

# The Remains of the Night: Nocturnalization, Street Lighting, and Urban Life in Eighteenth-Century Antwerp

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## Abstract

Several theories claim that the rhythms of daily life changed dramatically in the late eighteenth century, as a result of the advent of street lighting. New technologies made it possible to work longer hours, enjoy a dash of leisure time, or otherwise stay active during the evening. People thus slowly but surely ‘colonized’ the night. Drawing on new empirical data from the eyewitness accounts of the local criminal court in Antwerp, this article subjects this theory to a thorough investigation. The findings show that there was no real increase in nocturnalization because Antwerpers – even without new street lamps – remained active for a long time anyway. They usually continued working long after sunset or had time for leisure. Sleep was limited to the biological minimum. A deviant rhythm in which people remained active until the wee hours of the morning and only got up well after sunrise was reserved for a small group of people who belonged either to the absolute cream of the crop or to the fringes of society.

*Keywords:* time use, daily rhythms, work hours, leisure time, sleep patterns, nocturnalization

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In the autumn of 1787, the Antwerp burgomasters and aldermen discussed the introduction of public street lighting in the city. Following the latest fashion, a network of *réverbères* and *lanteernen* (street lights) would be installed to dispel the darkness. However, it soon became clear that the annual costs would amount to the staggering sum of several thousand guilders, and the city council was unsure of how to raise the money. The ambitious plan was therefore shelved until further notice.<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth-century Antwerp was not completely swathed in darkness at night, however. Lanterns could be found near inns and shops, stately patrician's houses, the city gates, and other private or public buildings. Moreover, Antwerp bathed in the dim light of the numerous devotional lamps illuminating façade statues of the Virgin Mary and other saints that could be found in every nook and cranny of the city.<sup>2</sup> However, the diffuse light of night-time Antwerp must have been a far cry from the public street lighting that had been installed elsewhere in Europe. From the late seventeenth century onwards, local city councils and royal patrons invested heavily in lanterns and lamps. From London, Paris, and Amsterdam, a flood of *réverbères* spread across Europe. Around the turn of the century public street lighting could also be found in Turin, Copenhagen, Lille, Berlin, Vienna, and myriad other provincial towns. It set a revolutionary process in train, one that has been defined as 'nocturnalization' by the American historian Craig Koslofsky.<sup>3</sup>

During the eighteenth century, the night was increasingly colonized by city-dwellers. Daily rhythms were abruptly unplugged from the solar cycle. The closing times of inns, shops, coffeehouses, billiard rooms, *salons*, theatres, and other venues crept even further into the night. City gates remained open, the curfew abandoned. Late suppers became the norm. Work and leisure continued well into the small hours. Due to street lighting,

1 Van der Straelen, *De Kronijk van Antwerpen*, II, 166.

2 Van de Velde, *De Keizerstraat*, 24.

3 Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*.

the whirligig of urban life barely ever came to a standstill in the late eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Koslofsky's hypothesis certainly fires the imagination. Nocturnalization can be inferred from a large yet diverse body of sources, including magazines, novels, how-to books, diaries, and medical treatises, but the evidence remains largely indirect. For instance, frequent lamentations about nocturnalization appeared in the *Tatler*, the *Spectator*, and other polite magazines. In 1710, Richard Steele wrote: 'We have thus thrown business and pleasure into the hours of rest, and by that means made the natural night but half as long as it should be... Near two thirds of the nation lie fast asleep for several hours in the broad day-light.'<sup>5</sup> It was surely an exaggeration, as Koslofsky also admits, but the question of how much so is moot. Did Steele touch upon a wider social trend? Were eighteenth-century Britons – and other European city slickers – gradually colonizing the night, or was it rather a literary hyperbole, a purposeful slip of the pen?

Koslofsky has some other evidence in store that seems to suggest that nocturnalization was more than an upper-crust whimsey. Numerous rules and regulations show that restrictions on nightwork were gradually abandoned, that the starting hours of concerts, balls, and other events slipped further into the night, and that dinners were served at a later hour. Yet, even with these sources in mind, it remains uncertain if and to what extent these normative sources captured a broader social reality. Was nocturnalization more than a fashion fad of the cream of the crop? Did it radically unhinge the everyday rhythms of society at large in terms of work, leisure, and sleep? Finally, the main correlation between public lighting and nocturnalization remains largely untested. Koslofsky has gathered some compelling evidence on how the *réverbères* and other street lamps fuelled a newly buzzing nightlife in eighteenth-century London, Amsterdam, and Paris, but what about the more provincial towns – such as Antwerp – that either still muddled on under starlight or the barest of artificial enhancements? Did nocturnalization only occur at a later stage there? Were traditional labour, leisure, and sleep patterns more resilient? Was everyday life still more attuned to the solar cycle?

