether a chair with a trapezoidal seat, tall back and inward-curving arms obtained a special name in seventeenth-century Scotland. It is a rare seventeenth-century Scottish inventory that goes beyond the bland *ane chyir*.'[15] Michael Pearce, whose

PhD thesis was on Scottish inventories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, writes: 'I've certainly read a lot of inventories now, but I haven't yet seen any descriptions of carved chairs that equate to "caqueteuses". Most chairs are noticed on account of their upholstery, or are oak or fir chairs, sometimes "carvit", or buffet stools.'[16] Likewise, Victor Chinnery's discussion of 'Salisbury' chairs does not refer to any early sources that use the term *caquetoire*.[17] Thus it seems likely that in Britain the term *caquetoire* also dates back only to the nineteenth century.

The date range 1560–70 has implications for the dating of British *caquetoire* chairs. The well-known chair in the Victoria and Albert Museum with a 'Romayne' panel in the back, with a woman's face looking ahead rather than in profile, and with angled ('dog-leg') arms and H-stretchers and which was previously dated to *c*. 1540, has already been demoted on the basis that its panel is a nineteenth-century imitation of a Romayne panel.[18] It seems more likely to be a piece inspired by *caquetoire* armchairs, but made at a later date. Other chairs that have been dated to the 1530–50 period require close scrutiny.[19]

CACQUETOIRE CHAIRS IN FRANCE AND BRITAIN

In France, the term *caquetoire* is used today to refer to a tall, narrow-backed, lightly built, joined armchair with a trapezoidal seat.[20] The arms are joined to the front and outside of the rear uprights with a 'bird's mouth' joint, and the front legs are turned. Beyond this, the type shows very considerable variation. The arms may be curved or angled and may have additional supports. There may be four or six legs and four stretchers in a square or three in an H. The rear uprights may be turned or left square, and the turning of arm supports and front legs may be plain, baluster or inverted baluster. The front stretcher is often fixed across the base of the front legs in the form of a footrest, rather than between them, which Bonnaffé suggests leads to the high seat, but both features hint at the status of the user of this type of chair (Figure 3).[21] The greatest degree of variation lies in the back, which can, for example, be empty except for a high cresting, have a single or double arcade or a plain or carved panel, which may or may not extend to the seat. The cresting rail can be fixed between the uprights or on top of them. The carving on the panel back varies from the minimal to the extremely elaborate, doubtless reflecting the varied contexts in which these chairs were used. The 'second Renaissance' taste of the late sixteenth century was for the fantastic (masks, exotic creatures) and, for example, the arm could terminate in a ram's head.[22] A related type is the *caquetoire* that rotates on a base.[23]

In contrast to France, the term *caquetoire* in both eastern Scotland and the area around Salisbury has been applied to a type of joined armchair that is built as heavily as a

standard British panel-back armchair. Its distinctive features are a trapezoidal seat (four-sided in eastern Scotland, six-sided in Salisbury) and arms that are usually round in eastern Scotland and angled in Salisbury, and have baluster arm supports.[24] Scottish examples often have relatively tall panelled backs, while the height of the backs of the Salisbury examples is similar to those of standard panel-back armchairs throughout England. In eastern Scotland the seat can be at a low level. The arms of the Salisbury examples are joined to the front of the rear uprights, whereas the Scottish examples follow the French model in having bird's-mouth joints.[25] On Scottish *caquetoires* the cresting is usually placed across the full width of the chair, whereas in Salisbury the crest rail is usually fixed between the rear uprights and any cresting projects from this rail, the mayoral chairs being exceptions. The Scottish examples are usually of oak or pine; the pine examples are likely to be less elaborately carved and may be plain.

The earliest dated Scottish *caquetoire* is the 1582 chair in the Provand's Lordship collection in Glasgow, which comes from the House of Kelly, Aberdeenshire (Figures 4–6).[26] It has a heavily moulded crest rail bearing the date and initials 'G.1582.I'. The plain back panel has a deeply moulded frame, and the front seat rail is shaped with a double bracket. Close examination shows that the arms, turned arm supports, front legs and seat are later replacements. Chinnery dates another *caquetoire* to *c.* 1580.[27] This chair has a central front seat support that creates a double arcade, and a back panel carved with an arch in perspective. The double arcade is sometimes found on French *caquetoires*. Some French examples have shaped seat rails, but dated chairs are rarely, if ever, seen. In Scotland, dated *caquetoire* chairs continue into the eighteenth century.[28]

FIGURE 4.   The oldest dated Scottish *caquetoire* chair, 1582, Provand's Lordship. Photo: author.

The best-known Scottish *caquetoires* are the twenty chairs at Trinity Hall, Aberdeen, the home of the city's seven incorporated trades, each being given by the deacon or deacon-convenor of a trade on their retirement. These have elaborately carved crest rails and seat rails, and their panel backs are carved with the donor's name and coat of arms. They are mostly oak and bear carved dates from 1621 to 1690.[29] The earliest deacon's chair at Trinity Hall, bearing a 1574 date, is not of the *caquetoire* type.[30] It belongs to the Wrights and Coopers trade, bears the name Jerome Blak in gothic lettering and has a merchant's mark on the back panel (Figure 7). It has a square seat and a panel below the seat, recalling the earlier 'box armchair', and the naturalistic finials are carved in the solid.[31] It has been suggested that this chair is a family chair reused as a deacon's chair.[32] The back of the cresting is made of quarter-sawn oak, whereas the boards of the back show signs of cleaving (Figure 8). This does not prove that the cresting is a later addition, but it is consistent with this idea. Deacons' chairs had an important ceremonial role in the

FIGURE 5.   Detail of Figure 4, rear view.
Photo: author.

trades, but the circumstances surrounding their provision is uncertain.[33] There must be an explanation as to why no deacons' chairs survive from between 1574 and 1621, the date of the first Aberdeen trades *caquetoire*. It would be premature to argue that the gap between the first dated Scottish *caquetoire* (1582) and the 1621 date is an indication of the conservatism of the trades.

