

Campaign Bed

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Illustration 1:



Illustration 2:

Existing beds

There are a fair number of beds from our period that have survived and are in museums today. However, almost without exception, these are beds that were used at home. This begs the question, what did people sleep in when in the field?

While it is likely that the lower classes slept where they may, it would seem likely that those who could afford a pavilion of their own would probably prefer a bed to go in it. Period art often depicts people on beds inside tents, so the idea at least was around, even if the practice is questionable.

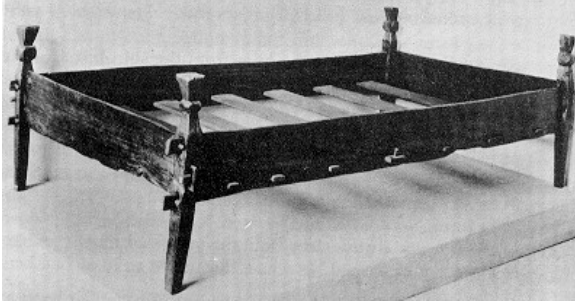


Illustration 3: Gokstad bed

Ropes or Slats

Nearly all the extant beds are rope beds. The exception being the beds from the “Viking” finds at Gokstad and Oseburg.

However, from personal experience as well as the accounts of others, I know that rope beds are a pain to set-up. Not only does it take a long time to string the rope, but it takes even longer to tighten it. Inevitably,

your first couple of nights sleeping in it are none too comfortable, as the rope stretches and must be re-tightened. This isn't really a problem for a bed that is going to be left set up at home, but is less than ideal for a camp bed.

Another problem is that the extreme tension on the ropes requires that the bed frame be very stout (note Illustration 4 below). While it would initially seem that a bed with wooden slats would be harder to transport than one with a net of rope, the reverse is actually the case. This is likely the reason why the viking beds were slat based.

While this bed is intended to be a late period (not Viking) field bed, I used slats instead of rope as the advantages are too great. It seems like reasonable conjecture that if 16th century Europeans did indeed make beds for use in the field, that they would make the same decision.

Style

Given that this was a first attempt, and that it will be used at events, I chose to go with a fairly simple design, rather than a heavily decorated one. This allowed for a plank headboard and footboard rather than ones built up of raised panels with rails and stiles. Also, simple adornment of the posts was done, but no carving.

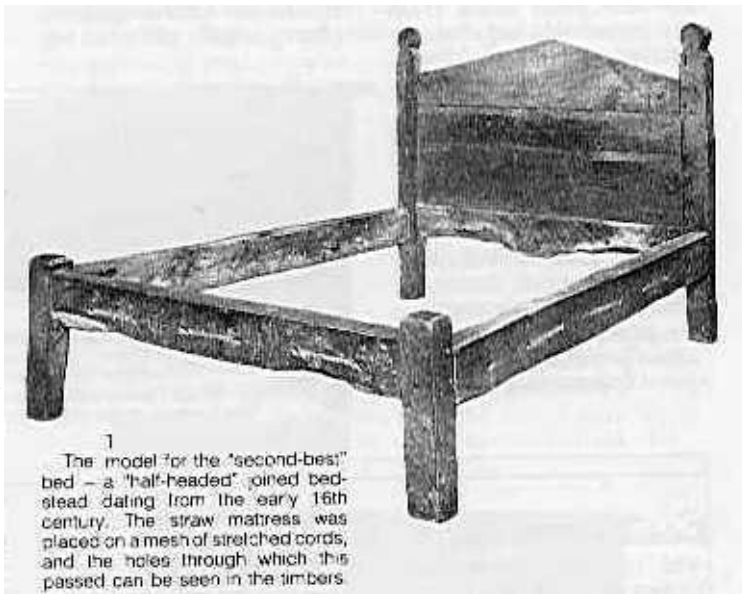


Illustration 4: 16th cent. rope bed

Materials

The bed is made entirely of red oak. Oak is one of the most common woods used in medieval and renaissance furniture.

Methods

The joints are all pinned mortise and tenon joints. The pins are tapered dowels, so the joints tighten up as the pins are driven in. Driving the pins back out allows the joints to be easily disassembled.



Illustration 5: 16th cent. bed joint *Illustration 6: my bed joint*

The rails were made up from two 1 inch thick pieces of oak glued and screwed together. The inner piece was notched for the slats before gluing up. In period, a full-thickness piece would simply have been carved away with adze, broadax, and chisels. I didn't do it this way due to the added expense for wood and the time necessary to cut away that much wood. However, I will likely try it this way in the future.

A few of the slats were dovetailed into the rails. This helps strengthen the bed by keeping the rails from bowing outward. The dovetail was known in the 16th century, but was not a terribly common joint, due to its difficulty. In this case though, it does not need to be tightly fitted, which makes it easy to cut. Alternately, I could have used a pinned mortise and tenon as in the the Viking bed in figure 3 above. In the end I chose the dovetail so as to keep the side of the bed cleaner looking, as in the rope bed I was emulating stylistically.

Tools

Power tools such as a table saw and drill press were used in the initial forming of the wooden parts. Hand tools were used in all joinery, finishing, and detail work.

Finishing

Other than a few problem areas where sandpaper was used, the final surfaces of all the parts were created using a hand plane or scraper. The wood was then finished with boiled linseed oil. Linseed oil was used on all sorts of wooden items in our period and creates a durable surface that can be refinished by the simple addition of more oil.

Conclusion

A field bed is necessarily a bit of conjecture. I will continue to try to find more evidence for the existence and style of renaissance field beds. As it stands, the bed is a definite success. It is easy to assemble and disassemble. It is comfortable and attractive and the look is period even if the specific use may not (or may) be.

In the future I may try carving the rails out of single pieces of heavier stock. Also, I would like to try making a raised panel bed. This will be significantly more work, but may be somewhat lighter, and will definitely be fancier.

Illustration References

1. Friedrich Wilhelmssohn (Gene Eisele), The Bed, inside the tent at Glory, photograph, 2009
2. Raffaello, Sanzio, Vision of the Cross (detail), fresco, 1520-1524
3. Unknown Photographer, Plain bed from the Gokstad find 1240-1250
4. Unknown Photographer, "Second Best" bed at Weald Museum (need to double check)
5. Terafan Greydragon (Peter Barclay), Joint on a bed at the Saffron Walden museum in Essex, photograph, 2007
6. Friedrich Wilhelmssohn (Gene Eisele), Pinned mortise and tenon, photograph, 2009