To answer some of these questions, this essay leaves the metropolitan atmosphere of London, Paris, and Amsterdam to explore the more provincial setting of Antwerp. In the late eighteenth century, Antwerp's Golden Age had long since tarnished. In the decades and centuries after the siege of 1585, when the rebellious city was recaptured by its Spanish overlords, the commercial hub of the Habsburg Netherlands had only slowly found its second wind. In the late eighteenth century, the city at the Scheldt witnessed a modest economic growth based on lace-making, spinning, and other proto-industrial activities.<sup>6</sup> Even though Antwerp had its own coffee houses, auctioneers, lending libraries, theatres, and other fashionable venues, the cultural scene was a bit listless, not to say parochial.<sup>7</sup> How did nocturnalization fare in such an urban environment, where serious discussions about

4 Koslofsky's book is part of a wider trend among historians of exploring the uncharted territory of the night: Cabantous, *Histoire de la nuit*; Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night*. A thriving strand of research is also focussed on early modern sleep: Handley, *Sleep in early modern England*; Ekirch, *At Day's Close*; Emich, 'Zwischen Disziplinierung'. For sleep in the deep past: Dossey, 'Watchful Greeks and Lazy Romans'.

5 Cited in Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 155.

6 Blondé and Van Damme, 'Retail Growth', 638–641.

7 On the cultural infrastructure, see: De Paepe, "'Les opéras étaient en vogue'"; Delsaerd, 'Het leeskabinet'.

modern street lighting only cropped up in the late eighteenth century? Together with a radical change in setting, this article also taps entirely new sources and develops a new methodology. To uncover the daily rhythms of society at large – and to trace the impact of nocturnalization – we will turn to the *examinatieën en informatieën* (eyewitness reports) of the local court of criminal justice in Antwerp. The *Hoge Vierschaar* administered justice in serious cases such as murder, manslaughter, burglary, larceny, assault, and battery.<sup>8</sup>

To judge the facts of each case, the examining magistrates summoned a series of witnesses, who shared details about the crime they had witnessed in the preliminary investigation. What exactly had they seen? When? What were they doing at the time? These details were carefully written down in the *examinatieën en informatieën*, documents which thus contain vital source material allowing us to reconstruct daily rhythms and individual uses of time in detail. This approach is based on the pioneering work of Hans-Joachim Voth, who tapped similar sources of the London Old Bailey to reconstruct daily time-use in the late eighteenth-century metropolis.<sup>9</sup> Similar research has been carried out in other parts of Europe to trace the (changing) pace of early modern life.<sup>10</sup> This article will use a similar methodology: to find traces of nocturnalization, it will successively explore work, leisure, and sleep in eighteenth-century Antwerp. Before discussing the results, I will first reflect briefly on the methodological caveats presented by the sources.

### *'Until the Wee hours': Time in Testimonies*

In the summer of 1775, the examining magistrates of the *Hoge Vierschaar* called Michiel Van Doren to testify. In his testimony, the cotton spinner gave a detailed account of his activities on Monday 14 August. On that particular day, he had spent the afternoon watching an execution at the citadel. Around ten o'clock in the evening he accompanied his sister-in-law home. He then went with his brother Michiel for one last round of drinks at a local gin bar, before stumbling home around a quarter to twelve.<sup>11</sup> Testimonies such as these are a ten a penny; the Antwerp magistrates questioned hundreds of eyewitnesses, victims, and suspects every year. Together these files contain thousands of clues about the timing, duration, and sequence of everyday activities that were, for the purpose of this project, collected in a database.<sup>12</sup> Two sorts of data can be extracted. First and foremost, the *examinatieën en informatieën* provide some accurate data concerning the beginning and

8 On the Vierschaar and its functioning, see Monballuy, *Six centuries of Criminal Law*, 411-428; Verhoeven, 'How to question a suspect thoroughly?'

9 For the original research, see: Voth, 'Time and Work in Eighteenth-Century London'. More elaborative is Voth, *Time and Work in England*.

10 For instance: Hailwood, 'Time and Work in Rural England'; Verhoeven, 'Fashionably Late?'; Ogilvie, 'Consumption, Social Capital, and the Industrious Revolution'; Pierik, *Urban life on the Move*, 54-55.

11 Antwerp, Felix Archives Antwerp (hereafter FeA), Vierschaar (hereafter V) 111, Interrogation of Michiel Van Doren, 14 August 1775.

