

N. 6 2025

Fascicolo 23. Luglio 2025 Storia Militare Moderna (6)





Società Italiana di Storia Militare

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Nuova Antologia Militare

Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare

Periodico telematico open-access annuale (www.nam-sism.org)

Registrazione del Tribunale Ordinario di Roma n. 06 del 30 Gennaio 2020

Scopus List of Accepted Titles October 2022 (No. 597)

Rivista scientifica ANVUR (5/9/2023) Area 11, Area 10 (21/12/2024)



Direzione, Via Bosco degli Arvali 24, 00148 Roma

Contatti: direzione@nam-sigm.org; virgilio.ilari@gmail.com

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For the Journal: © Società Italiana di Storia Militare

(www.societaitalianastoriamilitare@org)

Grafica: Nadir Media Srl - Via Giuseppe Veronese, 22 - 00146 Roma

info@nadirmedia.it

Gruppo Editoriale Tab Srl - Viale Manzoni 24/c - 00185 Roma

www.tabedizioni.it ISSN: 2704-9795

ISBN Fascicolo 979-12-5669-174-6



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Stendardo di Lepanto (1570), Lati A e B, Museo Diocesano di Gaeta. Wikimedia Commons. Lo stendardi fu dipinto a tempera su seta da Girolamo Siciolante da Sermoneta (1521-1575), su incarico del Cardinale Onorato Caetani. L'11 giugno 1570 fu benedetto da Papa Pio V nella Basilica di San Pietro e consegnato a Marcantonio II Colonna ponendolo al comando della flotta pontificia. Partito da Civitavecchia e giunto a Gaeta il 22 giugno 1571, Marcantonio Colonna, fece voto di consegnare lo stendardo al patrono della città qualora fosse tornato vincitore. Il 13 agosto Pio V fece consegnare un secondo stendardo della Lega a Don Giovanni d'Austria, comandante generale della flotta cristiana che, riunitasi a Messina, salpò il 24 agosto verso Lepanto. Durante la battaglia del 7 ottobre i due vessilli sventolarono rispettivamente sull'Ammiraglia e sulla Capitana pontificia e non furono mai centrati dal tiro nemico. Nelle stesse ore il papa ebbe la visione della vittoria e in ricordo rifinì l'Ave Maria nella forma attuale, aggiunse le Litanie lauretane alla recita del Rosario e l'appellativo mariano di Auxilium Christianorum e consacrò il 7 ottobre a Santa Maria delle Vittorie sull'Islam, celebrato con lo scampanio al mattino, a mezzogiorno e alla sera in ricordo della vittoria. Papa Gregorio XIII trasferì poi la festa alla prima domenica del mese di ottobre intitolandola alla Madonna del Rosario. Al ritorno da Lepanto, Marcantonio Colonna sciolse il voto consegnando lo stendardo al vescovo Pietro Lunello. Il vessillo fu poi conservato presso la cattedrale dei Santi Erasmo e Marciano.

The Night in Early Modern Warfare:

Risks, Opportunities, and Military Perceptions of Darkness¹

di Luca Domizio (University of Genoa, PhD)

ABSTRACT: Before the public intervention to light urban spaces at night, especially following the introduction of electric lighting, night in the Early Modern period in Europe was perceived and experienced as a suspended time, often marked by exception and inversion of norms. While much military history research focused on modern night warfare — particularly in the context of post-industrial and technological developments — earlier centuries are typically relegated to secondary operations or *ruses de guerre*, treated as minor aspects of warfare. This article reconsiders such assumptions by examining what night meant for soldiers in the 16th and 17th centuries. Drawing on treatises and instructions, iconography, and correspondence — particularly from northwestern Italy — it explores how night was perceived and used both in theory and practice. Through an analysis of a vast corpus of military treatises and a study of operations from the final phase of the War of Monferrato, it argues that night was not a marginal aspect of war, but a fundamental dimension of early modern military practice and soldiers' lived experience.

KEYWORDS: EARLY MODERN EUROPE, NIGHT WARFARE, MILITARY TREATISES, SOLDIERS' EXPERIENCE, WAR OF MONFERRATO, TACTICAL USE OF DARKNESS.



s the historiography on time and its perception in the past has long been studied with many interesting results², the studies on the subject of the night in the period between the medieval and modern eras

NAM, Anno 6 – n. 23 DOI: 10.36158/97912566917461 Luglio 2025

¹ The research presented in this article was discussed on two occasions: at the 2024 Student Conference of the University of Pavia, "Quando scende la notte. Opportunità, limiti e interpretazioni della notte dall'antichità all'età contemporanea", and at the workshop organized by the *Society for the History of War* (SHoW) and the *Arbeitskreis Militärgeschichte* (AKM). I would like to express my gratitude to everyone who contributed with comments and suggestions, and especially to Professor Virgilio Ilari.

² Among the many examples, it is particularly important the sociological and historical reflection of Norbert Elias, *Time: an essay*, Oxford, Blackwell 1992 (1st ed. 1984). The link

remain limited. Nevertheless, this area of research offers valuable and insightful perspectives for future study. Roger Ekirch's comprehensive work presented a wide overview of the night in the early modern era, analysing its use and life, but also the authoritative efforts of controlling it and its individual perception³. Also important, Alain Cabantous' significant studies, in which he also explored the juridical, spiritual and criminal meaning of the night, as well as its treatment by different powers⁴, opened new paths. Since then, the field has gained greater structure through Craig Koslofsky, who examined the colonization of nighttime from 1660 onward. He highlighted the different ways in which the night was colonized and how daily life extended into the night due to new illumination and evolving practices, particularly in cities, before spreading to rural areas⁵. What emerges from the studies is that, for the societies of the early modern period, the night was generally (though not always) perceived as a danger to be contained and controlled by various authorities, who therefore sought to neutralize it by regulating the social life that animated it. As has been noted by the historian of justice Mario Sbriccoli in 1991, disciplining the night was an additional way to control society, first and foremost during the day⁶. However, the phenomenon of war at night, and more broadly the military world beyond the use of soldiers for policing duties, has not been extensively studied. What did it mean the end of the day for a soldier in the 16th and 17th centuries? Was the darkening of the sky the spy of the upcoming rest, an harbinger of danger or was it something else?

It's useful to reapproach this field from the perspective of military history, which may involve multiple angles of exploration and raise different questions.

between time and the military world—how time was used and perceived as a resource, and how it defined war—is explored in some of the most sophisticated studies included in the special issue *Militär und Zeit in der Frühen Neuzeit*, synthesized in the introductory article by Achim Landwehr, «Zeit und Militär in der Frühen Neuzeit. Unsystematische Beobachtungen», *Militär und Gesellschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 21 (2017), Universitätsverlag Potsdam, pp. 7-30.

³ Roger Ekirch, At day's close. Night in times past, New York, Norton 2006.

⁴ Alain Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit. Europe occidentale. XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Fayard 2009. Id, *Les Ombres de Clio: les nuits historiques existent-elles? (XVIe-XXe siècle)*, Paris, CNRS Editions 2018.

⁵ Craig Koslofsky, *Evening's empire*. A history of the night in early modern Europe, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2012.

⁶ Mario Sbriccoli (acd), *La notte: Ordine, sicurezza e disciplinamento in età moderna*, Città di Castello (PG), Ponte alle Grazie 1991.

For instance, one could reconstruct a history of nighttime operations, seeking to understand how and why they have been conducted over time and across various wartime contexts. While it is true that the invention and adoption of night vision devices (for both personnel and vehicles) mark a clear before and after in the history of war at night⁷, this does not mean that, previously, nighttime was a period of inactivity. On the contrary, looking back, we can consistently find reports and testimonies of nighttime actions carried out or planned in the dark across a wide range of conflicts and settings. But what kind of actions were they? More importantly, how were they conceived by the military of the time?

This problem has been studied thoroughly by Sven Petersen, who explored nighttime and its dynamics during the Siege of Freiburg im Breisgau in 1744, underlining firstly how night was differently perceived and employed by besiegers and defenders, creating a condition of multiple temporalities. Petersen clearly emphasized how, using physical and psychological advantages, the three main activities carried out at night were: «Informationsgewinnung, Arbeit und Kampf»⁸ (*Intelligence gathering, work,* and *combat*). Therefore the night and darkness were environments in which to act, in which Petersen also examines the psychology of combat and its effects⁹. Another possible approach could be the study of the nighttime collective life of armies or the tasks and works that were specifically carried out at night. From this perspective, the work of Lucian Staiano Daniels, studying the collective life of a regiment in 1625, is a highly interesting contribution, as it explores how soldiers in a specific context experienced

⁷ For example, on the practice of night operations following the adoption of night vision devices (a topic we will delve into later), see: Alfred Toppe, *Night combat*, Center of Military History, Washington, D.C., United States Army 1953.

⁸ Sven Petersen, «Im "Schleier der Nacht". Dunkelheit und Unsichtbarkeit als Faktoren frühneuzeitlicher Belagerungen», Militär und Gesellschaft in der Frühen Neuzeit, f. 21 (2017), p. 157. As it is later expanded: «Den Gedanken von der arbeitsamen Nutzbarkeit der Nacht ist im Kontext frühneuzeitlicher Belagerungen eine zentrale Bedeutung beizumessen. Praktiken jenseits des Schlafens und Ruhens waren omnipräsent und strukturierten das Ereignis. Sie wurden instrumentalisiert und durchdrangen die Handlungsebenen sowie das Denken der Kombattanten. Dies reichte von einer verschleiernden Nutzung der Dunkelheit und ihren psychologischen Momenten über Aufhebungsversuche der durch sie bedingten Umweltbedingungen bis hin zur Urbarmachung einer ansonsten unproduktiven Zeitspanne». Ivi, p. 170.