A second group of nine *caquetoire* chairs was acquired by Sir William Burrell in 1925 from a dealer/collector/curator in Aberdeenshire; he kept two at Hutton Castle and gave seven to Provand's Lordship.[34] The design seems to have been used for both ceremonial and domestic purposes.

FIGURE 6.　Detail of Figure 4, crest rail. Photo: author.

There are two *caquetoires* of identical design but different sizes, each with a coat of arms and initials at Crathes Castle, south of Aberdeen. The larger, undated, 'AB' chair and a smaller 'KG' chair dated 1597 have been shown to correspond to the names of the castle's owners, Alexander Burnett and Katherine Gordon.[35] The coat of arms on the KG chair is for Katherine Gordon's father, in line with the practice of Scottish women at this time to retain their maiden name and identity throughout their marriage. This pair is a rare example where it can be concluded that the smaller one was made for a woman, which suggests that in Scotland *caquetoires* were not in general women's chairs. It remains to be seen how frequently pairs were made in Scotland; they do not appear to have existed in the Salisbury area, or in France.[36]

The Salisbury examples described at length by Victor Chinnery almost all have angled arms and a trapezoidal seat with six sides and, as a group, he considered them to span the period 1580–1650.[37] In general, their backs are lower than the Scottish examples. They include two striking mayoral chairs dated 1585 and 1622, both in walnut, with fluted legs and fluted arm supports (Figures 9 and 10). The 1622 chair imitates the style of the earlier one, but has a finer carved back panel.[38] Chinnery points out that only three of thirty-eight Salisbury armchairs known in 1979 were not of *caquetoire* design.[39] This implies that the design retained an almost exclusive local favour for a long period. Only two chairs are known to have had a ceremonial role,

FIGURE 7. Jerome Blak Deacon's chair, 1574, Trinity House, Aberdeen. Photo: Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen.

so most must have been for domestic use. Research since 1979 has increased the total of thirty-eight to fifty-four and has brought to light an additional group of over fifty panel-back armchairs that lack angled arms and trapezoidal seats and are considered to be from Wessex, but not Salisbury, and thus not to be *caquetoires*.[40] Last, it is worth mentioning that a number of seventeenth-century Salisbury panel-back chairs have earlier designs in their back panels, such as medieval scenes and Romayne heads, as well as the *caquetoire* shape.[41] This suggests that there was a group, probably, as Chinnery suggests, the Salisbury joiners' guild, with an unusually developed interest in chair design and in asserting a distinctive fashion.

It can thus be seen that in neither eastern Scotland nor Salisbury was the lightly built *caquetoire* design adopted wholesale. Instead, there was a selective incorporation of

Figure 8. Detail of Figure 7, back and cresting. Photo: Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen.

its elements into existing chair-making traditions. The Salisbury examples retained fewer French features than the Scottish examples. The trapezoidal seat and round or angled arms were both adopted, although the relatively narrow back and bird's-mouth joint were adopted in eastern Scotland but not in Salisbury. The two extra seat supports are generally absent. The result was a chair of heavier weight, simple arm joints (Salisbury) and often a lower seat (eastern Scotland).[42]

At present, only general explanations can be suggested for the emergence of variants of the *caquetoire* chair in Scotland and Salisbury. There were economic, political and social links between leading merchants, clergy and other high-status figures in the wealthy ports of eastern Scotland, from Aberdeen to Edinburgh, and the Continent.[43] Bishop Elphinstone was acquiring Flemish woodwork for King's College Chapel,

FIGURE 9.   Mayoral chair, 1585, Salisbury.
Photo: Jan Chinnery/*Oak Furniture:*
The British Tradition by Victor Chinnery
(ACC Art Books, 2016).

FIGURE 10.   Mayoral chair, 1622, Salisbury.
Photo: Jan Chinnery/*Oak Furniture:*
The British Tradition by Victor Chinnery (ACC
Art Books, 2016).

Aberdeen as early as 1500.[44] The old link between Scotland and France strengthened with the marriage in 1537 of James V and Madeleine, daughter of Francis I, which led to his purchase of luxurious French furnishings such as beds, chairs and tapestries, and to the Renaissance decorative work at Stirling Castle and Falkland Palace.[45] When his daughter Mary, widow of Francis II, returned in 1562 to reign as Queen of Scots, she did so 'with ships laden with luxurious gowns and furnishings'.[46] At the same time, French and Flemish craftsmen are recorded as working in Scotland, and Pearce has used guild records to suggest that there was a 'French school of furniture-making' in Edinburgh from the 1550s in which French craftsmen held leading positions.[47] Unfortunately, the furniture he mentions does not include chairs. Several questions arise. How far was the *caquetoire* involved in new techniques and tools introduced by immigrant craftsmen? Were the chairs initially made in workshops by Scottish craftsmen under French supervision? How did their design and manufacture evolve, and how did demand for the style spread beyond the initial stratum of households and achieve such longevity?