12 The data was initially collected during the FWO research project (2008-2011) *Chronos' flight. Daily time experience and regulation in the Netherlands (1750-1805)*, which resulted into a database with more than 2,000 references to points in time.

end of work, leisure, sleep, and other activities, as eyewitness were sometimes very specific about when they had hopped out of bed in the morning, arrived at work, took their lunch break, finished working, ordered their first beer in their favourite inn, or finally went to sleep. Using these points of time as a benchmark, the duration of activities can be calculated with what sociologists refer to as a start-stop methodology.<sup>13</sup>

Eyewitnesses also frequently referred to specific points in time, even when they were already fully engaged in a certain activity. It echoes the random recall methodology that is also widely used in sociological time-use research, although it renders the calculation of the relative duration of various activities much more difficult. All references to activities within a short space of time (say an hour) are tallied and then the proportion (in percentages) between work, leisure, sleep, and other activities can be calculated. Evidently, the random recall methodology is less precise than the start-stop methodology, but both can shed new light on the changing rhythms of daily life in the past. Were work, leisure, and other activities indeed ‘colonizing’ the night as Koslofsky and others have suggested, while sleep was gradually postponed until the early hours of the morning (fig. 1)? Was Michiel Van Domen, who went to bed around midnight, a rare bird? Although a quantitative analysis of the data from the interrogations may provide some answers to these questions, we will also look at the more qualitative evidence in the statements. Eyewitnesses frequently mentioned when an activity lasted until late (*tot laete*) in the evening. In doing so, they provided indirect information about time-related norms and values. This approach chimes with the recent historiographical trend to look more closely at time-related ideals, principles, and emotions, including feelings of time pressure, tedium, and haste.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from the abovementioned problems, there are two additional methodological caveats that are linked to these sources.<sup>15</sup> First and foremost, there is always the possibility that eyewitnesses did not speak the truth about their daily activities and the temporal minutiae. However, even if they did so, they had to come up with a more or less plausible story that matched the expectations of the examining magistrates. Everyday life, as well as societal rhythms, were already highly synchronized in eighteenth-century Antwerp, and every deviation from the norm would have alarmed the judges. A case in point was the testimony of laundress Anna Moons, who was called to the witness box in 1781 when her housemate Augustinus Cordelier was accused of exhibitionism. Moons stated that she had always harboured suspicions about Cordelier, who had a habit of rising early – before five o’clock in the morning – and was often in bed already around half past eight in the evening, when Moons arrived home from work. Apparently, the fact that his everyday routines were so out of kilter of what was expected aroused serious suspicion.<sup>16</sup> Secondly – and this is a far more serious problem – the motley crew of witnesses called to testify

<sup>13</sup> Time-use analysis is a thriving line of research in contemporary sociology. See for an introduction to this methodology: Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*; Glorieux, Minnen, and Van Tienhoven, ‘Exploring the stable practices of everyday life’; Southerton, ‘Analysing the Temporal Organization’.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Jütte, ‘Sleeping in Church’; Zimmer, ‘Die Ungeduld mit der Zeit’; Champion, ‘Emotions, time and narrative’.

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of the specific methodological problems linked to the *examinatieën en informatieën*: Blondé and Verhoeven, ‘Against the clock’.

<sup>16</sup> FeA, v 115, Testimony of Anna Moons, 18 January 1781.



*Fig. 1 Willem Laquy, Scholar cuts a pen by candlelight, 1770, oil on panel, 80 × 36 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.*

was not entirely representative for the Antwerp population at large. Eyewitnesses were predominantly male, middle- or upper-class, and taken from the ranks of the more senior city-dwellers, as their testimonies were seen as more reliable than the observations of women, youths, or lower-class witnesses.<sup>17</sup> However, even with these biases in mind it is

<sup>17</sup> Blondé and Verhoeven, 'Against the clock'. Similar caveats are discussed in Hailwood, 'Time and Work', 93-95; Voth, 'Time and Work in Eighteenth-Century London', 31-32.

beyond doubt that the examining magistrates of the Vierschaar summoned a wide sweep of people to the witness box. Together their statements can shed some light on the changing rhythms of work, leisure, and sleep in early modern Antwerp. Was the traditional balance between day and night really disrupted by a slow but steady process of nocturnalization?

### *'Toiled Till Late in the Evening': Labour Time*

In May 1789, Matheys Merckx, a cotton spinner, was called to testify in a case of larceny. According to his statement, he had been working in the cotton mill in the Bontemantelstraat *tot laet* (until late). Around a quarter to ten, he finally called it a day and went home.<sup>18</sup> As evening work was anything but uncommon in eighteenth-century Antwerp, his statement would have raised no eyebrows. Domestic servants, innkeepers, musicians, and other workers in the service economy were forced to work long hours, while the night watchmen, cesspool cleaners (*ventjaegers*), and other notorious nighthawks would only begin their nocturnal meanderings after ten o'clock in the evening. The *examinatieën en informatieën* also demonstrate that a small host of craftsmen, shopkeepers, and unskilled labourers were still at work around nine or ten in the evening. Peter Dom, a journeyman plumber, declared in 1766 that he had finished working around half past nine, when he, his brother, and his nephews were beaten up by a selection of the city's riff-raff on their way home.<sup>19</sup> In 1772, Maria Elisabeth Meijers, an elderly ironer, was mugged around half past eight at the Veemarkt, when her friends came to pick her up from work.<sup>20</sup> Even though Elisabeth and Peter were unfortunate to be harassed on their way home, these and other examples show that the lack of public lighting did not hold townspeople back from working late. Early modern illustrations of people working by the flickering light of candles, oil lamps, or other light sources are common (figs. 1-2). Even without *révèrberes* and other modern street lamps, late eighteenth-century Antwerpens were clearly colonizing the night.