^{9 «}Die Undurchsichtigkeit der Nacht erweist sich daher als doppelte Herausforderung, die einerseits durch den Eigensinn der Soldaten genutzt wurde und andererseits die Entscheidungsfähigkeit der Offiziere beeinflusste». *Ivi*, p. 158.

the night, highlighting how a particular social group interacted with the nighttime world, not fearing it as an empty time for rest but using it for activities, especially of watches, patrols and marches¹⁰.

his article aims to offer an overview of the various issues linking night and the military world, providing an interpretation that poses general questions but focuses specifically on Northern Italy and parts of Europe between the second half of the 16th century and the early decades of the 17th century. The main approach is cultural, though it also considers an example from operational history. Technological and institutional aspects are addressed as well, even if they are not the central focus of this study¹¹.

1. Military Nighttime in a Long Perspective: a suspended time?

Since ancient times, the military world has used the night as an opportunity to implement stratagems and military actions aimed at defeating the enemy through deception; beginning with the founding myth of the Trojan Horse¹². Although within the discourse on war these actions were often regarded as a lesser alternative to open-field battles, in practice they were quite common. As underlined in the fundamental book by Luigi Loreto: «A sua volta, buona parte della storia militare operativa dell'Impero romano è storia non di guerre – nel senso di campagne su larga scala condotte da truppe regolari legionarie contro avversari di

¹⁰ The author focused on this issue in particular in his PhD thesis, highlighting elements, such as the signing of letters, that reveal how soldiers were engaged all day and night. Particularly interesting is the parallel drawn with another segment of society that shared a similar nocturnal experience: students, with whom they had much in common (starting with the fact that they were often young males). Luciano Staiano-Daniels, «The War People: The Daily Life of Common Soldiers, 1618-1654», UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations 2018, ProQuest ID: Staiano-Daniels_ucla_0031D_16893, pp. 89-91. In his recent monograph, he also emphasizes how «Ten at night was the beginning of their working day». ID, The War People. A Social History of Common Soldiers during the Era of the Thirty Years War, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2024, pp. 22, 58-59.

¹¹ The perspective adopted reflects the methodology proposed by John A. Lynn, *Battle. A history of combat and culture*, Boulder, Westview Press, 2003. However, it also takes into account some of the issues surrounding the intersection of military and cultural history, as highlighted by Jeremy Black, *War and the Cultural Turn*, Cambridge, Polity 2012.

¹² Manousos E Kambouris, *The Trojan War as Military History*, Barnsley, Pen and Sword Military 2023, pp. 248-252.

tipo analogo – bensì di guerriglia, ossia di operazioni maggiori di alta polizia per il mantenimento dell'ordine pubblico interno nelle province, ovvero di protezione delle frontiere – o, *rectius*, dei limiti esterni del potere imperiale – da episodi di *low intensity*»¹³. Even though we cannot focus here on every period in which night actions occurred, it is important to acknowledge the possibility of a *long durée* analysis. Indeed, while technology became a transformative factor from a relatively recent point in history, certain elements remained constant for centuries: darkness, silence, and, when present, moonlight, which offered a degree of visibility and was therefore deliberately exploited. All this generally led to greater uncertainty, reduced precision in movements, more chaotic environments, and increased dangers.

During the Late Middle Ages, in a landscape where violence was organized in diverse ways, pitched battles often played a secondary role in warfare (though not in the discourse surrounding it), while raids (*Chevauchées*) and sieges—both closely tied to nighttime operations—were far more common¹⁴. For example, on 17 June 1462, Vlad III of Wallachia conducted a night cavalry raid against the Ottoman camp of Sultan Mehmed II at Târgovişte (*Atacul de noapte de la Târgovişte*). Using multiple attacks, torches, and fire, he inflicted significant damage (an event remembered for centuries for its audacious execution, Fig. 1).

Among these nighttime actions, scaling (escalade) became a widely used attack tactic, allowing attackers to seize a castle or citadel with swift assaults. Taking advantage of surprise, the cover of darkness, and the physical fatigue that made it harder for guards to stay alert—sometimes even causing them to fall asleep, one of the most severely punished failures—attackers could avoid the prolonged efforts of a full siege. Warfare in this period was primarily a suc-

¹³ It further states: «Si pensi – per rendere tutto più chiaro –, e. g., per il primo caso, alla storia delle Mauretanie, della Giudea, della Arabia Nabatea, della Britannia, ai Bagaudi, ai ricorrenti episodi di recrudescenza della pirateria nel Mediterraneo nel Tardo antico a partire da quello eclatante dei Franchi sotto Probo fino ai Vandali, e alle nuove forme emergenti nel Mare del nord». Luigi Loreto, *Per la storia militare del mondo antico. Prospettive retrospettive*, Napoli, Jovene editore 2006, pp. 137-138. However, night battles were also possible, as illustrated by Vladimir DMITRIEV, *The «Night Battle» of Singara: Whose Victory?*, HISTORIA I ŚWIAT, nr 4 (2015), pp. 65-70.

¹⁴ Philippe Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, Malden, Mass. Blackwell 1999. For the Italian context, see: Aldo A. Settia, *Rapine, assedi, battaglie. La guerra nel Medioevo*, Roma, Laterza 2002.



Fig. 1. Theodor Aman (1831-1891), *The Battle With Torches* (1866). It depicts the Night Attack of Târgovişte, a skirmish fought between forces of Vlad III the Impaler of Wallachia and Mehmed II of the Ottoman Empire on Thursday, June 17, 1462. Theodor Adam Museum, Bucureşti, Wikimedia Commons.

cession of raids into enemy territory or actions that accompanied the large-scale movements of armies¹⁵. This tradition eventually merged into what became known as partisan warfare (meaning warfare conducted by 'parties', though always composed of regular soldiers) in the early modern period¹⁶. Other scholars have also referred to it as *Kleiner Krieg*, using yet another posterior concept to signify a way of conducting warfare that was already being practiced¹⁷,

¹⁵ A specific and successful leader in this regard was Edward of Woodstock: Clifford J. Rog-ERS, *War Cruel and Sharp: English Strategy under Edward III, 1327-1360*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press 2000.

¹⁶ George Satterfield, *Princes, posts and partisans: the army of Louis XIV and partisan warfare in the Netherlands (1673-1678)*, Leiden, Brill 2003; Beatrice Heuser (Ed.), *Small wars and insurgencies in theory and practice, 1500-1850*, London, Routledge 2016.

¹⁷ As an example of this, a recent study mapped the movements of these parties, providing

and later codified as an organic form of warfare in military treatises under the term *petite guerre*¹⁸. The particularity of this kind of warfare, which was one aspect of the campaigns of the period (together with sieges, the central element of wars, and battles), was that it had the highest rhythm of actions. However, during the night, the tempo of operations slowed, as darkness obstructed movement. On the other hand, an important aspect of partisan warfare was the limited size of the parties, which, as has been demonstrated through the study of primary cohesion groups across different periods, encouraged both the efficiency and motivation of the troops¹⁹. During the night, due to the lack of visibility and the need for closer spatial references, party formations had to be tighter. Therefore, these kinds of personal links became stronger and more important, which also had an impact in the event of encounters with the enemy.

a much more complex view of the dynamics of warfare in the 17th century and how they influenced outcomes on the ground (also in terms of resources): Peter H. Wilson, Katerina Tkacova, Thomas Pert, «Mapping premodern small war: The case of the Thirty Years War (1618-48)», *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 34, 6 (Jun 2023), pp. 1043–1071. Another innovative perspective for studying the practice, particularly the many interactions that occurred during these operations with civilians, Thomas Pert, «'If you make the people run away, you will starve': the military significance of refugees during the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648)», *War & Society*, vol. 43, 3 (2024), pp. 237–252.

¹⁸ George Satterfield, «The Fate of Petite Guerre in Early Modern Europe», *Revue Historique des Armées* (SHD), 2017/1 (n° 286), pp 48-59; Sandrine Picaud-Monnerat, *La petite guerre au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Institut de stratégie comparée-Economica 2010, pp. 105-130.

¹⁹ In general, studies on the cohesion of these primary links, initiated after World War II and expanded since, argue that these bonds have been essential in the conduct of fighting operations Edward A. Shills, Morris Janowitz, «Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II», The Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Summer 1948), pp. 280-315. Strachan, among others, contested this thesis, instead emphasizing the importance of training and the specificity of warfare since the 19th century Hew Strachan, «Training, Morale and Modern War», Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), pp. 211-227. At the same time, historians have attempted to apply these frameworks to earlier periods of warfare, for example by analyzing the motivation of 18th century soldiers, as proposed by John A. Lynn, The bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and tactics in the army of Revolutionary France, 1791-94, Urbana, University of Illinois Press 1984. More recently, Berkovich stated that close friends (the primary group) were the main motivating factor Ilya Berkovich, Motivation in War: The Experience of Common Soldiers in Old-Regime Europe, Cambridge, Cambridge university press 2017, pp. 195-197. Nevertheless, as noted by Hanlon, these links and forms of collective behavior could also work against the military institution, for example by encouraging soldiers to desert together Gregory Han-LON, The hero of Italy. Odoardo Farnese, Duke of Parma, his soldiers, and his subjects in the Thirty Years' War, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2019, p. 65.

