

# Ancient Furniture

## Part III



**I** recently finished reading “*A World Lit Only by Fire*,” by William Manchester, an interesting but rather grim foray into the medieval mind. In one of the early chapters, I found this passage on the appearance and use of medieval beds:

The centerpiece of the room was a gigantic bedstead, piled high with straw pallets, all seething with vermin. Everyone slept there, regardless of age or gender—grandparents, parents, children, grandchildren and hens and pigs—and if a couple chose to enjoy intimacy, the others were aware of every movement. In summer they could even watch. If a stranger was staying the night, hospitality required that he be invited to make “one more” on the familial mattress. . .

Manchester qualifies his description of family closeness with the disclaimer that these were the prosperous peasants. The *really poor* fared much worse. And, of course, the royalty often had beds such as the one at right, reserved for a single occupant (and select guests).

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This short article is hardly the last word on beds. Most of the people who promised me articles on beds seem to have fled the country, so maybe we can do our big “bed spread” at a later date. I would like to feature “Viking” beds, Anglo Saxon “cabin” beds, roman cots, rope beds, cradles and 14th Century canopied beds, among others. If you have plans or ideas for any of these, please let me know—Arlof*