Meijers, Merckx, and Dom were not really representative of the Antwerp population in general, however. Most late eighteenth-century people stopped working somewhere between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, after a (very) long work day. For most Antwerpens, this work day would have started at around six in the morning, with a short (breakfast) pause around nine or ten, a longer lunch break between twelve and two, and some short interruptions in the afternoon (tab. 1). Merckx, for instance, claimed that he had resumed work in the cotton mill around a quarter past two in the afternoon after his lunch, and that he had steadily worked till ten in the evening, with only two short interruptions to relieve himself outside of the workshop.<sup>21</sup> These habits raise a lot of questions. Were these people working long hours and until late in the evening to maximize their family income? Did they cut back on precious leisure time? Were the traditional rhythms

<sup>18</sup> FeA, v 122, Interrogation of Matheys Merckx, 5 May 1789.

<sup>19</sup> FeA, v 106, Interrogation of Peter Dom, 14 April 1766.

<sup>20</sup> FeA, v 108, Interrogation of Maria Elisabeth Meijers, 1772.

<sup>21</sup> FeA, v 122, Interrogation of Matheys Merckx, 5 May 1789.



Fig. 2 Egbert van der Poel, Fish market by evening, 1660-1664, oil on panel, 35 × 26,5 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

Tab. 1 Labour time in Antwerp, 1700-1790 (n=170).

	Average			Median		
	1700-1749	1750-1775	1776-1790	1700-1749	1750-1775	1776-1790
Start work day	05h51	06h03	06h18	05h30	06h00	06h30
End work day	19h01	19h26	19h38	19h15	20h00	19h30
Lunch time	1h30	1h30	1h30	1h30	1h30	1h30
Total work hours	11h40	11h52	11h50	12h15	12h30	11h30

of everyday life being disrupted by a creeping industrious revolution?<sup>22</sup> Analysing the data from the Vierschaar, that does not seem to have been the case, as late eighteenth-century Antwerpers did not necessarily work much longer or much later than their predecessors in the first decades of the century. Although we have to be careful with statistics drawn from a small sample size, the evidence from the *examinatieën en informatieën* does not seem to point at a steady increase in working hours throughout the century. Working hours hovered – almost invariably – at around eleven to twelve hours a day in both seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Antwerp. Daily labour input even seemed to decrease slightly on the eve of the French Revolution (tab. 1).

Antwerp was not really an exception on the rule. Even if a city was bathed in the light of the new *réverbères*, the collective rhythms of labour did not seem to have moved into the night. In London, where street lighting had been introduced in the late seventeenth century and proliferated in the eighteenth, through the initiatives of private street-light companies, labour time invariably hovered around eleven hours a day, at least according to Hans-Joachim Voth's careful estimates based on Old Bailey proceedings.<sup>23</sup> Londoners usually stopped working around seven o'clock in the evening. Traces of an industrious revolution rather left an imprint on the weekly and annual rhythms, as people appeared to have cut back on Saint-Mondays (traditionally part of the weekend) and all sort of holidays rather than on their everyday leisure.<sup>24</sup>

Labour time fluctuated throughout the seasons, as the amount of natural daylight had some effect on the beginning and end of work. Antwerpers were already up and about around half past five in summer, while they remained in bed for an extra half hour in winter. Work ended half an hour earlier in winter than in summer.<sup>25</sup> Fluctuations between high summer and deep winter were thus limited to one hour a day, which is surprisingly little given the limited amount of daylight available between the autumnal and the vernal equinox. With the sun rising around 7h44 and setting around 15h44 in the depths of winter, Antwerpers worked a staggering number of hours in the dark using candles, oil

<sup>22</sup> For the initial hypothesis, see De Vries, 'The Industrial Revolution'. He offers a more elaborate analysis in De Vries, *The Industrious Revolution*, 73-87.

<sup>23</sup> Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 130-136.

<sup>24</sup> Voth, 'Time and Work', 33-36; Voth, *Time and Work*, 100-101, 110, 166.