In the case of Salisbury, the context is very different. The town had commercial contacts with France through the wool trade.[48] The Salisbury *caquetoires* included neither the bird's-mouth joint nor the tall back of the Scottish variant. The influence of the French model is thus weaker and suggests the lack of a broader cultural orientation in favour of French Renaissance design. French craftsmen may not have been resident. The Salisbury examples end in the 1670s, and this shorter period of popularity is compatible with the style being a preference of a guild with sophisticated tastes which did not extend far geographically and could therefore not be sustained over as many generations as it was in Scotland.[49]

The emergence of *caquetoire*-inspired chairs in Scotland and Salisbury close together in the 1580s may be coincidental, as the scale and social processes involved in each place differed. Whereas it has been argued that Renaissance design was slow to start to influence English furniture, the impact of the *caquetoire* design only ten or twenty years after its likely introduction in France shows that, by the late sixteenth century, the pace of influence had accelerated, no doubt facilitated by the Elizabethan boom in building houses for wealthy households, new styles of interior decoration, and an increase in the number of rooms and new types of furniture.[50]

The general question of the influence of immigrant craftsmen in the sixteenth century is too large to discuss here. Immigrant joiners and carvers were present from Aberdeen to East Anglia to London to Winchester and Exeter and Devon.[51] It is too simplistic to suggest that the presence or absence of French or Flemish craftsmen in a town necessarily led to the transfer or not of particular furniture designs. They were a differentiated category; they may have been working on fixed woodwork in churches or houses, they may have been introducing new techniques such as marquetry and complex mouldings, and they may have been highly skilled workers passed from commissioner to commissioner or less skilled workers employed casually. The growth of London in the late sixteenth century and, especially, its wealthy classes created an expanded demand for luxury goods of all types, which included new forms of furniture with new types of decoration. What immigrant craftsmen made, however, has proved harder to establish than their presence.[52] The fact that the *caquetoire* design was not copied in Scotland and Salisbury but treated as a mine from which to select elements suggests that makers and customers had a strong influence on what was made. The use in Scotland of the bird's-mouth joint on sturdy chairs where it was not really necessary may reflect the involvement and even leadership of French craftsmen in guilds, contrary to their usual exclusion in England.

Finally, as well as these three main groups of *caquetoire* chairs in Britain and France, a group of possibly related examples is worth examining. The Victoria and Albert Museum has a heavily built oak chair with a narrow raked back, arms joined to the

face of the uprights, moulded seat rails and low stretchers and a back panel with an applied moulded rectangle with lozenge inside (Figure 11).[53] Apart from its differently shaped, moulded panel-back decoration and its lack of extra stretchers, this chair has some similarities to a chair illustrated in the French literature which has a narrow raked panel back with three full-height tapered shapes, and turned twin baluster stretchers just below each seat rail (Figure 12).[54] According to Laurence Fligny, this chair dates from the very early seventeenth century, is a very rare design, may not be French, and the shapes in the panel back are planed out of the solid.[55] The V&A chair is considered to date from 1560–80, based on the similar applied moulded rectangle with lozenge decoration on the panel-back armchairs at Sizergh Castle dated 1570–71.[56] There are other relevant comparators: the Scottish 1582 caquetoire and two undated side chairs at Sizergh Castle considered to be from the 1570s, all of which have an applied moulded rectangle on the back panels.[57] This suggests the possibility of a link between the V&A, 'French' and Sizergh chairs. The creation of complex shapes made with moulding planes, applied or cut in the solid, may have been a new decorative technique, perhaps introduced by immigrant craftsmen.[58]

There are two *caquetoires* that fit into neither the Scottish nor Salisbury types. Roe illustrates a chair in St Augustine's Church, Broxbourne, Hertfordshire with bulbous acanthus-carved legs and arm supports, floral marquetry on the back panel and the upper surfaces of the angled arms, and an elaborate cresting rail (Figure 13).[59] A visit to the church by the author revealed that the chair,

FIGURE 11. Unusual *caquetoire*-type chair, 1560–80, England (W.54-1948). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 12.   Raked-back chair, unknown origin. Private collection. Photo: author.

while of *caquetoire* style, is made up from a collection of fragments of different ages; the cresting could date from 1600–50, but the rear stiles and back and arms with marquetry are later. A second chair is the bullet-wood *caquetoire* that appeared at Sotheby's, London on 22 October 1982, and in the Littlecote House sale in 1985 (Figure 14).[60] The back has an armorial cresting, an armorial shield for 'Roope of Dartmouth, Devon impaling Boys or Winterbottom', guilloche and palmette carving on the frame, steeply sloped, slightly curved arms, probably with bird's-mouth joints, a seat with a torus moulding and H-stretchers. The H-stretcher and bird's-mouth joint are unusual in a heavily made chair. The palmette feature is often found in seventeenth-century West Country oak furniture and on some Scottish *caquetoires*; it is also popular on French oak furniture. This imposing chair appears to be a solitary Devon example and was made in 1617 from timber imported from the Amazon basin by Nicholas Roope, a Dartmouth merchant.[61] It shows more French features than most other British examples and indicates great awareness of French stylistic trends in a trading port milieu. However, awareness of new styles is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of their adoption. The distribution of chairs in Britain that show any *caquetoire* influence demonstrates that it remained a minority taste outside Scotland.

