



## At Day's Close: Night in Times Past

By A. Roger Ekirch

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**"Remarkable...Ekirch has emptied night's pockets, and laid the contents out before us." ?Arthur Krystal, *The New Yorker***

Bringing light to the shadows of history through a "rich weave of citation and archival evidence" (*Publishers Weekly*), scholar A. Roger Ekirch illuminates the aspects of life most often overlooked by other historians?those that unfold at night. In this "triumph of social history" (*Mail on Sunday*), Ekirch's "enthralling anthropology" (*Harper's*) exposes the nightlife that spawned a distinct culture and a refuge from daily life.

Fear of crime, of fire, and of the supernatural; the importance of moonlight; the increased incidence of sickness and death at night; evening gatherings to spin wool and stories; masqued balls; inns, taverns, and brothels; the strategies of thieves, assassins, and conspirators; the protective uses of incantations, meditations, and prayers; the nature of our predecessors' sleep and dreams?Ekirch reveals all these and more in his "monumental study" (*The Nation*) of sociocultural history, "maintaining throughout an infectious sense of wonder" (*Booklist*).

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## At Day's Close: Night in Times Past By A. Roger Ekirch Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Engrossing, leisurely paced and richly researched, this history finds Ekirch reminding us of how preindustrial Westerners lived during the nocturnal hours, when most were plunged into almost total darkness. By describing how that darkness spelled heightened risk—of stumbles, drowning, fires and other dangers—Ekirch accounts for the traditional association of nighttime with fear and suspicion, illuminating the foundations of popular beliefs in satanic forces and the occult. He also describes how the night literally provided a cloak of darkness for crimes and insurrections, and how fear of the night sometimes led to racist blame and accusation. A professor of history at Virginia Tech, Ekirch ranges across the archives of Europe and early colonial America to paint a portrait of how the forces of law and order operated at night, and he provides fascinating insight into nocturnal labor—of masons, carpenters, bakers, glassmakers and iron smelters, among many others. The hardest nocturnal workers were women, Ekirch writes, doing laundry after a full day's domestic work. Ekirch also evokes benign nighttime activities, such as drinking and alehouse camaraderie; the thrill of aristocratic masquerades; the merrymaking of harvest suppers and dances. A rich weave of citation and archival evidence, Ekirch's narrative is rooted in the material realities of the past, evoking a bygone world of extreme physicality and preindustrial survival stratagems. 8 pages of color and 60 b&w illus. (*June*)

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From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Historian Ekirch re-creates the ambience of the European nocturnal world prior to the advent of artificial lighting in a fresh and thought-provoking cultural inquiry. Drawing on works of literature, letters, diaries, and criminal court documents, and maintaining throughout an infectious sense of wonder, Ekirch ignites the reader's imagination with example-rich descriptions of humankind's "age-old fear of darkness" and belief that the night is the domain of demons, witches, and ghosts. Turning to science to document the fact that we are more prone to illness, accidents, and death at night, Ekirch then lists a plague of former nighttime hazards, including spooked horses, emptied chamber pots, fire, and the dastardly crimes of the time. He compares the rural night with the city night, night as endured by the poor and enjoyed by the wealthy, and discusses sleep habits, romance, storytelling, dreams, and the liberation under the stars of the otherwise oppressed and maligned, from slaves to gays and lesbians. As Ekirch so vividly evokes the old magic of true night, he casts a skeptical eye on our brightly lit, 24/7 life, in which the heavens are obscured and we sit enraptured before computer and TV screens, oblivious to nature. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

“An enthralling anthropology of the shadow realms.” (John Leonard - Harper's)

“Absorbing...fascinating...[Ekirch] has plundered an extraordinary range of cross-cultural sources for his material, and he tells us about everything from witches to firefighting, architecture to domestic violence...[A] monumental study.” (Terry Eagleton - The Nation)

“Engrossing...Ekirch's narrative is rooted in the material realities of the past, evoking a bygone world of extreme physicality and pre-industrial survival stratagems.” (Publishers Weekly)

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#### **Nellie Davis:**

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#### **Lorene Lord:**

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