<sup>25</sup> Based on the data from the *examinatieën en informatiën*, the median for the start of the working day was 06h00 in winter and 05h30 in summer, while it ended at 20h00 in winter and 20h30 in summer. There is more variation in the average values: the day began at 06h19 in winter versus 05h26 in summer, and ended at 20h13 in winter and 20h40 in summer.

lamps, torches, and other artificial light to find their way.<sup>26</sup> Master brewer Antonius Leemans, for instance, was summoned by the Vierschaar on 9 January 1787, when one of his journeymen, the cooper Theodorus Schoof, was accused of larceny. Leemans declared to the examining magistrates that he and Schoof had been working in the brewery until half past ten. When they were locking up, his journeyman was arrested by the *corps de garde*. Working late was rarely if ever frowned upon.<sup>27</sup> Outdoor activities were perhaps a little less obvious, but even these were not impeded by darkness. Toon Dom, a plumber and jack-of-all-trades, was asked about his evening activities in December 1769. The clerk of the court wrote down his answer meticulously: ‘The prisoner says that he hawks mussels on the street until seven o’clock, although rarely that late, and then spends his evening at home winding silk and making nets to earn his living. Every so often, he also goes for a beer in the *Jaeger* (the Hunter).’<sup>28</sup> Toon and his fellow townsmen appear barely hindered by the lack of public street lighting in Antwerp. In London, where street lighting was extant from the late seventeenth century onwards, seasonal variations also occurred, although they were somewhat less obvious than in Antwerp.<sup>29</sup>

### ‘Went on a Spree Until the Curfew Sounded’: Leisure Time

For most Antwerpers, work was without further ado swapped for leisure around seven or eight o’clock in the evening. Men raced home for a quick meal – some slices of bread with cheese, with fish or dried meat on the side – and then went to their favourite inn to meet their friends and to share some beers or Dutch gin.<sup>30</sup> Dom’s testimony was therefore typical for a wide sweep of lower- and middle-class Antwerpers. Leisure time during the evening was punctuated by two important moments. First of all, there was the temporal landmark of the closing of the city gates. On sultry summer evenings, Sundays, or holidays, Antwerpers were keen to escape the city for a breath of fresh air in the countryside like most townspeople. Walking was popular.<sup>31</sup> Others went to the vegetable gardens, the bleaching fields, or the mills that were situated outside the ramparts.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, beer was much cheaper in the inns, taverns, and gin boots in Borgerhout and other villages

<sup>26</sup> On the spread of artificial lighting in Antwerp households, see Saelens and Ryckbosch, ‘Fueling the urban economy’; Saelens, *Consumer culture and energy transition*.

<sup>27</sup> FeA, v 120, Interrogation of Antonius Leemans, 9 January 1787.

<sup>28</sup> FeA, v 107, Interrogation of Toon Dom, 26 December 1769: ‘Den gevangenen segt te laetsten tot den seven uren des avonts te cruijden, ende dat seer raer soo laet, ende dan den meer reste van den avondt ten sijnen huijse besight to sijn met seijde te winden ende netten te breijden om sijnen cost te winnen.’

<sup>29</sup> Voth, *Time and Work in England*, 135–142. Seasonal variations were also small on the English countryside: Hailwood, ‘Time and Work’, 118–119.

<sup>30</sup> More than seventy percent of all leisure activities mentioned in the Vierschaar files was related to drinking in inns, taverns, or gin boots. For more on breakfast, lunch, and dinner in lower and middle-class households in Antwerp, see Verhoeven, ‘Dining Out!’.

<sup>31</sup> See for example FeA, v 92, Interrogation of Laureys Ipermans, 26 January 1728; v 102, Interrogation of Andries Mewis, 11 January 1746. Walking was also popular on the city walls: Frateur, ‘One of the sweetest places in Europe’.

<sup>32</sup> Vermoesen, ‘Boerende stedelingen of verstedelijkte boeren’; Vermoesen, ‘Urbanization from below’, 36–37.

outside Antwerp, since the taxes were much lower there. Even in the evening, a great many people were out and about.<sup>33</sup> However, Antwerpers returned in haste to the city as soon as the bells of the city gates started to toll. One summer's evening in 1770, Jan Lambrechts hurried to the Rode Poort after a couple of drinks in an inn outside the city wall. Even though it was *corts na negen uur* (a few minutes after nine o'clock), Lambrechts found that the barrier and the gates were already closed.<sup>34</sup> Unlike other towns, where the custom of closing the city gates at night was gradually abolished, Antwerp stuck to the time-honoured tradition.<sup>35</sup> In the depths of winter, the drawbridge was already raised around five o'clock in the afternoon. Antwerpers were so familiar with the custom that *omtrent het poortsluyten* ('around the time that the city gates are closing') became a temporal beacon, equally precise as *op de noon* (at noon), *tusschen zeven en acht in den avond* (between seven or eight in the evening), or other notions of time.<sup>36</sup>