FIGURE 13. Broxbourne *caquetoire*-style chair, Church of St Augustine, Broxbourne, Hertfordshire. Photo: author.

FIGURE 14. Roope chair, 1617, Dartmouth. Photo: Sotheby's.

ORIGINS

Having thus outlined the chairs in Britain that showed *caquetoire* influence, this section examines the origins of the design. The emergence of the *caquetoire* chair in France around 1560 or 1570 is seen by Janneau as part of the change from the tradition of heavily built chairs towards light open-arm chairs after 1550 that took place under the influence of Philibert de l'Orme, Superintendent of Works under Henri II from 1547, and the Italian-influenced court of Catherine de Medici.[62] In Italy there seem to have been few lightly built chairs with arms and rectangular seats in the 1550–1600 period. Armchairs were most often strongly built, rarely had turned legs and arm supports, and frequently had decorated front stretchers with rectangular panels.[63] There was also no tradition of chairs with trapezoidal seats. Hence, light open-arm chairs must

be regarded as primarily French in origin. The mid-sixteenth century was a period when chateaux were being built in the Loire valley and architects published designs for houses and matching internal furnishings that included classical elements and motifs. The *caquetoire* design can be seen as embodying architectural principles: 'the multiple columnar leg and arm supports, high backs and applied entablature-like mouldings are reminiscent of classical façades, or at least those which appear in the sixteenth-century literature of both Italy and France (Serlio, de l'Orme, Barbaro et al)', and the trapezoidal seats 'allow the legs and arm supports to be off-set so that they appear like a colonnade or in better perspective'.[64]

The classically educated upper-class owners and, particularly, it has been argued, those women who shared in expanded education, adopted a new lifestyle with matching furnishings.[65] The arrival of simple chairs may be linked to the replacement of benches by side chairs at the dining table, but light arm chairs seem more likely to be connected with what Mercer describes as the 'increased role of women in social life'.[66] He writes:

> on the whole feminine influence upon furniture was exerted indirectly, but the appearance, or at any rate the appearance in large numbers, of lightly-made seats and chairs was hastened and intensified by women's need and desires. By the early sixteenth century upper-class women had achieved at least this much independence in some countries: that they had social occasions of their own from which men were excluded either by request or, if recalcitrant, by intimidation.[67]

This quotation suggests that the chair could be both for women and portable. A recent study shows that aristocratic women in England and Scotland before 1550 undertook estate management and used social networks based on their family connections to mobilise financial support (e.g. in widowhood) and for the political advancement of their children, contrary to images of their confinement in the domestic and non-political spheres.[68]

The trapezoidal seat has been presented as an integral part of Renaissance design. Another possibility is now examined — namely, that armchairs with trapezoidal seats existed before 1560. A chance purchase in a Budapest bookshop made the author aware of the 1974 article by Erszébet Vadászi on an unusual pair of *caquetoire* chairs in the collection of the Museum of Applied Arts, Budapest, which are catalogued as French and from the Auvergne (Figure 15).[69] The chairs are heavily built and the back panels contain 'first Renaissance' decoration with ribbons, dolphins and winged angels around circular and octagonal central reserves with the initials, PNE and OKF.[70] The chairs have had extensive restoration. Discussion with the curator Balázs Semsey suggests that the back panels and rear uprights on both chairs are original, as are the baluster legs and arm supports on 71.43.2 (PNE), all of which are in oak, but that the scrolling arms (probably of reused oak), seats, seat rails and stretchers on both chairs and the baluster legs and arm supports on 71.43.1 (mostly in walnut, elm and beech) are largely replacements.[71]

Figure 15. *Caquetoire-*style chair, with PNE initials, owned by Museum of Applied Art, Budapest. Photo: Ilka Olajos.

Vadászi argues that the carving on the backs and uprights can be dated to 1530–40 based on similarities with a set of twenty panels at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, which have been attributed to the Chateau d'Assier in Quercy, adjacent to the Auvergne, one of which bears a 1530 date. The similarities are far from complete — they do not include the reserves with initials, an infrequent feature — and could simply indicate a shared design source. She tries to connect the PNE and OKF initials with Galliot de Genouillac, artillery master of Francis I and Louis XII, who had the Chateau d'Assier built between 1524 and 1535, but there is no match. Vadászi

nevertheless proposes a date range of 1530–40 for the chairs, which would make them the earliest known *caquetoires*. She suggests that they are forerunners of the light *caquetoire* that emerges after 1560, and that their heavy construction reflects continuing medieval influence in the first half of the sixteenth century.

There is no doubt that heavily built 'thrones' with high, straight backs with first Renaissance panels existed before 1550.[72] Moreover, Bonnaffé illustrates a carved panel from a three-seated chair from Langeac Abbey in the Auvergne that has a garland with the coat of arms of Jean de Langeac, a local noble and leading envoy of Francis I who became Bishop of Limoges in 1533.[73] This shows that the upper class in this 'remote' area was in touch with prevailing styles. One possibility is that the Budapest *caquetoires* contain reused panels from such high-back chairs, even if not from the Chateau d'Assier, to which trapezoidal seats have been added. A more probable interpretation starts from Fligny's suggestion that first Renaissance decoration continued in use in the provinces up to fifty years after it was fashionable.[74] Two constructional features of the Budapest chairs features are relevant: that the back uprights (which are considered to be original) are not straight, as in the pre-1550 'thrones', but are slightly raked from the level of the seat upwards, and that the legs and arm supports have baluster turning, a style that emerges after 1550. The existence of late, heavily built *caquetoire* chairs is shown by the example with second Renaissance decoration attributed by Bonnaffé to nearby Burgundy (Figure 16).[75] Vadászi herself notes the pair of epées, a bandolier bag and drum on the left upright of the 'PNE' chair, and says that

CHAISE A BRAS. — BOURGOGNE.
(Collection de M. le baron Adolphe de Rothschild.)

