

Audio relaxation techniques date back to the Sixteenth Century

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(Medical Xpress) -- The use of birdsong and the sound of running water to aid sleep has been used for more than five hundred years, according to researchers at Royal Holloway, University of London.

Members of the upper classes began using the audio relaxation techniques, using portable fountains that released a soft sound, in the sixteenth and seventeenth century as people became aware of the health benefits of sleep.

Professor Sandra Cavallo, from the Department of History at Royal Holloway, has carried out a study analysing the extensive use of family

correspondence and household inventories with the diachronic analysis of health advice literature.

She discovered that during the decades that straddle the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a new culture of rest emerged.

Professor Cavallo explains: “Chairs and beds specifically designed for resting during the day became common both in summer residences and urban palaces. These were small size and freestanding beds, surrounded on all sides by bed curtains and covered on top by a canopy replaced the monumental ‘open bed’ that was a feature of the previous period.”

There was growing awareness of the importance of sleep in terms of health benefits, with medical professionals playing an important role in directing and monitoring the ongoing changes.

Male and female sleeping quarters were created in palaces, with the bedroom of the most prosperous a secluded space for individual use. “The use of multiple mattresses increased the comfort of laying in bed for the most privileged,” Professor Cavallo says. “While the singing of birds coming from remote parts of the globe and the introduction of devices such as portable fountains that released a soft sound conducive to sleep made the experience of sleeping more pleasant.”

She adds: “Undoubtedly, the new objects had a multifunctional value but one of their declared aims was to make [sleep](#) more salubrious according to the principles of healthy life promoted in the advice literature of the time.”

Provided by Royal Holloway, University of London

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