

Scupstoel

Members might be interested in this curious drawing that relates to high relief carving running right round a capital from the Town Hall in Brussels, built around 1447-50.

Badly damaged, the capital still survives. The drawing has been given the title *Scupstoel* (which I am informed translates literally to mean 'shovel chair') and is attributed to the circle of Rogier van der Weyden who was town painter at the time.

Clearly of note for showing in some detail four different types of 'stoels' that were presumably familiar in Brussels at the time, it also represents a rare glimpse at the means by which designs possibly progressed from conception to execution. This might be of particular interest to those who attended the recent Christopher Gilbert Memorial Lecture where a discussion of the relative roles that 'designers' and craftsmen played in that process followed Glenn Adamson's fascinating paper on the impact drawn designs and the

organisation of the craftsmen that executed them might have had on the ornament of furniture.

It has been suggested that this drawing forms part of that process, the curved layout relating to the requirements of the carvers when setting out the design on either the capital itself or a preparatory model. However, the good state of the drawing does not indicate it was used directly in this way, suggesting that in this instance the city council commissioned their painter to produce a design for the capital from which copies, and possibly models, were taken and used to work from.¹ Whether such copies and models were made in Rogier's workshops or those of the carver remains a mystery but it does seem that, in this instance at least, the passage of a design from artist to carver and paper to stone did not inhibit the high relief in which the capital was eventually carved.

The meaning behind the curious act of shovelling chairs depicted in the drawing is puzzling. Suggestions have been made that it alludes to either ducking stools or a 'common torture method of the time - tying someone to a chair and throwing them in a swamp'.² While this might have entailed digging a few chairs out of the mud from time to time it seems rather tenuous. It would be interesting to hear if anyone can shed more light on the subject.

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¹ <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/w/weyden/rogier/19graphi/3scupsto.html>, 7/12/2007.

² <http://www.glasssteelandstone.com/BE/BrusselsHoteldeVille.html> 7/12/2007



Scupstoel 1447-50, by Rogier van der Weyden (1400-1464).
Pen over chalk tracing on paper. Metropolitan Museum of Art,
New York.