

Call for Papers

Contributions are sought for a proposed thematic issue of *Parergon* called *Living, Dreaming, and Dying in the Pre-modern Bed*.



Organisers:

[Professor Stephanie Trigg](#) (The University of Melbourne), [Dr Mairi Stirling Hill](#) (The University of Melbourne), [Rose Albiston](#) (The University of Melbourne)

Rationale:

What is the significance of the bed in medieval and early modern Europe? What is the role of the bed in the pre-modern imaginary? What is the relationship between the bed as a material object and its symbolic uses?

This proposal for a special issue of *Parergon* seeks to explore the role of the bed in medieval and early modern European culture, from a range of disciplinary perspectives. The medieval and early modern bed is a space for sleeping and for dreaming, for having sex and for giving birth, for convalescing and for dying. It can be a site for ostentatious material display, a place of ritual ceremony, simply a mattress on the floor, or even a site of torture. The pre-modern bed challenges modern understandings of the relationship between private and public, especially the bed in aristocratic and royal households. It is also in bed that Margery Kempe reports that Jesus first spoke to her in the early fifteenth century and it is in the bed of Mrs Peach, in which she is 'lying-in' after childbirth, that Hugh Peters is accused of hiding in 1660 to evade capture for treason. Beowulf describes one brother's murder of another as having made an unexpected 'morþorbed'; Lady Bertilak jovially threatens Gawain that she will 'bynde yow in your bedde'; and Shakespeare famously leaves his wife his second-best bed in his will.

The bed is an intriguing object of examination due to its constant presence throughout a person's life and its part in major life events such as birth, marriage, and death, across all classes and ways of life. We are looking for proposed papers on any of the following topics, drawing on archaeological, artistic, historical and literary sources, across the medieval and early modern eras:

- Childbeds
- Sickbeds and convalescing
- Marriage beds and marital sex
- Deathbeds and dying
- The bed as a site of sexual intrigue
- The bed as a site of violence
- The bed as a gendered space
- Dreams
- Sleeping and rest
- The regulation of the bed in religious and secular culture

Please send an abstract of 250–350 words and a 50–100-word biography to Rose Albiston (r.albiston@student.unimelb.edu.au) by the **21st of September 2025**. We will know by the end of October if our proposal is accepted, for anticipated publication in 2027.

For more information, see *Parergon*'s [Call for Proposals](#).