Moreover, it was during this period that the Spanish tercios adopted, on a new scale, an already widespread nighttime practice, giving it global application and diffusion: the so-called *encamisada*²⁰. From another perspective, the only true forms of naval warfare conducted at night can be found in amphibious operations carried out under the cover of darkness, for example those related to privateering, often aimed at capturing prisoners²¹. In the Age of Sail, nocturnal naval combats were exploited through stratagems, such as the night fireship attack on the Spanish Armada in August 1588, conducted by Sir Francis Drake²² (See Fig. 2). One of the few exceptions is the Battle of Chesma (1770) between the Russian and Ottoman Empires, in which part of the combat continued at night with fireships and bombardment (Fig. 3). More broadly, night can be studied as the preferred setting for the so-called *ruses de guerre*, examining both their conception and execution²³.

However, this does not mean that the military's relationship with the night was limited to these frameworks. As previously mentioned, although military operations typically halted at sunset, conventional warfare could still take place in the dark. This was especially the case when armies marched at night and, whether by chance or due to errors by guides and informants, unexpectedly encountered one another, leading to clashes. Another common instance of nighttime

^{20 «}Nos referimos a la "encamisada", también llamada "alborada" o "trasnochada". Se trataba de un golpe de mano nocturno, que preferiblemente se asestaba en el denominado cuarto de guardia de "la modorra", pasada la media noche, cuando el enemigo dormía y a sus centinelas les costaba más combatir el sueño. Idealmente, el tiempo se calculaba para que el ataque en sí se produjera de forma que cuando hubiera terminado, empezase ya a clarear, lo que permitía efectuar la retirada a la luz del día, al amparo de las fuerzas de cobertura que siempre se disponían con esa finalidad». Julio Albi de La Cuesta, *De Pavía a Rocroi. Los tercios españoles*, Madrid, Desperta Ferro Ediciones 2017 (9.ª edición), p. 202.

²¹ For example, the coasts of the Ligurian Ponente Riviera were often infested by these landings, which often occurred at night: Giorgio Fedozzi, *Corsari e Pirati in Liguria. Le scorrerie dei predoni turchi e barbareschi, i saccheggi, le deportazioni, la schiavitù e i riscatti*, Imperia, Dominici 1998.

²² For open naval encounters at night, it's necessary to wait, at least given the temporary status of historical research, until the 20th century, as the recent collective book showed how different navies adapted to night combat in the middle of WWII: Vincent P. O'HARA, Trent HONE (Ed.), *Fighting in the dark. naval combat at night 1904-1944*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press 2023. See also Claudio Rizza, «Il Combattimento notturno e la Regia Marina», *Storia Militare*, Vol. 2, 2021, pp. 57-66.

²³ Michel Pretalli (dir.), *Penser et dire la ruse de guerre de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, Besançon, PUFC 2021.



Fig. 2. Philip James de Loutherbourg (1740-1812), *Defeat of the Spanish Armada* (1796), National Maritime Museum, Greenwich Hospital Collection. Modified by Ian Dunster Wikimedia Commons

combat was the assault on fortresses or fortified positions (such as trenches and redoubts), as well as sorties carried out by defenders. In some cases, these types of actions can also be analyzed with the help of iconographic representations, which allow us to reconstruct their development. For example, various stamps commemorate the 'Surprise of Cremona': the night assault carried out between January 31 and February 1, 1702, when the Imperial army, led by Prince Eugene of Savoy, launched an attack on the city after having infiltrated some men in the preceding days. Although Cremona was not captured, the operation resulted in the imprisonment of the French Marshal Villeroi (Fig. 4). Such episodes have often been studied individually in the history of military campaigns, sometimes as exceptions within the more conventional activities of war.

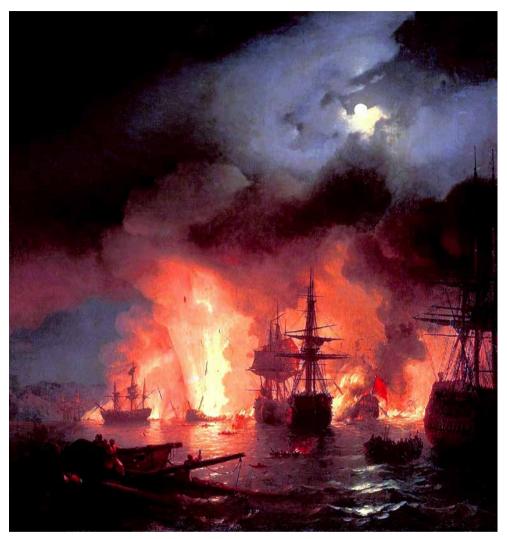


Fig. 3. Ivan Aivazovskij (18171900), *Battle of Çeşme at Night* (1856). Çeşme battle in the night of June 25-26, 1770. Feodosia National Gallery I. K. Aivazovskij.) Wikimedia Commons.

What seems to be lacking, however, is a broader analysis of nighttime combat, as well as the psychological dynamics at play during these events, a research perspective that is increasingly being developed for daytime battles or encounters²⁴.

²⁴ While some of these reflections began many years ago with the now-classic work of John Keegan and others, a new elevation of this perspective can be traced to the fundamental

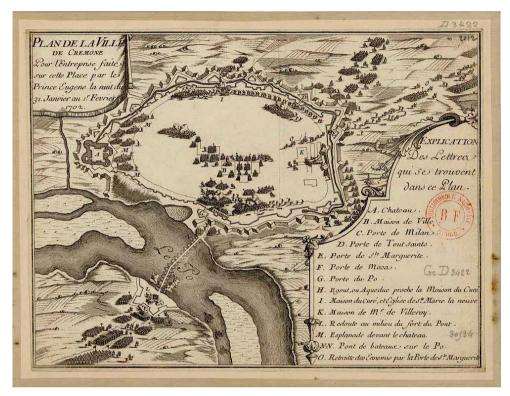


Fig. 4. Plan de la ville de Crémone pour l'entreprise faite sur cette place par le prince Eugène la nuit du 31 janvier au 1er février 1702, Bibliothèque nationale de France, GED-3422. Public Domain

Another perspective—one I will not delve into but which I find crucial as it significantly broadens the outlined framework—concerns the study of military units (professional, semi-professional, and militia) employed as policing forces in the early modern period²⁵. This particular use of the military has been well studied in Italy by CEPOC (*Centro di studi 'Le polizie e il control*-

book, especially notable for its thorough approach, by Gregory Hanlon, *Italy 1636. Cemetery of armies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2016. This historiographical perspective has been recently expanded by Giovanni Cerino Badone, Eugenio Garoglio, *La battaglia dell'Assietta e la campagna militare alpina del 1747*, Torino, Edizioni del Capricorno 2021.

²⁵ On the subject of soldiers and military personnel employed as forms of 'police' (within the various corps that made up such forces in the Early Modern period), in both urban and extra-urban contextssee the rich collective volumes in the series initiated by: Livio Antonielli, Claudio Donati (acd), *Corpi armati e ordine pubblico in Italia (XVI-XIX sec.)*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino Editore 2003.



Fig. 5. Rembrandt (1606–1669), *The Nightwatch*, or Militia Company of District II under the Command of Captain Frans Banninck Cocq (1642), Rijksmuseum. Public Domain.

lo del territorio') and is exemplified, for instance, by Rembrandt van Rijn in the painting *The Night Watch* (*De Nachtwacht*, see Fig. 5), which depicts a civic guard company beginning their patrol in Amsterdam. On the other hand, however, the presence of soldiers in the city was not always a means of asserting control or power, as it could also be a source of disruption, often causing disturbances and destabilizing the urban environment²⁶.

²⁶ In Parma, during the troubled period of the regency and rearmament under Odoardo Farnese, which militarized the Duchy and its cities, conflicts between soldiers and civilians frequently emerged. On 29 May, Colonel Francesco Serafini informed the Duke via letter that three soldiers had been fighting during the night; they were subsequently arrested and executed in the public square the following morning, as a warning to others. In another letter, dated 2 July, Serafini reported that «quattro Soldati [...] di notte andavano

These considerations raise further reflections on the various roles and broader range of experiences a soldier could have during the nighttime, which was considered particularly dangerous for its inversion of values and potential for revolt. Within this category, an additional layer of complexity can be introduced by distinguishing between the control of cities and that of rural or coastal areas. Although seemingly peripheral to the broader military context, this distinction is important, as it had very practical consequences for warfare. Indeed, the night-time defense and security systems of armies in the field—including the precautions for guard shifts and the organization of sentries—were essential not only for protection against external threats, as previously mentioned, but also for monitoring and regulating life within the camps themselves, thereby ensuring discipline and order among the troops.

The aim of this overview was to show how different traditions converged in the broader scenario of night combat during the 16th and 17th centuries. However, this reconstruction could easily be extended into the 18th century and beyond. For example, the night played a crucial role for the special operation in Tripoli to burn the American frigate Philadelphia and resolve its diplomatic problem²⁷. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the 20th century saw the proliferation of specialized studies on night combat, conducted in various sizes and by different cultures²⁸. Notably, the Japanese Army's imperial phase produced the first comprehensive and sophisticated analysis of night combat²⁹. For example, the role of moon-

facendo mill'insolenze per la città. Che finalmente resoluto di volere reprimer quelle loro insolenze questa notte si erano fatti prigioni». Archivio di Stato di Parma, *Collatereria di Piacenza*, *Carteggio militare*, b. 5, fascicolo 1633-1634. These and other episodes still require further exploration in order to deepen our understanding of civil-military relations at night. I thank Martino Zanardi for pointing out these and many others interesting cases, which he will hopefully publish soon. For broader context, see Gregory Hanlon, *The hero of Italy....*

²⁷ Giuseppe Restifo, «A night of fire in Tripoli (1804)», in Michela D'Angelo, Gelina Harlaftis, Carmel Vassallo (acd), *Making waves in the Mediterranean: Sulle onde del Mediterraneo*, Messina, Istituto di studi storici Gaetano Salvemini 2010, pp. 85-95.