For most people – at least the male part of the population – the closing of the city gates was just an interlude in their evening leisure, as bar-hopping went on within the city walls until ten or eleven o'clock. Leisure slowly but surely petered out when the curfew was sounded and the inns, taverns, and gin shacks started to close. Thirsty customers often begged for a last round of drinks. Barabara Theresia Frans, a publican, attested in the winter of 1787 as to how a band of wigmakers flooded into her inn at around half past ten in the evening. When her husband refused to draw a final round of drinks, given that the *wachtklocke* (curfew) had already sounded and he wanted to lock up, the men became aggressive and one even punched Barabara on her head.<sup>37</sup> Testimonies such as these are legion.<sup>38</sup> Unlike other European towns where the curfew was gradually abolished, it still sounded in Antwerp, be it winter or summer, at around 22h30, a practice not abandoned until the late eighteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Even though city ordinances strictly forbade drawing beer after the curfew, the bailiff and night watchmen seem to have adopted a policy of tolerance. Notorious nighthawks were not arrested as long as they did not cause trouble. In the spring of 1753, the publican Jan de Groot alerted the watchmen at around a quarter past eleven when one of his customers, a certain Makey, refused to leave. Makey even drew his knife when the *knapen* (guards) arrived, but when he swore to keep his cool, he was left to finish his drink.<sup>40</sup> Nearly twenty years later, in September 1772, the frame-maker Joannes Josephus Pelemans declared that he had been drinking in the *Koning David* (King David) with some colleagues until the small hours. When he finally went home between

33 Some examples: FeA, v 99, Interrogation of Jan Campaert, 7 April 1741; FeA, v 103, Interrogation of François de Bock, 8 September 1751.

34 FeA, v 107, Interrogation of Jan Lambrechts, 22 June 1770.

35 On the abolition of closing the gates, see Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 129-130.

36 FeA, v 106, Interrogation of Marinus van Beughem, 14 April 1765. A similar effect could be seen in Amsterdam, where the tradition of opening and closing the city gates was still in place in the eighteenth century: Pierik, *Urban Life*, 60-61.

37 FeA, v 120, Interrogation of Brabara Theresia Frans, 19 November 1787.

38 FeA, v 108, Joannes Christoffel Lambrechts, 22 January 1771; v 116, Interrogation of Ignatius Seghers, 19 May 1782; v 118, Interrogation of Joannes Franciscus Verdonck, 27 June 1785.

39 On the abolition of the curfew, see Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 129-130.

40 FeA, v 104, Interrogation of Jan De Groot, 28 March 1753.

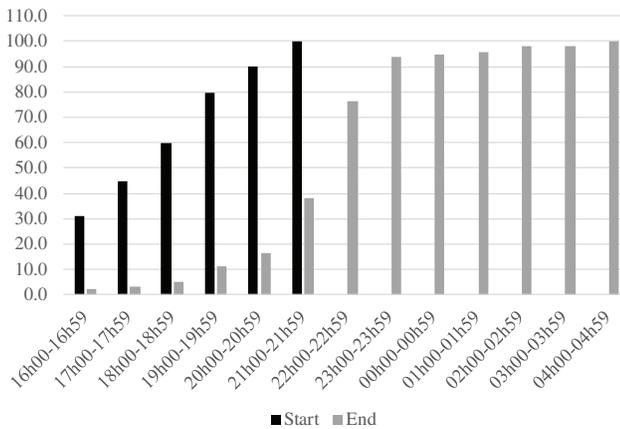


Fig. 3 Beginning and end of leisure activities as a percentage of the Antwerp population, 1585-1790.

two and half past three in the morning, he was assaulted in his own house by some lowlife, who gave him a good thrashing.<sup>41</sup> Pelemans's skin was saved by some neighbours and Hermanus Janssens, a musician who was returning home after an evening spent playing in several inns and taverns.<sup>42</sup>

These and other examples illustrate that Antwerp's night owls were not easily discouraged from scouring the city after dark. Even without the praised *réverbères* they freely roamed the city to have a final drink, to enjoy some music, or even have a dance, come rain or shine, whether it was winter or summer. Yet we have to be aware that these night-hawks were rather the exception than the rule. Most Antwerpers drained their last tankard at around ten in the evening and returned home. By eleven o'clock in the evening only a small minority of Antwerpers (barely six percent) were still up and about (fig. 3).

