His table dormant in his halle always stood redy covered al the longe day.

Chaucer, Prologue to Canterbury Tales

A purely decorative installation was described by Wilbrand of Oldenburg as embellishing the palace of the Ibelins in Beirut:

In the interior of the palace, in the middle there is a pool constructed of marble composed of various pieces in various colours….They represent a variety of innumerable flowers. When the onlooker tries to discern them, they dissolve and convey an illusion. In the middle there is a dragon, who seems to inhale the animals depicted. He ascends from a crystal clear fountain that splashes water so abundantly that it rises into the air which streams in through a beautifully ordered window and in time of heat makes the air humid and cool. The water that overflows on each side of the pool drains through small openings and brings, through its quiet whisper, repose to the lords who sit around.1

If this is a reliable description it certainly would not be what one would find in most houses, even of the wealthy. Although there may have been items of luxury, furnishings and installations would have been primarily utilitarian.

A: Household Furniture

In the medieval West furniture was often limited to trestle tables, perhaps a single table dormant, a few chairs and benches, chests and bedsteads. This dearth of movable furnishings appears to have prevailed in the East as well. From the Geniza documents it is apparent that chairs and tables had become unfashionable in Egypt in the Middle Ages and people preferred as little heavy furniture as possible.2 In the Byzantine towns and villages also, tables and chairs were uncommon items in

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2 This was true of the Geniza community and probably represents most housing at the time. See Goitein, 1983, p. 108.
most houses; and from their scarcity in the written sources and, less surprisingly in archaeological evidence, we can understand that the same was true of houses in the Frankish East. Although tables and benches are recorded among the possessions of the Italian communes in Acre, these objects were used to display goods for sale and were not items of household use. The only archaeological evidence for such items in domestic use comes from three sites: a Military Order castle, a monastic house and a farmhouse. Tables in the refectory of the monastery of St Euthymios, east of Jerusalem, were made from large blocks of stone laid laterally on elongated stone-built bases adjacent to stone-built benches along the walls. Tables in the Hospitaller refectory of Bethgibelin Castle were, as noted above, formed from spolia marble columns that had been cut in half lengthways with the curved side down and the flat side uppermost, supported on stones. These were placed in parallel rows across the room (Figure 39). A table formed of a monolithic slab of limestone was found during the excavation of the farmhouse at Har Hozevim (Figure 46). It was located in the main vault near the bakery installation and may well have been used to prepare the dough.

What do we know of beds? The bed as an item of furniture is well documented in the West appearing in numerous illustrations in manuscripts and referred to in lists of furnishings and wills. In the East, however, the situation was considerably different. In Egypt wooden bedsteads that were used in earlier periods are still mentioned Geniza documents of the tenth and eleventh centuries; but they seem to have gone out of fashion by the twelfth century, by which time there are references only to bedding (pillows, mattresses, pads to be laid over the mattresses and various types of bed linen and covers). In