²⁸ Starting from the English manual, with particular reference to the recent Russo-Japanese War: Charles Tyrwhitt Dawkins, Night Operations for Infantry: Compiled for the Use of Company Officers, Aldershot, Gale & Polden 1918. Also the small handbook of the Center for Lessons Learned, «Own The Night!» Small Unit Night Fighter Manual, Fort Leavenworth, U. S. Army 1996.

²⁹ In the first half of the 20th century, the Japanese undertook a comprehensive analysis of the ongoing changes in nighttime combat, beginning with reflections on military history and

light was crucial in calculating precise distances, particularly when determining whether movements were made with or against the light (Fig. 6). Additionally, the Soviet approach to night operations was extensively studied by the US military³⁰, as it remained relevant during WWII, particularly in the use of cavalry, which allowed for a better exploitation of surprise³¹. Also, particularly interesting are the reflections on the sea and air domains, especially regarding the expansion of possibilities due to the industrialization and modernization of warfare, as night combat presents not only tactical challenges but also technical ones³². For example, special units of the Luftwaffe specialized in the Night Hunt (*Nachtjagd*) against RAF and US bombers during the air defense campaign over the Reich³³. Today, night combat still retains its specificities, but increasingly resembles day-time operations thanks to technological advancements³⁴. What appears to be a continuous factor, however, is the fatigue associated with operating in darkness, as the attrition rate tends to be higher—particularly when night actions are not planned as distinct operations, but rather as a continuation of daytime activity.

These considerations, which serve as a preliminary assessment of the issue and point to a broader historical context, add further complexity to the topic. Although not all these elements are directly addressed in this research, they help

their experience in the war against Russia (1904–1905). This research led to the development of a true doctrine of night fighting, which was later translated and analyzed by the Americans in 1955: Eighth United States Army Military History Section Japanese Research Division, *Japanese Night Combat*, 3 voll., Washington, United States Army Forces 1955.

³⁰ A thesis presented by Corbett M Flannery, *Night Operations – The Soviet Approach*, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas 1978 (now available online, published in 2012).

^{31 «}By operating at night, cavalry avoids attack by aircraft, and moves, dismounts, and strikes with much more surprise than during daylight hours». Night Combat by Russian Cavalry, *Intelligence Bulletin*, Vol. I, No. 2, October 1942.

³² See, for example: Bill Gunston, Night fighters. A development and combat history, Sutton Pub. Stroud 2003 (1st ed. 1976); Merrick Krause, Night Air Combat: A United States Military-Technical Revolution, US, Defense Technical Information Center 1997 (than published in 2012); Stephen L. McFarland, Conquering the Night: Army Air Forces Night Fighters at War, Washington, Center for Air Force History 1998. We have already mentioned references to the adaptation to nocturnal naval combat. For a problematization focused on engineering aspects, see V. K. Shamshurov, Engineer Combat Support in Special Conditions, Moscow, Voyenizdat 1985 (1st ed. 1972).

³³ Theo Boiten, *Nachtjagd. The Night Fighter Versus Bomber War over the Third Reich,* 1939–45, London, Crowood Press 1997.

³⁴ Especially for infantry; some remarks remain very valid: Chris McNaB, Will Fowler, *The encyclopedia of combat techniques*, Enderby, Silverdale Books 2002, pp. 225-227.

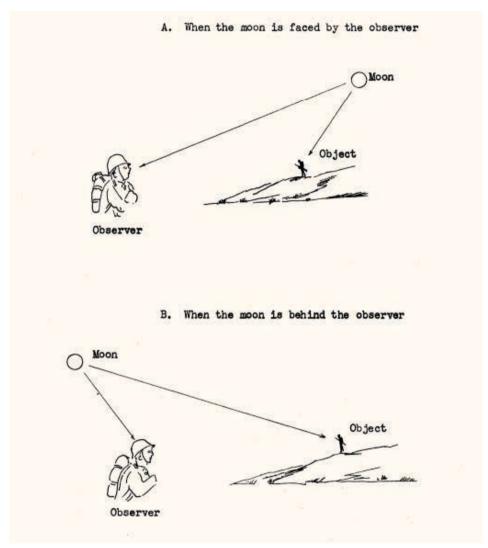


Fig. 6. Eighth United States Army Military History Section Japanese Research Division, *Japanese Night Combat*, Vol. 1., *Principles of Night Combat*, Washington, United States Army Forces, 1955, p. 106.

steer the discussion away from sweeping generalizations. In fact, we must broaden the scope before narrowing it down to specific areas and time periods; a wider range of contexts is necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the subject.

2. Nighttime in Early Modern Military Treatises (16th & 17th Centuries)

The revolution of the printing press and its spread in the 16th century led to an explosion in the field of military knowledge and technical-military treatises³⁵. A key feature of these treatises, particularly from the final decades of the 16th century, was that they were written by professional soldiers from various branches and social backgrounds (for the first time on such a wide scale), rather than solely by humanists, scholars, or military engineers and architects. This characteristic allows us, through their texts, to explore the conceptions of war during the period with considerable precision³⁶. The analysis will extend to the first three decades of the 17th century, a period when the technicization of military texts had reached completion and a new surge in publications significantly expanded their production.

Despite the importance of symbolic attributions, the focus here is on the practical dimensions of night in the military world, as culturally reflected in the technical-military treatises of the time. To highlight the persistence of this theme, a chronological approach will be adopted, complemented in some aspects by a thematic organization of the arguments, though the former will be prioritized. This structure aims to demonstrate the continuous attention given to the night within the development of European military knowledge (understood geographically, or more precisely as Italian in language, and above all Catholic in cultural orientation).

The first military figure considered is Lauro Gorgieri, who, in his brief treatise on the art of war published in 1555, refers to the night as «the time most often

³⁵ For a comprehensive view of the Italian military treatises, which will be our main focus here, see: Virgilio Ilari, *Scrittori militari italiani dell'Età Moderna: Dizionario bio-bibliografico 1410-1799*, Roma, Nadir Media 2021 (1a ed. 2011).

³⁶ Many authors, most notably David Parrott, have expressed skepticism about the plausibility and reliability of early modern military treatises. On this issue and possible responses to it, see (particularly the bibliography on this subject) Luca Domizio, «Dall'armata a cavallo all'arma di cavalleria. Trasformazione militare e mutamento sociale», *Nuova Antologia Militare* (NAM), Issue n. 15, IV (June 2023), pp. 83-142. Important studies on these topics continue to demonstrate the enriching perspectives they can offer, such as the recent book by Oleg Rusakovskiy, which examines the proliferation of translations of European military treatises in the 17th century, prior to the reforms of Peter I and the emergence of a Russian theoretical discourse on warfare, marked by the production of original treatises on the subject: Oleg Rusakovskiy, *European Military Books and Intellectual Cultures of War in 17th-Century Russia. From Translation to Adaptation*, Leiden, Brill 2025.

chosen for such enterprises [stealthy entrances] and betrayals.»³⁷ He thus positioned himself within the broader discourse that framed the night as a time of danger. Shortly after, however, Ascanio Centorio degli Ortensi offered a broader perspective, acknowledging the night not only as a source of peril but also as an opportunity for commanders to overcome tactical deadlocks. Moreover, he emphasized the night as a crucial time for essential military operations, such as positioning artillery and carrying out fortification work³⁸. The author also highlighted the night as a crucial time for essential military operations, such as positioning artillery and carrying out fortification work. More generally, he frequently used the phrase «by day and by night» (or variations of it) to emphasize how many military activities—or at least their preparation—often did not cease with the arrival of evening. On this last point, it is also interesting to note a clear alignment with military treatises produced in other languages during the same period³⁹. Bernardino Rocca, in his 1566 treatise dedicated to these themes, refers to contemporary condottieri and presents a casuistic of situations in which they might find themselves engaged in combat. In one of the chapters, he briefly illustrates the strategic possibilities offered by the night as one of the elements to keep in mind for successful operations, as it is a moment when soldiers are more vulnerable⁴⁰.

³⁷ Lauro Gorgieri, *Trattato della guerra, del soldato, del castellano, et come ha da essere uno general di esercito* di M. Lauro Gorgieri da S. Agnolo in Vado, in Pesaro, per Bartolomeo Cesano 1555, p. 30.

^{38 «[...]} quel luogo, dove egli conoscerà essere più suo avvantaggio, et di notte ordinarvi le sue trincee, con i suoi gabbioni per difensione si dell'artiglieria, come di coloro, che l'essercitano, con quegli strepiti di tamburri, et d'arme, che si suole, insino che saran fatte le trincee, piantati i gabbioni, et acconcie le artiglierie al suo ordine». Ascanio Centorio degli Ortensi, *Il secondo discorso di guerra*, di M. Ascanio Centorio. Al S. Duca di Savoia, in Vinegia appresso Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari 1557, p. 44.