FIGURE 16.   *Caquetoire*, Burgundy.
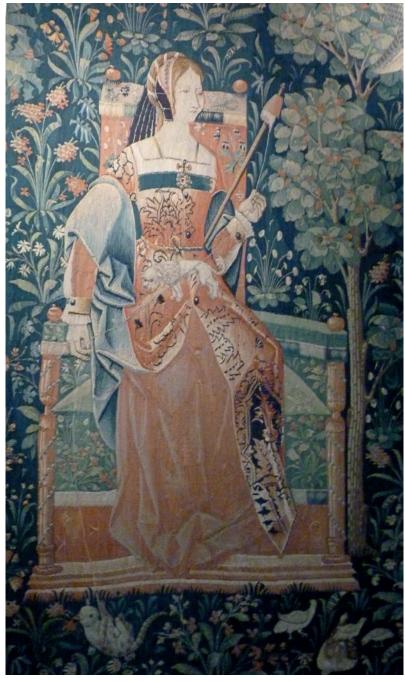Photo: Bonnaffé (1887).

FIGURE 17. Detail of the 'Reading' tapestry with lady in *caquetoire*-type chair, fifteenth century, Cluny Museum, Paris. Photo: author.

'the bandolier bag makes one think of the beggars' movement in the Netherlands', which only started to spread from 1566.[76] She rejects this connection since 'our chairs were made before this', an objection which fails if the chairs are 1566 or later. The interpretation proposed here is thus that the Budapest *caquetoires* are not forerunners of the later lighter examples, but provincial contemporaries.

A second chair is a more convincing example of a pre-1550 armchair with a trapezoidal seat. On a visit to the Cluny Museum in Paris, the author noticed a tapestry showing a couple (Figure 17). On the right a man stands in a doublet, jerkin and bonnet with a slashed brim and holding a book, and on the left a woman is seated in an armchair, with a distaff over her shoulder, in the process of spinning.[77] The front and back uprights appear to have ball finials, and the seat has a definite trapezoidal appearance and seems to float near the front legs, where there is a deep turned groove, but no joint is shown. This suggests that it is a turner's chair rather than a joined one like the *caquetoire* chair. The front legs have vertical red lines, possibly imitating painted reeding or fluting, and a beaded cord winds around them. There is a ring turning close to the base. The front legs terminate in round discs and the seat is placed on a stepped plinth, no doubt indicating the woman's elevated status. There is no footrest. The cresting rail and arms are covered in a plain, red, fringed tapestry-type fabric and the sides of the seat and front below the seat have a blue floral tapestry cover. The pink colour below the latter cover may be a further textile; this may cover a board fixed between the front legs, but this is unclear. Decorative textiles were frequently used to adorn plain high-status furniture at this time.[78]

The catalogue describes the scene as 'Reading' (*La Lecture*), the man's activity, and it belongs to a series illustrating 'Seigneurial Life'. What is most interesting, however, is that it depicts a turner's chair with a trapezoidal seat, and that the date given to the tapestry is the first quarter of the sixteenth century. This date is well before the dates suggested by Janneau for the start of light armchairs (1550) and *caquetoire* chairs (1570). The tapestry has a provenance from the southern Netherlands.

The obvious question is whether the chair in the tapestry is based on an actual chair and, if so, whether it really has a trapezoidal seat, or whether this is an effect due to the designer of the tapestry trying to show a square seat in perspective, perhaps in order to make room for the woman's fine dress. Béatrice de Chancel-Bardelot, Head Curator at the Cluny Museum, has confirmed the 1500–25 date based on the style of the couple's costumes. She continues:

> The chair which interests you is indeed shown in rather maladroit perspective, but the artist indeed perhaps wanted to show a trapezoidal seat. For in another tapestry in the series, Bathing (*Le Bain*), the bath-tub has a rectangular section and does not appear to be so deformed.[79]

It is unusual for sixteenth-century tapestries to show figures seated in chairs, and it is possible that the design of the 'Reading' tapestry was intended as much to draw attention to this particularly innovative chair as to convey aspects of the seigneurial lifestyle.

Turners' armchairs, which can be seen in medieval paintings, illuminated manuscripts and woodcuts, go back to Ancient Egypt and range from elaborate thrones encrusted with jewels, inlay, metal, ivory, or carved, to plain armchairs and stools. They usually had rectangular or triangular, not trapezoidal, seats.[80] The fact that a turned chair with a trapezoidal seat existed in the early sixteenth century does not deny the Renaissance origins of the *caquetoire*. It simply shows that trapezoidal seats were known in high-status chairs at that date. The possibility of a link between the southern Netherlands and the French design sources of the *caquetoire* remains to be explored. The Royal Belgian photographic archive includes two tall joined chairs with trapezoidal seats and simple parchemin and linenfold panels in the back and at the front, below the seat. These are catalogued as fifteenth-century, but it has not been possible to establish whether they are original or are made up.[81] There are also a small number of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century heavily built *caquetoires* attributed to the present-day Netherlands.

