

# Reeding Between the Lines

## The History of Reeded Furniture.

by Mark Arnold

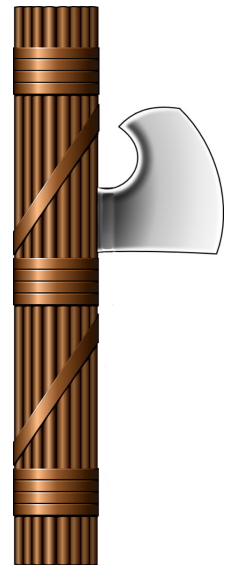


Rote imitation of period furniture and its related design elements has never appealed to me. I've always been much more interested in why certain elements are associated with particular styles of furniture and how each style evolved than I have been with how its hallmark elements can be replicated either with hand tools or machines. One such detail is the reeding found on European neoclassical and American federal furniture, both in their high-style and vernacular manifestations. A cursory survey of furnishings produced between the last quarter of the 18th century and the second quarter of the 19th century reveals the widespread use of reeding on the edges of table tops, turned elements, tambours and on the face of sabre legs, among other applications.

The origins of this neoclassical staple can be traced to a symbol of power in ancient Rome – the fasces. Derived from the word fascis, meaning a bundle, banding, or binding, it shares the same root as the architectural term fascia which is a plumb horizontal band located at the bottom of the entablature of most Classical Orders, and at the end of rafters on most build-

ings. The word fasces is itself a Latin plurale tantum occurring only in the plural form much like the English words clothes, pants, scissors, etc.

In ancient Rome, the fasces was a bundle of wooden rods – elm or birch – lashed together with a band of red fabric. Protruding from the bundle was the head of an ax. It was carried by a lictor, or magisterial attendant to indicate the importance of the government official. To the citizens of the Roman empire,



### reed·ing/rēdiNG/

*noun*

1. a small semi-cylindrical molding or ornamentation.  
·the making of reeded moldings.