³⁹ For example, Philipp Eberhard, in his treatise, continuously emphasized the attention that always had to be present in this military field: « [...] l'armée s'y puisse mettre en ordre, tant à pied que de cheval, quand elle s'y assemble aux alarmes de nuict, ou de jour »; or « Et aussi doibt regarder que ce soit lieu avantaigeux, pour combattre les ennemis, s'il les venoient assaillir de nuict ou de jour ». Philipp EBERHARD, *Instruction de toutes manierres de guerroyer, tant par terre que par mar, e des choses y servantes*: Redigée par escript, par Mes. Philippes duc de Cleves, c. de la Marche e s. de Ravestain, à Paris, chez Guillaume Morel imprimeur du Roy 1558, pp. 21, 33.

^{40 «}Pertanto Pandolfo si deliberò in ogni modo di mettersi in aventura se potesse levargli d'improviso uno de i detti luoghi presidiati, e fatta una buona scielta de soldati [...] si apprestò una notte ad uno di quei presidi, e volse andar di notte perche la notte alle volte è più comoda a simili effetti che'l giorno, e la notte fa per costume gli huomini fedeli, assai

Regarding stratagems and their relationship with the night, authors, each in their own way, claimed a rhetorical tradition to which they belonged. In presenting and legitimizing these tactics, they primarily drew from a classical repertoire⁴¹. That same year of Rocca, Aurelio Cicuta wrote about the captains of antiquity: «[...] having fought during the day and withdrawn from the battlefield in the evening [with heavy losses], during the night they secretly buried their dead to show the enemy, the following morning, that their own losses were minimal while those of the enemy were great, thus disorienting them with this tactic.»⁴² There were also technical issues concerning night combat, a problem addressed by Girolamo Cattaneo in his treatise on artillery. He dedicated two paragraphs to the materials needed for the fabrication of explosive shells capable of illuminating visual areas⁴³. For this very reason, as previously mentioned, Domenico Mora identified the night as the ideal time for positioning artillery and carrying out nighttime construction work⁴⁴.

più licentiosi del giorno [...]». Bernardino Rocca, *Imprese, stratagemi, et errori militari* di M. Bernardin Rocca piacentino, detto il Gamberello, divise in tre libri, in Venegia appresso Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari 1566, p. 412.

⁴¹ On the cultural *milieu*, particularly in the Italian context see: Frédérique Verrier, *Les armes de Minerve : l'humanisme militaire dans l'Italie du XVI siècle*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne 1997. See also, regarding why military authors employed ancient examples and their objectives in doing so: Luca Iori, «Gualdo Priorato e la storia militare antica. Sul Guerriero prudente e politico (1640)», in Alessandro Metlica, Enrico Zucchi (acd), *La res publica di Galeazzo Gualdo Priorato (1606-1678). Storiografia, notizie, letteratura*, Venezia, Edizioni Ca' Foscari 2022, pp. 187-225; Luna Nájera, «The Deployment of the Classics in Early Modern Spanish Military Manuals», *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Fall 2015), pp. 607-627.

⁴² Aurelio Cicuta, *Della disciplina militare del capitano Alfonso Adriano*, libri III, In Venetia, Appresso Lodovico Avanzo 1566, p. 436.

^{43 «}A far palle di fuoco da tirar di notte fuora d'una fortezza, per vedere i nemici, che fusser venuti sotto quella, a fare qualche danno», Girolamo Cattaneo, *Avertimenti et essamini intorno a quelle cose che richiede a un bombardiero, così circa all'Artegliaria, come anco a fuochi arteficiati*, di Girolamo Cataneo novarese, in Brescia appresso Thomaso Bozzola 1567, pp. 28-29.

^{44 «}Hor nel condurre l'artiglieria sicura sotto le muraglie fa mestiere di servar questa regola, cercherete di condurlavi di ntote per mio parere, accioche i nemici non vi possano impedire il vostro disegno, percioche non vedendo essi quello, che fate, e perciò sforzati di tirare a bersaglio, malagevolmente nuocere vi potranno». Domenico Mora, *Tre quesiti in dialogo sopra il fare batterie, fortificare una città, et ordinare quadrate, con una disputa di precedenza tra l'arme e le lettere*, di Domenico Mora Bolognese, in Venetia, per Giovanni Varisco e compagni 1567, p. 15. The author insisted on this point many times, particularly in a subsequent treatise from later years on the military profession, which we will revisit

On the other hand, there was also the opposite problem: striking the enemy at night while they were working on siege positions and setting up their batteries. Girolamo Ruscelli outlined several methods for firing at night to disrupt these operations, as well as general techniques for keeping external areas illuminated during nighttime engagements⁴⁵. However, there were also opposing views, such as that of Giovanni Francesco Fiammelli, who agreed on the necessity of conducting nighttime trenching and similar operations but was strongly against night firing, considering it costly in terms of resources and ineffective⁴⁶. Moreover, the author was also opposed to using the night—contrary to the common belief of the time—to break camp and retreat when near the enemy, as it was fundamentally risky due to the chaos it could cause⁴⁷. As noted by Alessandro Capobianco a few years later, however, despite the limited effectiveness of night firing, its psychological impact was significant, especially on a besieged stronghold. By interrupting moments of rest, it contributed to lowering the morale of the garrison⁴⁸.

later: ID, *Il soldato* di M. Domenico Moro, bolognese, in Venetia appresso Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari 1570, p. 244.

⁴⁵ See the paragraphs: Il modo che si ha da tenere quando havessi il pezzo sul luogo, e che allo scuro volessi tirare; Il modo di tirar la notte con l'artiglieria e A far torce, che ardano al vento, e acqua, per tempo di notte, per veder fuor d'una muraglia in qualche fortuna, e da condur gente di notte per luoghi sterili. Girolamo Ruscelli, Dell'ordinanze e battaglie di Cesare d'Evoli signor napolitano, Per gli Heredi d'Antonio Blado Stampatori Camerali, 1572, pp. 20, 23 e 33.

^{46 «}Avvertistca di più, che le batterie della notte poco vagliono per la guerra, e assai costano, e rare volte vengono bene giuste, benche si aggiustino i pezzi il giorno per la notte, e queste non sono buone, se non per tenere à freno il nimico, accioche non esca fuori à levare la breccia, e quelli commodi, che fanno per quelli di fuori, però non loderei usare queste, se non di quando in quando, per le cause dette [...]». Giovanni Francesco Fiammelli, *Dell'ordinanze e battaglie... cit.*, 1583, p. 137.

^{47 «}E pare che la più parte di coloro, che hanno scritto dell'arte della guerra convengano in questo, che quando s'ha da diloggiare un'esercito si faccia di notte, perche il nimico non possa dandoli alla coda, ò altrimenti assalendolo, impedirlo, ò darli impaccio. Ma io giudicherei, che ci andassero alcune considerazioni [...]. Insomma a me pare, ch'l benefizio della notte apporti poco giovamento, e però se non v'è qualche necessità, che astringa à fare altramente, non mi pare da marciare innanzi la levata del sole, e si riponga di giorno [...]». *Ivi*, pp. 146-147.

^{48 «}Quesito LXII. *Del tirare con l'Artiglieria nel tempo della notte*. Il quesito era necessario, ne si doveva in nessun modo tralasciare, che il tirare nella notte, sia di grandissimo frutto, per danneggiare quelli di dentro, perché quando si penseranno di riposare, per la faticosa giornata da continui assalti, se gli rinovano nel tempo della notte nuovi travagli, e impedimenti, per dover rifar i danni e le ruine ricevute nel haversi a coprire». Alessandro Capobianco, *Corona e palma militare di arteglieria*, dallo strenuo Capitano Alessandro Capo-

The darkness that came with the night was, therefore, an element that could be used in multiple ways, by both the besiegers and the besieged. Gabriele Busca, describing in his treatise the operations linked to siege warfare, examined the night both from the besieger's and the defender's point of view. In the first part, regarding the attacker, he writes that during the preliminary phases, when it is necessary to gather all the information about the fortress and its defenses, these operations are best conducted at night, when darkness offers more cover. In any case, it is better to draw the enemy's gaze in a different direction while acting⁴⁹. On the other hand, defenders had to be very careful at night (especially with regard to sounds)⁵⁰, but they too could make use of it—for example, by organizing a sortie and conducting it at night (with preparations and measurements taken during the day) in order to achieve greater success, as «massimamente perche la battaglia è più tremenda la notte, che il giorno»⁵¹. At the same time, this moment could be used to send messengers out and try to bring resources in. In presenting the advantages of this type of operation, the author was also among the first military writers in the Italian language to use the term «incamiciata» (Encamisada) in his text⁵². Another perspective, less frequently considered, focused on the type of terrain best suited for nighttime operations, a topic touched upon by François de La Noue in his work while discussing military actions during the Wars of

Bianco Vicentino delli Bombardieri della città di Crema, in Venetia, appresso Gio. Antonio Rampazetto 1593, p. 41.

^{49 «}troppo pericoloso essendo l'avicinarsi di giorno alle fosse et riconoscerle: ma la notte con la sua oscurità da quei pericoli, che di giorno soprastanno, ci rende sicuri. Per la cui sicurezza maggiore, diasi fintamente all'arme, tennendo per questa via occupati i nemici». Gabriele Busca, *Della espugnatione et difesa delle fortezze*, di Gabriello Busca milanese, in Turino nella stamperia dell'herede di Nicolò Bevilacqua 1585, p. 64. For the same reason, a few pages later, he mentions that it's better when the moon isn't too bright for these operations: «et sarebbe bene, che ciò si facesse senza lume di luna; perche quanto più sarà l'aria oscura, tanto meglio sia», p. 66.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 213.

^{51 «}e chi di notte si trova assalito, più difficilmente si difende, che il giorno non fa; perche viene colto all'improvviso. Adunque nel tempo che da una parte si combatte, dall'altra possono uscire genti, e ricevere soccorsi, mandare avisi, e riceverne parimente. Debbesi però havere l'occhio à gli inganni, che'l nimico potrebbe apparecchiare». *Ivi*, p. 238.