As daily life in Antwerp was already largely disconnected from the solar cycle and leisure – especially in winter – went on long after dark, the *examinatieën en informatieën* thus provide little if any evidence for a society-wide nocturnalization. This is no surprise, as modern street lighting was absent. Yet even in cities that were already bathing in the bright light of the *réverbères*, daily rhythms were not necessarily very different. In late eighteenth-century Amsterdam, where more than 3,000 street lamps were burning, mobility reached an apex at somewhere between six and nine in the evening before it slowly but surely petered out. At around ten o'clock in the evening, when the rattle guards started their tour throughout the city, public life almost came to a standstill. Amsterdammers who were still up and about after midnight were the exception.<sup>43</sup> In London, where the curfew had long since been abandoned and modern street lighting made it possible – at least in theory – to extend leisure time long into the night, Hans-Joachim Voth's time-use analysis has revealed that most customers of inns, taverns, and coffee houses slunk off at around eleven o'clock in the evening and went home. Even in a metropolis such as London, public

41 FeA, v 108, Interrogation of Joannes Josephus Pelemans, 20 September 1772.

42 FeA, v 108, Interrogation of Joannes Pelemans, 20 September 1772.

43 Pierik, *Urban Life*, 57-60.

life had practically ground to a halt by midnight.<sup>44</sup> Apparently, Richard Steele's famous claim that 'near two thirds of the nation' had 'thrown business and pleasure into the hours of rest' is best taken with a pinch – or rather a sack – of salt, as staying out until sunrise seems to have been a privilege of a small pack of notorious night owls.<sup>45</sup>

First of all, gender seems to have mattered. Men and women were equally active in Antwerp until nine or ten in the evening. Both sexes were found together in inns, where beer and gin were served, and where fiddlers and pipers sometimes played a tune, inviting people to sing along and dance, and where all sorts of card and dice games were played.<sup>46</sup> Early modern paintings and prints often show women and girls who remained active long even after sunset (fig. 4). An illustrative example was Anna Maria Derijck, who was questioned by the Vierschaar in the autumn of 1772, having been a victim of burglary. On a Sunday in November, Anna Maria and her husband had taken a ride to Lillo in a gig. Around ten o'clock in the evening they returned to Borgerhout and ordered a last round in the local inn. They stayed until midnight before discovering they had been robbed.<sup>47</sup> Women and men were also found on streets and squares until late, where they gossiped with acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbours. In May 1773 the examining magistrates of the Vierschaar investigated another case of burglary in the Claretraet, where the house of master tailor Philippus Gevaerts had been looted. Among the eyewitnesses summoned to court were Anna Cools (a fishmonger), Lucie Dellen (a greengrocer), and Johannes Degraef (a cobbler), who, apart from some minor details, offered a similar story. Cools swore that she and her neighbours had been chewing the fat on the street around a quarter past nine *salvo justo* (circa), when Jan Kindermans – a frame-maker and Gevaerts's lodger – had arrived. Kindermans fetched some beer in a nearby inn, wolfed down a piece of stockfish, and babbled with the neighbours. They all remembered his edgy, nervous, and suspicious behaviour.<sup>48</sup> Theresia Hertweghs, a thread-twister, added a little extra colour, as she confided that Kindermans was a man of ill fame, who 'works little and drinks too much'.<sup>49</sup>

Philippus Gevaerts testified that he and his wife had left the house around half past eight in the evening, as they had been invited at home by some friends 'to be merry'. After *salvo justo een ure* (one hour or so), one of the neighbours came to warn them that they had been burgled.<sup>50</sup> Gevaerts case perfectly illustrates that women in early modern Antwerp – whether accompanied or not – had several options of how to spend their evenings. They could stay at home or visit some friends, but they could just as well gossip on the

44 Voth, *Time and Work*, 104–105. Londoners seemed to have gone to bed somewhat later than Antwerpers, although the differences were small. Voth's calculations also point to a chronological evolution, as Londoners on average went to bed between 22h25 and 23h15 in 1760, but in 1800 between at 22h47 and 23h55. By 1830, average bedtime had reverted to the values of the 1760s.

45 Cited in Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 155–156.

46 Women were not always welcome in early modern inns, although there were a lot of regional differences: Kümin, 'Public houses and their patrons'; Kümin, *Drinking Matters*, 69–70.

47 FeA, v 108, Interrogation of Anna Maria Derijck, 18 November 1772.

48 FeA, v 109, Interrogations of Lucie Dellen, Anna Cools, and Peter Coenraets, 14 May 1773.

49 FeA, v 109, Interrogation of Theresia Hertwegh, 14 May 1773: 'wijjnigh werckt ende veel drinkct's'.

50 FeA, v 109, Interrogation of Philippus Gevaerts, 14 May 1773: 'om vrolijk te sijn'.



Fig. 4 Cornelis Bloemaert, Girl with lantern, ca. 1625, engraving, 11,4 × 8,8 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 5 Michiel Versteegh, *A woman in a kitchen by the light of an oil lamp*, ca. 1830, oil on panel, 49 × 43 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