CONCLUSION

The history in this article is incomplete for several reasons. The most important are that there was no widely used, specific term for *caquetoire* chairs in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that dated French examples are virtually unknown. The term *caquetoire* was applied in that period to a quite different type of chair, a low upholstered women's chair without arms. The modern use of the term dates only from the nineteenth century, and the rare 1571 *tallemouse* reference has been relied on to date the earliest example in France of the lightly built, high-backed armchair with a trapezoidal seat. In eastern Scotland and the city of Salisbury the evidence is somewhat stronger because some dated *caquetoires* exist.

The immediate origins of the French *caquetoire* chair clearly lie in one form of light chair with arms introduced after 1550, when upper-class seating was revolutionised. Heavily built chairs such as thrones and box armchairs were replaced as part of the application of coherent design to grand houses and their interiors. Regarding the period before 1550, it has been argued that the heavily built Budapest *caquetoires* are unlikely to be forerunners of the lightly built *caquetoire*. The possibility that the trapezoidal seat was known early in the sixteenth century is suggested by the turner's chair in the Cluny Museum 'Reading' tapestry. Whether there is a

connection between the southern Netherlands and France at the relevant time is yet to be researched.

If the Renaissance origin of *caquetoire* chairs is correct, there still remains room for debate about whether this type of chair is a woman's chair rather than simply a portable chair. The argument that they were part of a shift in the social position of upper-class women in France relies on this identification. How far similar shifts existed in different countries remains another area for research. Dated examples show that the *caquetoire* design reached eastern Scotland (1582) and Salisbury (1585) relatively quickly. Some general contextual reasons for the arrival of the design have been offered. It has been suggested that the selective choice of *caquetoire* features in the British examples indicates that they were made by local makers rather than immigrant craftsmen. If this is so, the more numerous *caquetoire* features adopted in Scotland could be because French influence there was greater than in Salisbury. Many questions remain for future research. How far was the presence of French craftsmen influential in the adoption of features of the style in Scotland, and how long did it continue? Did they work outside as well as through guilds? What skills and knowledge did they bring? How did *caquetoire* chairs acquire domestic popularity? Other unanswered questions include how the raked-back and possible Belgian and Dutch *caquetoires* fit into the story, and whether the Roope chair was unique, or part of a local Devon tradition. In brief, this incomplete history opens up numerous areas for future research on both the production and consumption of this chair type in Britain, and on the social groups involved in the selective adoption of the design.

REFERENCES

1   The term trapezoidal is used here to refer to seats where the back is markedly narrower than the front; the seat may have four or six sides. Future research may measure trapezoidal shapes by the ratio of front

to back seat widths, or by an angular measure.

[2] http://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/caquetoire and Edmond Bonnaffé, *Le Meuble en France au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Rouam, 1887), p. 226. All websites accessed 16 November 2018.

[3] Henry Havard, *Dictionnaire de l'Ameublement et de la Décoration depuis le XIIIe siècle jusqu'à nos Jours*, 4 vols (Paris: Ancienne Maison Quantin, 1887), I, p. 607; Jacques Thirion, *Le Mobilier du Moyen-Âge et de la Renaissance en France* (Dijon: Faton, 1998), p. 143. The original is in Latin. Macquoid and Edwards give an alternative: 'It cannot be said that their mouths are frozen, at all events I will answer for it on behalf of the ladies of Paris, who could not refrain from calling their chairs *caquetoires*.' Percy Macquoid and Ralph Edwards, eds, *Dictionary of English Furniture*, 3 vols (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors' Club, 1954), I, p. 203.

[4] Havard, *Dictionnaire*, I, pp. 607–10; Nicole de Reyniès, *Le Mobilier Domestique: vocabulaire typologique*, 2 vols (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1987), I, p. 44, n. 3.

[5] Peter Thornton, 'Back-stools and chaises à demoiselles', *The Connoisseur* 185, no. 744, (1974), pp. 99–105 at p. 102; Guillaume Janneau, *Les Sièges*, 2 vols (Paris: Fréal, 1975), I, p. 12.

[6] Janneau, *Les Sièges* I, p. 12.

[7] Thornton, 'Back-stools', pp. 102–03; Peter Thornton, *Seventeenth-century Interior Decoration in England, France and Holland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 186.

[8] Janneau, *Les Sièges* I, p. 12.

[9] Thornton, 'Back-stools', p. 105, n. 8.

[10] Bonnaffé, *Le Meuble*, p. 226.

[11] Thornton, 'Back-stools', p. 105, n. 8; Nicole de Reyniès, *Le Mobilier Domestique* I, p. 108.

[12] Bonnaffé, *Le Meuble*, p. 226.

[13] Janneau, *Les Sièges* I, pp. 11–12. In doing so he contradicts his view that the chair originally had no specific name. De Reyniès, *Mobilier Domestique* I, pp. 107–08, captions her pictures '*fauteuils en tallemouse*'.

[14] Monique de Fayet, *Meubles et Ensembles, Moyen Age et Renaissance* (Paris: Massin, 1961), pp. 12, 17, 32; Jacqueline Boccador, *Le Mobilier Français du Moyen Age à la Renaissance* (Paris: Monelle Hayot, 1988), pp. 298–303; Thirion, *Le Mobilier*, pp. 143–44; Monique Blanc, *Le Mobilier Français. Moyen Age Renaissance* (Paris: Massin, 1999), p. 85.

[15] Stephen Jackson, 'Terminology; a further note on the caqueteuse', *Regional Furniture Society Newsletter* 40 (2004), p. 24.