^{52 «}Le uscite di notte, che si dicono incamiciate, nelle quali si prende alcun segno insolito (ma bene apparente per riconoscere gli amici da nimici nell'oscurità della notte) se con avedimento, e consiglio saranno bene esseguite, faranno riportare nobilissime vittorie». *Ivi*, p. 239.

Religion in Gascony⁵³. This type of consideration reflected a concrete attention to the actual practice of these tactics. Bernardino de Mendoza also emphasized the relationship between terrain and night in several passages, also titling a paragraph «Preventions for fighting at night» (*Prevenciones para combater de noche*). When besieging a stronghold, he advised considering the entire surrounding area, particularly the presence of nearby cities and their potential hostility, using the cover of night to seize control of all connecting roads. He also warned of the risks in flat regions where camps were set up, recommending doubling the number of guards and patrols, especially mounted sentinels, outside the camp in such cases⁵⁴.

As mentioned, nighttime also altered the qualities of time and soldiers, making events unfold differently than they would during the day. This dual nature—both danger and opportunity—was already recognized and utilized by military men and theorists of the time. Giorgio Basta, in his treatise published during his lifetime in 1606, focused on several aspects of the role of night in warfare⁵⁵. Reflecting on marches, he stated that darkness doubled the complications not only for practical reasons but also because it made soldiers more susceptible to fear⁵⁶.

^{53 «} Ils souffrirent beaucoup, jusques à ce qu'ils fussent en la Gascogne, où ils se renforcerent d'harquebusiers, dont ils autoent très grand besoin : mesmement pour garantir la cavallerie des surprises de nuict, qui sont fort communes en ces quartiers-là, pour la voisinance des villes e Chasteaux ». François de La Noue, *Discours politiques et militaires du seigneur de La Noue*, à Basle, De l'Imprimerie de François Forest 1587, p. 833.

^{54 «}Lo primero que Vestra Alteza ha de mandar platicar, es, si ha de hazer uno dos alojamientos, antes del venir a poner descubiertamente el sitio, dando a entender si ay villas al contorno con algunas demonstraciones del quererse sitiar, y no la que se pretende, para hallarla más desapercebida: para esto [...] de noche con gran diligencia se envían tropas de soldados a tomar los puestos y pasos, por donde podrá venir gente a meterse en la tierra»; «Estando con mucha sospecha de enemigos, si la tierra es flaca, ha de hacer de noche casi toda la gente guardia, durmiendo en las murallas: principalmente si se temen de escalada, o trato: y aviendo cavalleria en ella de guarnición, se les ordena ronden a caballo de noche [...]». Bernardino de Mendoza, *Theorica y practica de guerra*, En Anveres, en la Emprenta Plantiniana, pp. 89-90, 132.

⁵⁵ On this subject, he also reflects in the posthumous treatise on Cavalry, where he specifically focused on the problems regarding mounted warfare. In this case as well, the link with the night, particularly night marches and nocturnal assaults, is fundamental: Giorgio Basta, *Il governo della cavalleria leggiera*, in Venetia appresso Bernardo Gionti, Gio Battista Ciotti e compagni, 1612, pp. 70, 92 and following.

^{56 «}La notte poi è particolarmente negli Eserciti non molto ben ordinati, e in viaggio di qualche lunghezza raddoppia le difficoltà, dando per se sola terrore, con far apparire i perico-

This anxiety had a significant impact on nighttime operations, such as those carried out by sappers previously mentioned, and consequently on the challenge of ensuring their protection⁵⁷.

That same year, Bartolomeo Pellicciari republished a text with significant additions, in which he also extensively addressed nighttime operations (dedicating sections, for example, to incamiciate and escalades). He suggested specific ways to strategically exploit the fears associated with the night. One such tactic involved staging false nighttime cavalry attacks on an enemy stronghold for several consecutive nights, forcing the defenders to remain constantly on alert. In doing so, Pellicciari sacrificed the element of surprise—one of the key advantages of night combat—in order to desensitize the enemy's defensive system, making it less responsive to an actual threat, which would then be unleashed at the decisive moment⁵⁸. On the other hand, for this very reason, the role of the sentinel was crucial, especially at night. Lelio Brancaccio specifically emphasized its fundamental function: the ability to distinguish, amid the sounds of the night, between the enemy's deceptive maneuvers and actual attacks⁵⁹. Once an alarm was raised in a camp, an emergency defensive mechanism was set in motion. It is important to note that guards and sentinels spent the majority of their time inactive, as in most cases, nothing happened during their watch (Fig. 7). As a result, the

li assai maggiori, e togliendo à soldati la vergogna del fuggire». ID, *Il maestro di campo generale* di Giorgio Basta conte d'Hust, in Venetia, Appresso Gio Battista Ciotti senese all'Aurora 1606, p. 60.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 107.

^{58 «}Sopratutte l'altre cose è di sommo bisogno, acciò la cosa riesca più felicemente, di fare che d'otto, overo di dieci giorni, prima, che s'inviy a tal impresa, in ogni notte cavalleria vadda a dar'allarme al campo nemico, e dipoi subitamente si ritiri, per tenerlo in continuo travaglio, e acciò all'hora poi non si metta in arme, quando sarà assalito da dovero; imperoche il consueto dell'armi che gli saranno state date nel passato, e non havendo egli mai veduta cosa di momento, lo farà diventare negligente, e con tal arte si faciliterà l'impresa». Bartolomeo Pellicciari, *Avvertimenti in fattioni di guerra*, ristampati in Modena per Gio. Maria Verdi, 1606 (Ia ed. 1600), p. 289. On the *encamisada* see pp. 113, 116.

^{59 «}E perché la maggior' diligenza si dee far' di notte, per la oscurità della quale, non si può discernere talor' cosa alcuna, è però necessario, che si serva dell'orecchia, tenendola attenta ad ogni minimo strepito, con haver' subito l'arme alla mano, osservando bene quel', che è; ed intendendo romor' certo di molta gente armata, può gridare all'erta; e quando discerna chiaramente i nemici, deve allor' gridar' all'arme, che se per ogni minimo strepito senza discernere che cosa sia, ò da quel che venga cagionato, gridasse arme, darebbe inditio di molta viltà». Lelio Brancaccio, *I carichi militari* di Fra' Lelio Brancaccio, in Anversa, Appresso Ioachimo Trognesio 1610, p. 11.



Fig. 7. Carel Fabritius (d. 1656), *The Sentinel* (1654), after restauration (2005). Staatliches Museum Schwerin. Wikimedia Commons.

prescribed state of constant alert was largely theoretical, especially when danger was perceived as distant (even if it was not necessarily so). For this reason, the decision to raise the alarm was a significant one and could not be made without a degree of certainty. Given the need for rapid mobilization, there was always the risk of descending into chaos. As Lodovico Melzi observed, cavalry was at its greatest risk precisely in these moments, making it particularly vulnerable during such phases⁶⁰.

The last author considered here is Flaminio della Croce, probably the most rhetorically elaborate. One aspect he emphasized more than other military writers was the psychological impact of nighttime on soldiers. According to della Croce, assaults were best carried out during the day rather than at night because, in daylight, soldiers were more inclined to act valorously, or at least to follow orders properly, since their actions could be observed by their comrades and officers. At night, not only was this impossible, but it could actually encourage the opposite behavior⁶¹. Even in a later work dedicated to cavalry, della Croce returned to the soldier's perspective with greater focus:

«Finally, let everyone consider and place themselves in the mind of a soldier standing alone in the dark at night, out in the open countryside, even if there were no suspicion of enemies. The mere darkness of the night is itself a source of horror and fear, something unnatural. And what happens when he hears people approaching? His heart will pound, and his thoughts will race, no matter how brave he may be, finding himself alone. It is more than true that a lone man is

^{60 «[...]} poiche non hà dubbio, che la Cavalleria in luogo niuno corre maggior pericolo, che quando si truova nell'alloggiamento, non potendo il soldato mettersi in punto, senz'haver chi gli aiuti ad armarsi, nel che, come anche nel metter' in ordine il cavallo, si richiede qualche spatio di tempo, e toccandosi arme di notte, suole d'ordinario nascer gran confusione; onde l'esperienza molte volte hà mostrato, che poco numero di gente può far grandissimo danno in un Quartiero, colto all'improvviso». Lodovico Melzo, Regole militari del Cavalier Melzo sopra il governo e servitio della cavalleria, in Anversa appresso Gioachimo tipografo 1611, p. 76.

^{61 «}Stando che alcune cose sono nella guerra, le quali meglio è metterle ad effetto di giorno, che di notte, in particolare il dare li assalti, con quelle preparationi che perciò si conviene, perche quelle imprese, che s'intraprendono di giorno, sforzano le persone valorose, e che bramano per quella via d'esser avanzati, e pervenire à loro dissegni, à maggiormente adoprarsi, essendo alla veduta d'ogni uno, e in particolare del Capo: Gli altri di manco cuore, e stima, non ardiranno far mancamento alcuno, per non esser co'l vituperio anco castigati». Flaminio DELLA CROCE, *Theatro militare* del capitano Flaminio della Croce, in Anversa, appresso Henrico Aertssio 1617, p. 289.

timid—especially at night—while in the company of others, he is courageous»⁶².

Furthermore, even though we will not explore its extensive treatment here since it lies beyond our selected timespan, it is worth noting that this was also a point explicitly emphasized by Raimondo Montecuccoli in his writings, published posthumously. Montecuccoli, in fact, observed: «Cominciar la zuffa di notte o verso sera, s'egli si dee combattere con pochi contra molti o si dee attaccar un campo, imperciò che la notte dà luogo alle finte ed alle insidie; ella nel resto ricopre indifferentemente sotto al suo manto le belle e le cattive azioni, onde rimane la virtù senza lo stimolo della cupidigia, dell'onore, e del timore dell'ignominia, e del gastigo»⁶³. He returned to this topic in several sections, and the subject has been further enriched by the complex editorial history of his works. Notably, Ugo Foscolo commented on this point in his editions of 1807-8, adding a marginal note published also later in the 1852 edition by Giuseppe Grassi: «The reason behind this precept "At night, the first troops must be ordered to charge head-on at anything they encounter" is rooted in human nature. When two enemy groups unexpectedly meet at night, the one less terrified and surprised will rout and scatter the other»⁶⁴.

As already mentioned, the list of treatises analyzed could be extended. For the moment, this first survey aims to determine and underline the presence of the problem of warfare at night when the technicization of military treatises was fully established and the humanistic and rhetorical aspects were relegated to a different tradition of texts⁶⁵. Reflecting on things to keep in consideration, it's important to

⁶² ID, L'essercitio della cavalleria et d'altre materie del capitano Flaminio della Croce, in Anversa, appresso Henrico Aertsio, 1625, p. 62

⁶³ Raimondo Montecuccoli, «Della Guerra col turco in Ungheria (Aforismi)», in Raimondo Luraghi (Acd), *Le Opere di Raimondo Montecuccoli*, Vol. II, Roma, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito 1988, p. 371

⁶⁴ Note 4 continues: «Presso gli antichi, e segnatamente in Omero e ne' tragici greci, la prima lode militare spettava a quelli che combatteano di notte e in agguato. L'uomo è men coraggioso quanto meno può misurare i pericoli: l'ignoranza delle cose ci fa diffidenti; quindi la perplessità, i terrori panici e le superstizioni». Giuseppe Grassi (acd), *Opere di Raimondo Montecuccoli, annotate da Ugo Foscolo e corrette, accresciute ed illustrate da Giuseppe Grassi*, Torino, Tipografia Economica 1852, pp. 163-164.

⁶⁵ As Pretalli explained, focusing in particular on the tradition of Renaissance military dialogue that bridged humanistic culture and technical expertise, while already being written with utilitarian and military purposes, he also highlighted the emergence of technical military treatises, which became established by the late 16th century. Michel Pretalli, *Du*

Fig. 8. Giovanni Battista Crespi (1573-1632), Batalla ocurrida en la noche del 21 de junio de 1615: salida a las trincheras de las tropas saboyanas, Museo del Greco, Ministerio de la Cultura, Gobierno de España.



note that starting in the 17th century, but especially after the middle of the century, military treatises became increasingly multilingual, therefore a more complete survey would need to include mainly French, German, English, and Spanish, at least—but not only. Furthermore, also numerically, the treatises concerning mili-

champ de bataille à la bibliothèque : Le dialogue militaire italien au XVIe siècle, Paris, Classiques Garnier 2017, p. 26.



tary subjects tended to multiplicate in numbers beside length, so a much broader approach is needed.

3. Night Operations in the First War of Monferrato (1613-1618)

Finally, in this third and last part of the research, I would like to briefly focus on the concrete practice of warfare at night, identifying a specific context of confrontation and the occasions in which the night was used to conduct op-

erations and why. At this point, it is also worth mentioning that while the study of memoirs mentioned earlier could be useful for analyzing perception and individual experiences, and has been used in important studies⁶⁶, their use also poses several problems. Indeed, the problem with utilizing the descriptions furnished by such an explicit source preliminarily necessitates a reflection on the author's objective in narrating the events, as the testimony of the actions is rarely the primary purpose of this literary genre.⁶⁷ For example, the 1536 operation narrated by Montluc, describing the destruction of the mills of Arles, essential for the logistics of the invading imperial army, shows how a raid was conducted at night. However, the episode must be connected to Montluc's purpose in writing: to emphasize his military prowess (at the end of his career, which also necessitates caution due to the temporal distance between the event and its narration), primarily to defend his own name. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in his *reflection on the enterprise*, the author emphasized that the operation was possible« à cause de l'obscurité de la nuit »⁶⁸.

Further and critical analysis of the use of these sources for studying nocturnal military operations is certainly needed and will likely open new paths of research. Here, I intend to concentrate on observing practices in action, as described by their authors or external observers, to determine whether there was a correspondence with the theories outlined in the military treatises discussed above.

The War of Monferrato, not often studied as it is overshadowed by the subsequent explosion of the Thirty Years' War, was a major conflict within the Italian

⁶⁶ As in the fundamental study by Harari, where memoirs are employed not only to grasp the experience of soldiers but also to analyze their subjectivity, Yuval N. Harari, *Renaissance military memoirs. War, history, and identity, 1450-1600*, Rochester, Boydell Press 2004. Or in the work of Sherer, where these sources are further utilized to examine the foundations of motivation and combat effectiveness, Idan Sherer, "When War Comes They Want to Flee": Motivation and Combat Effectiveness in the Spanish Infantry During the Italian Wars», The Sixteenth Century Journal, Vol. 48, No. 2 (Summer 2017), pp. 385-411.

⁶⁷ Memoirs are a rich literary genre, employed in various contexts but generally requiring similar preliminary analyses. For a collective reflection, see: Guillaume Pinet, Lorenzo Paoli, Jean Beuvier (dir.), « Imprimer en nostre souvenance »: enjeux et pratiques de la mémoire et de l'oubli à la Renaissance, Paris, Classiques Garnier 2023.

⁶⁸ Blaise de Montluc, *Commentaires*, Tome I, *La Formation d'un capitaine (1521-1543)*, Texte de l'édition de 1592 (Millanges), Clermont-Ferrand, Editions Paleo 2007, p. 117. On the conduct of this operation, see also the analysis of it as a 'special operation' characteristic of the age of chivalry: Yuval N. Harari, *Special Operations in the Age of Chivalry, 1100-1550*, Suffolk, Boydell et Brewer 2007, pp. 163-183.

Peninsula. It was highly significant even in the broader European context, as it represented, in particular, a stage of the struggle between France and the Spanish Empire⁶⁹. The involvement of professional military contingents, units that formed the backbone of all major armies of the time, allows us to use this war as a case study to analyze widespread military practices across the European continent. In particular, I'll focus here on the last phase of the war in the summer of 1617, through the personal letters of the Duke of Savoy and his son, both commanding the operations conducted by the Savoyard army, as well as the correspondence of an agent of the Republic of Genoa, who was on a secret mission specifically to gather intelligence on the war from direct participants or couriers in contact with the warring factions. Furthermore, one of the night actions of this war was painted, resulting in one of the few visual representations of night fighting operations, specifically trench combat, from this period: a very small but unique image (See Fig. 8). In particular, as is visible, the painter accentuated the effects of explosions and firelight, which were probably not as physically overwhelming as depicted, but certainly psychologically impactful, as the senses tend to be more acute at night and lights therefore more striking. In major encounters, this heightened sensory intensity amplified the confusion and chaos of combat dynamics, also accelerating the attrition rate.

As Carlo Emanuele was a dynamic and unpredictable military leader⁷⁰, his

⁶⁹ On this war and why it has not been historiographically considered for a long time, see: Pierpaolo Merlin, Frédéric Ieva (acd), *Monferrato 1613. La vigilia di una crisi europea*, Roma, Viella 2016; Bernardo J. García García, Davide Maffi (acd), *El Piamonte en guerra (1613-1659): La frontera olvidada*, Madrid, Fundación Carlos de Amberes 2020. In particular, Giovanni Cerino Badone, in his study on the Italian section of the Spanish Road, grasped the strategic importance of this war within the broader context of larger military strategy: Giovanni Cerino Badone, *Gli incroci pericolosi: Storia e Archeologia della Strada di Fiandra in Italia e Savoia. 1561-1659*, Oxford, BAR Publishing 2018. P. 145. See also Pierpaolo Merlin, *La croce e il giglio. Il ducato di Savoia e la Francia tra XVI e XVII secolo*, Roma, Carocci 2018, pp. 96-110.

⁷⁰ Pierpaolo Merlin, *Tra guerre e tornei. La corte sabauda nell'età di Carlo Emanuele I*, Torino, SEI 1991. A biography of the Duke as a military leader is still lacking, one that specifically analyzes his leadership, his conduct in war, and his role in organizing military operations. So what is missing is a study of the elements that composed his mask of command: «a mask that he must make for himself, but a mask made in such form as will mark him to men of his time and place as the leader they want and need». John Keegan, *The mask of command*, New York, Viking 1987, p. 11. This article aims to provide some initial elements in that direction. For an overview of Savoyard military organization during the early modern period, see Paola Bianchi, «La riorganizzazione militare del Ducato di

military style, the result of many years of war against different adversaries, privileged the ability to maintain a tactical advantage in local situations, even when generally at a numerical disadvantage. The use of night to exploit the advantage of darkness was therefore one of his characteristic ways of action. On the 8th of February 1617, for example, the Duke wrote to his son informing him of the operational development and the conquest of the village of San Damiano, taken through a night attack at the breach of the walls⁷¹.