[16] Michael Pearce, 'Vanished Comforts: locating roles of domestic furnishings in Eastern Scotland, 1500–1650' (unpublished PhD thesis, History Department, University of Dundee, 2016). Michael Pearce, personal communication to the author, January 2017.

[17] Victor Chinnery, *Oak Furniture: the British tradition*, rev. edit. (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 2016), pp. 405–13.

[18] Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, fig. 3.29. See V&A, W.45-1925, with notes on the V&A website.

[19] Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, fig. 3.32; Tobias Jellinek, *Early British Chairs and Seats, 1500–1700* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 2009), p. 105.

[20] Janneau, *Les Sièges* I, p. 12.

[21] Bonnaffé, *Le Meuble*, p. 215.

[22] For examples, see de Fayet, *Meubles*, pp. 12, 17, 32; Monica Burckhardt, *Mobilier Moyen Age, Renaissance* (Paris: Massin, n.d.), pp. 3, 76; Boccador, *Le Mobilier Français*, pp. 298–303; Thirion, *Le Mobilier*, pp. 143–45; Blanc, *Le Mobilier Français*, pp. 84–85; Ader Tajan, *Bruno Perrier, Haute Epoque*, 2nd sale, Paris (7 December 1993), pp. 109, 114, 118. See also images of the *caquetoire* and *caqueteuse* in Google images, major auction sales and https://www.photo.rmn.fr for French museums. The terms first and second Renaissance refer to the decorative styles before and after 1530 in France. Gothic style overlapped with Renaissance style, and the latter with Mannerism.

[23] Thirion, *Le Mobilier*, p. 145. The French museums website has pictures of two rotating examples (*chaises tournantes*) at the Chateau d'Ecouen, the national museum of the Renaissance in France.

[24] See Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, figs 4.65 to 4.74, and Jellinek, *Early British Chairs*, pp. 106–09 for Salisbury examples. Existing writing on Scottish *caquetoires* rarely reports on restorations, so one cannot be sure that arms are original. However, a current study by Stephen Jackson should fill this gap and may modify the generalisations suggested here.

[25] Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, p. 411.

[26] Liz Hancock, personal communication to the author, January 2017. The 1582 chair is PL.1927.21.3.

[27] Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, fig. 4.94.

[28] Aidan Harrison, 'A Small Scottish Chair', *Regional Furniture* 29 (2015), pp. 1–13.

[29] Andrew Hannah, 'Some Early Scottish Chairs', *Scottish Art Review* 5 (1955), pp. 7–10; David Learmont, 'The Trinity Hall Chairs, Aberdeen', *Furniture History* 14 (1978), pp. 1–8; Jellinek, *Early British Chairs*, pp. 172–77; Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, figs 4.96 to 4.109. The 1621 date has been partially erased on a chair re-dated 1708 in Chinnery, fig. 4.96.

[30] There is also a throne-type deacon convenor's chair given by Matthew Guild in 1570, but this is made of earlier openwork tracery panels from St Nicholas Kirk, also known as the Mither Kirk. (Personal communication to the author, David N. Parkinson, ex-Deacon Convenor of the Seven Incorporated Trades of Aberdeen, February 2017). See also Jellinek, *Early British Chairs*, p. 170.

[31] The back is made of three horizontal boards, and the under-arm panels and under-seat front panel of two; all have stopped chamfered edges. The seat has four boards fixed front to back. There have been repairs to the back uprights, arms and seat.

[32] David N. Parkinson, personal communication to the author, February 2017.

[33] Stephen Jackson, 'Trade Incorporation Ceremonial Chairs', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 127 (1997), pp. 945–56.

[34] Liz Hancock, personal communication to the author, January 2017, based on Sir William Burrell's Purchase Book. Four pine chairs from Provand's Lordship dating from 1670 to 1695, generally with simpler carved backs, are shown by Jellinek in *Early British Chairs*, pp. 114–15. Hannah, 'Some Early Scottish Chairs', p. 9, says that *caquetoire* chairs as a whole are referred to as 'Aberdeen' chairs.

[35] Harrison, 'A Small Scottish Chair'.

[36] Ronald Butler reports that he has not found pairs of different sizes among Salisbury chairs. Personal communication to the author, November 2018.

[37] Jellinek, *Early British Chairs*, pp. 106–11; Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, figs 4.60–4.75.

[38] Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, pp. 405–07.

[39] Ibid., p. 409.

[40] Ronald Butler, personal communication to the author, February 2017.

[41] Victor Chinnery, 'A Salisbury Armchair — lost and found', *Furniture History* 33 (1997), pp. 43–47, and Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, frontispiece and figs 4.61a–c.

[42] Future research may define the elements of the *caquetoire* style more precisely and track their emergence individually.

[43] Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, pp. 420–22. Channels of Continental European influence are a current research interest in Scotland.

[44] Sallyanne Simpson, 'The Choir Stalls and Rood Screens', in J. Geddes, ed., *King's College Chapel, Aberdeen, 1500–2000* (Leeds: Northern Universities Press, 2000).

[45] The Stirling Castle (Romayne) 'heads' that show French influence have recently been re-dated by Historic Scotland research to the 1540s. See Kenneth A. Steer, ed., *The Stirling Heads* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1975); Historic Scotland Conservation Centre, *The Stirling Heads Reports* (2014), at: http://sparc.scran.ac.uk/publications/level%20II/level2PublicationsMajor.html.