In general, night actions were regularly used by the Duke in partisan warfare, in order to collect contributions and to keep the enemy continuously on alert. As reported by the Genoese commissar Sebastiano Saoli from Novi, informing the government about the recent and nearby developments of the war, he wrote that the previous night, from the garrison of Vercelli, the Savoyard troops entered Spanish territory and set fire to an open village two miles from Fort Saint Odoardo. On their return, the Spanish were able to recover the booty, but evidently not to repair the damage⁷².

The siege of Savoyard city of Vercelli perpetrated by the Spanish was a key moment in the final phases of the War of Monferrato (1617). As Vercelli was a key city of the Duchy, Carlo Emanuele had important reasons to rescue it. In the letters the Duke wrote to his son Vittorio, he emphasized the significance of darkness in military operations. On May 27, responding to Vittorio Amedeo's proposal to engage the besieging army in open battle, Carlo Emanuele advised against committing all their forces to a pitched encounter. Instead, he suggested organizing a special detachment of 3,000 selected infantry and as many cavalrymen as possible, with the aim of opening a breach in the enemy's defenses and entering the city with food and ammunition. Then gathering all togheter and organizing

Savoia e i rapporti del Piemonte con la Francia e la Spagna. Da Emanuel Filiberto a Carlo Emanuele II», in Enrique García Hernán, Davide Maffi (éd.), *Guerra y Sociedad en la Monarquia Hispanica. Politica, Estrategia y Cultura en la Europa Moderna. 1500-1700*, Madrid, CSIC 2006, pp. 189-216.

^{71 «}à notte siamo entrati in questo luoco dopò haverlo battuto cinque giorni continui; et seben si sono resi à discretione è stato però in tempo che i nostri si battevano alla breccia con le piche, et con le spade». ASTo, *Materie politiche per rapporto all'interno* (MPRI), *Lettere diverse Real Casa* (LDRC), Lettere Duchi e Sovrani della dinastia dei Savoia, Mazzo 28, lettera a Vittorio Amedeo, 8 febbraio 1617.

⁷² Archivio di Stato Genova (ASGe), *Guerra e Marina* 1137, Militarium Circa Custodiiam Status 1615-1617, lettera da Novi, 4 dicembre 1616.

a sortie the following night, coordinating with the remaining troops outside, in order to catch the sieging force disoriented by the events⁷³. For the Duke, this approach represented the most effective way to relieve the city, disrupting the besieging forces while ensuring the delivery of supplies. He therefore proposed a similar operation again on the fifth of July⁷⁴. In response to these instructions, Vittorio Amedeo argued that carrying out the operation in a single night would be impossible, as the enemy would likely detect their army en route and destroy it, thus risking the loss of the most capable segment of the Piedmontese forces. One of his officers proposed an alternative, which Vittorio endorsed: to use the night to set up an ambush along the road, then draw the enemy out by launching an attack in a different direction (San Germano). This plan aimed to relieve pressure on the besieged forces and strike the enemy during the day as they moved to respond.⁷⁵

Different stratagems were also employed in carrying out such operations. On June 11, for example, the Duke of Savoy sent 400–500 cavalrymen at night, each carrying sacks of gunpowder on horseback. However, due to weather-damaged roads, the contingent was slowed down during the nighttime operation and was consequently discovered by the Spanish troops surrounding the city. A battle en-

^{73 «[...]} questo bisognerebbe farlo la notte seguente, perche entrando questa il soccorso sud. Come si spera, crederanno che noi habbiamo fatto tutto quello che havevamo in pensiero, e se ne staranno più tralasciati». Archivio di Stato Torino (ASTo) MPRI, LDRC, Lettere Duchi e Sovrani, Mazzo 28, lettera a Vittorio Amedeo, 27 maggio 1617. In another letter dated 4 June, the Duke wrote that he was aware of the failure of the attempt to relieve the city and that, after taking action against the soldiers who had disobeyed orders, new efforts were needed for another attempt: «Però quanto all'effetto del nostro dissegno, io lodo sommamente che in tutti i modi si tenti questa notte come ci scrivete, perché domani passano i sei giorni che sapete, et questo ve l'incarico quanto posso, poiche ne vedete l'importanza».

⁷⁴ Ivi, lettera a Vittorio Amedeo, 5 luglio 1617.

^{75 «}Subito avuto la di VA di hieri sera, o fatto chiamar questi s.ri per saper da loro quello li parra circa a lo scritto e ordinatomi di VA. [...] non trovando buono di andar ad atacarli con 3mila fanti in quartiero essendo impossibile andar di qua in una notte a darli sopra in quartiero [...]; e perdendo la gente il campo di VA sarà perso tanto per il mancamento delli huomini che capi, e farci più perdita che di una bataglia. Queste ragioni e molti atterranno a detto Artigoti, Maseres, Forte, Santena, e Lezi: solo il S. Gislieri è di diferente opinione e vorrà far questo socorso furtivo. E più tosto imboscarsi in giorno e la notte seguente far l'effetto et il resto della gente con canoni andar verso San Germano per divertirli fermandosi un miglio lontano di qua». ASTo, *MPRI*, *LDRC*, Lettere Duchi e Sovrani, Mazzo 47, lettera a Carlo Emanuele, 6 luglio 1617.

sued, resulting in 200 cavalrymen being captured while the rest were forced to retreat. The stratagem to smuggle in ammunition not only failed but also led to heavy losses among the cavalry, as some of the gunpowder sacks reportedly exploded during the clashes, according to Poggi. Furthermore, the failed attempt alerted the Spanish governor, Don Pietro, to the fact that Vercelli was running low on ammunition. This crucial intelligence prompted him to slow down the siege operations, forcing the defenders to deplete their remaining resources completely⁷⁶.

As previously mentioned, nighttime could also be used by defenders to launch sorties against the Spanish trenches, as reported by Poggi on July 8. However, the attack had little effect, apart from causing some casualties on both sides. The following night, the Spanish forces responded with an assault on a defensive position of the fortress. Initially, they managed to seize it, but they were unable to hold their ground, according to the document, because the soldiers had not brought *zappe et batili*, the essential tools needed to build fortifications and secure their position. During this action, Poggi reported the loss of 2,000 men between the Spanish and Italian troops. In the same letter, there is also mention of another attempt by Carlo Emanuele to resupply the city with gunpowder. This, too, was a nighttime stratagem: two carts escorted by a hundred cuirassiers were sent, disguising themselves as part of a Spanish contingent heading toward the siege camp. However, this attempt was also discovered, forcing them to flee⁷⁷.

Another case is found in a letter reporting Don Pietro's evening attempt to assault one of the Duke's fortifications (a *mezzaluna*) on July 16. The initial attack was repelled, and when the Spanish governor considered pressing forward with reinforcements, his advisors strongly discouraged it, judging it unwise to attempt another assault in the dark⁷⁸. This episode suggests that large-scale nighttime assaults and battles, especially when lacking the element of surprise, were not an obvious choice but rather a decision that required careful consideration.

⁷⁶ ASGe, Archivio Segreto 1982 (1616-1618), lettera di Vincenzo Poggi, 11 giugno 1617.

⁷⁷ Ivi, lettera di Vincenzo Poggi, 8 luglio 1617.

⁷⁸ Ivi, Lettera del 16 luglio 1617.

4. First Light: Preliminary Conclusions

Although further research is certainly needed, especially concerning the empirical aspects of night warfare, this brief examination of an episode from the War of Monferrato appears to confirm several of the possibilities and risks previously outlined. Above all, this overview suggests that the military night—like other aspects of collective life in the early modern period—was governed by specific social, legal, and cultural norms that set it apart from daytime. However, war remained a pervasive and all-encompassing experience, one that extended into the night and even turned its inherent challenges, such as darkness, into tactical advantages for military operations. As we've seen, Sven Petersen rightly acknowledged this ambivalence, though his analysis focused on a single episode and was limited to sieges. A broader temporal perspective remains necessary, as even this article, while expanding the scope, offers only a partial exploration. Ultimately, even in the early modern period, nighttime was an integral part of a soldier's experience. Referring to the framework proposed by Koslofsky, we could argue that warfare had colonized the night long before the 18th century, as it was always an inherent part of military activity, both in Europe and beyond. It must therefore be studied in its specificities, but always within a broader framework that considers both day and night as essential elements of warfare, each serving distinct strategic purposes. What we now need are more specific studies focused on the various chronologies briefly mentioned here, as well as new research into how different cultures across diverse geographic regions approached the night and integrated it into their methods of warfare. As illustrated in the Mughal manuscript produced in 1562, comprising around 1.400 illustrations, Assad ibn Kariba, a supporter of the Prophet Muhammad's uncle, led a significant night attack against an army of unbelievers. Caught by surprise and thrown into confusion, the enemy forces ended up attacking and killing one another (see Fig. 9). This scene allegedly suggests that night combat was also shaped by specific cultural and environmental factors and was also depicted in diverse forms across different cultural traditions.

Further research is therefore needed.



Fig. 9. Basawan (fl.. 1560-1600), *Assad Ibn Kariba Launches a Night Attack on the Camp of Malik Iraj*, Folio from a Hamzanama (The Adventures of Hamza), Metropolitan Museum N-Y. Wikimedia Commons

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As seen through a night-vision device, U.S. Army Sgt. Andrew Burch and an Afghan soldier scan a tree line for militants during Operation Champion Sword, an air assault mission, in Khost province, Afghanistan, Aug. 4, 2009. Burch is assigned to the 25th Infantry Division's 2nd Battalion, 377th Parachute Field Artillery Regiment, 4th Brigade Combat Team. U.S. Army photo by Spc. Matthew Freire, 2009. This image was released by the United States Army with the ID 090804-A-2946F-105 (Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons)



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