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[47] Michael Pearce, 'A French Furniture-maker and the "Courtly Style" in Sixteenth-century Scotland', *Regional Furniture* 32 (2018), pp. 127–36.

[48] Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, p. 409.

[49] Information on Salisbury from Ronald Butler, personal communication to the author, November 2018.

[50] Christopher Pickvance, 'The Slow Arrival of Renaissance Influence on English Furniture: a study of the 1519 Silkstede, Shanklin and the 1539 Garstang, Cirencester chests', *Regional Furniture* 29 (2015), pp. 101–30.

[51] Benno Forman, 'Continental Furniture Craftsmen in London: 1511–1625', *Furniture History* 7 (1971), pp. 94–120; Lien Luu, *Immigrants and the Industries of London, 1500–1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Anthony Wells-Cole, *Art and Decoration in Elizabethan and Jacobean England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 169–200; John Allan, 'Breton Woodworkers in the Immigrant Communities

of South-west England, 1500–1550', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 48 (2014), pp. 324–60; Nicholas Riall, *The Renaissance Stalls at the Hospital of St Cross* (Winchester: Hospital of St Cross, 2014); and Pickvance, 'Slow Arrival'.

[52] Luu, *Immigrants*, pp. 27–51, 114–21.

[53] V&A, W.54-1948. Dimensions: 129.6 cm high, 68.5 cm wide at the front (44 cm at the back), 53.3 deep, seat height 52 cm (see the museum catalogue entry online).

[54] The chair is described as oak and dated to the first half of the sixteenth century by de Fayet, *Meubles*, p. 17; and as walnut, dated to the late sixteenth/early seventeenth century by Burckhardt, *Mobilier*, p. 76.

[55] Laurence Fligny, personal communication to the author, February 2017.

[56] National Trust collection nos 997985-6, 1 and 2.

[57] National Trust collection nos 997990 and 997991 — the latter, unusually, with turned rear uprights. The seat of the former is markedly trapezoidal, being 66 cm wide at the front and 50.5 cm at the back (from Jane Clarke, personal communication to the author, April 2017).

[58] The question of Flemish influence at Sizergh is discussed by Megan Wheeler, 'Early Elizabethan Chests at Sizergh Castle', *Regional Furniture* 32 (2018), pp. 103–25.

[59] Fred Roe, *Ancient Church Chests and Chairs* (London: Batsford, 1929), pp. 32–33.

[60] Sotheby's, London, *The Contents of Littlecote House, Wiltshire*, 2 vols (22 November 1985), I, lot 276; Adam Bowett, *Woods in British Furniture-making, 1400–1900: an illustrated historical dictionary* (Kew: Oblong Creative and Royal Botanic Gardens, 2012), pp. 454–57, 120 and 199.

[61] Bowett, *Woods*, p. 199.

[62] Janneau, *Les Sièges* I, p. 12.

[63] Frida Schottmuller, *Furniture and Interior Decoration of the Italian Renaissance*, 2nd edit. (New York: Westermann, 1928), pp. 168–90; Augusto Pedrini, *Italian Furniture. Interiors and Decoration of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (London: Tiranti, 1949), pp. 50–62. However, Eric Mercer, in *Furniture, 700–1700* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969), p. 108, refers to a '*petite chaise a femme*' in Louize de Borgia's chamber in 1514.

[64] My thanks to Megan Wheeler, from whom this quotation is taken.

[65] Mercer, *Furniture*, pp. 110–12.

[66] Ibid., pp. 107–08.

[67] Ibid., p. 108.

[68] Grace C. Denton-Spalding, 'From Court to Countryside: aristocratic women's networks in early Tudor England, 1509–1547' (BA thesis, History Department, Wesleyan University, Connecticut, 2015).

[69] Erszébet Vadászi, 'Deux Caquetoires', *Ars Decorativa* 2 (1974), pp. 45–60.

[70] Inv. nos 71.43.1 (OKF chair) and 71.43.2 (PNE chair). Dimensions: 123 cm high, 66 cm wide, 56 cm deep.

[71] Personal communication to the author, May 2016.

[72] Bonnaffé, *Le Meuble*, pp. 217–20.

[73] Ibid., pp. 105–06.

[74] Laurence Fligny, *Le Mobilier en Picardie, 1200–1700* (Paris: Picard, 1990), p. 121.

[75] Bonnaffé, *Le Meuble*, p. 223. The seat extends beyond the front arm supports on this chair, as on the Salisbury type but unlike the Scottish examples.

[76] Vadászi, 'Deux Caquetoires', p. 60, n. 27.

[77] For photos of the tapestry (collection number Cl.2182) see http://www.photo.rmn.fr (search *tapisserie 16ème*).

[78] David Starkey, ed., *The Inventory of King Henry VIII. The transcript* (London: Harvey Miller, 1988).

[79] Personal communication to the author, April 2016. The 'Bathing' tapestry has collection number Cl. 2182.

[80] Mercer, *Furniture*, pp. 44–49; R. D. Ryder, 'Three-legged Turned Chairs', *The Connoisseur* 190 (1975), pp. 42–47; R. D. Ryder, 'Four-legged Turned Chairs', *The Connoisseur* 191 (1976), pp. 44–49; Penelope Eames, 'Furniture in England, France and the Netherlands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century', *Furniture History* 13 (1977), pp. 1–303 at pp. 184–85.

[81] See http://balat.kikirpa.be, objects 97471 and 10128464.