street or visit their favourite inn. It shows that the classic stereotype of separate spheres, where men were free to roam the streets while women were destined to stay at home, does not fit well with the evidence from Antwerp (fig. 5). These findings dovetail with Bob Pierik's research on early modern Amsterdam, where women were also found in all sorts of public spaces till late in the evening, although their range might have been somewhat shorter than men.<sup>51</sup> In Antwerp, however, some change occurred throughout the evening. Women were always a minority in inns, but their attendance was most marked between six and eight in the evening before gradually dwindling. After midnight, women were rarely if ever spotted in inns, which turned into an all-male environment. At the same time, the presence of women in a domestic environment increased steadily after eight o'clock in the evening. Not counting some exceptions, the notorious nightbirds that roamed the city after midnight were exclusively male.

Night owls were not only predominantly male, but they also hailed from very specific social groups. Eighteenth-century commentators such as Richard Steele suggested that nocturnalization was primarily fuelled by the thin upper crust of British society, those who frequented the *Vauxhall* and other pleasure gardens as well as the inns, taverns, coffee houses, theatre and opera houses, and other fashionable venues until cock crow. Diner was only served around nine or ten o'clock, while most of these city-slickers only went to

51 Pierik, *Urban life on the Move*, 48-63.

bed (long) after midnight.<sup>52</sup> Detailed research by Hannah Greig and Amanda Vickery on the political day of MPs in eighteenth-century London has revealed that this landslide in the rhythms of everyday life was not some hyperbole sprouting from the overheated mind of some unworldly spectators, but a reality for the prime political rainmakers in Britain, who after a day of speeches and backstage lobbying, late and sumptuous dinners, endless socializing in clubs and coffee-houses, and attending balls, would finally fall into bed in the small hours.<sup>53</sup> Occasionally, traces of such an upper-crust nocturnalization process can also be found in Antwerp. In 1787, the chaplain Gaspar Savery was assaulted by a pack of guttersnipes at around ten in the evening, as he returned home following an exclusive late-night dinner with Miss Catharina Cantaert. At the Paardenmarkt, he was dogged by two men who gave him a sound thrashing with a stick and called him a *hoerschen paep schelm* ('whorish, popish scoundrel'). They also taunted him as a *keizerlijken pastoor* ('a faithful pastor of the Emperor'), which was a serious insult given the heated and hostile anti-Austrian atmosphere of the Brabantine Revolution.<sup>54</sup>

Evidence from the *examinatieën en informatieën*, scanty as it is, seems to suggest that the lifestyle of elites was indeed less and less attuned to the mainstream pulse of society at large, as wealthy merchants, senior officials, and other patricians worked, dined, and relaxed at other moments of the day.<sup>55</sup> Data from even scarcer sources such as diaries and egodocuments point in the same direction. Clara Cornelia van Eijck, a Dutch refugee in exile in Ghent, logged relatively late bedtimes into her diary, as she and her husband were accustomed to spending long evenings with friends. Talking, reading, card playing, and sewing frequently kept Clara busy till eleven or twelve o'clock at night, and sometimes even later. Nonetheless, even in her case burning the midnight oil was rather exceptional.<sup>56</sup> A similar pattern arises from the Vierschaar files: upper-class witnesses might have stayed active a bit longer than Mr. Average, but the differences were small. A series of advertisements for balls, theatre, and opera performances from the *Théâtre d'Anvers* suggests that those classic evening activities were often scheduled between six and nine in the evening.<sup>57</sup> Notorious night-owls, those roaming the streets long past midnight, were usually not upper- or middle-class city-dwellers, but predominantly lower-class townfolk: unskilled labourers, soldiers, or journeymen. They were also young, often in their twenties or thirties.<sup>58</sup> Nocturnalization was, in summation, anything but a mass phenomenon in Antwerp, but could only be observed at the fringes of society – be it the silky tasselled or the seamier side – while the silent majority of city-dwellers was by then already deep in the land of Nod.

52 For Steele's remark and similar observations of other social commentators, see Koslofsky, *Evening's Empire*, 128-133, 153-156.

53 Greig and Vickery, 'The political day in London'.

54 FeA, v 122, Interrogation of Gaspar Savery, 17 July 1787.

55 For the social divergence in time-use: Verhoeven, '(Pre)Modern Sleep'; Verhoeven, 'Dinging Out!'.

56 Paklons and Verhoeven, 'While my husband was away'.

57 FeA, BA 213, Programmes and performances of the Théâtre d'Anvers, 1759-1797.

58 Some examples: FeA, v 101, Interrogation of Jacobus Frederix, 23 November 1744; v 115, Interrogation of Joannes Delmas, 1 May 1780; v 118, Interrogation of Joannes Michiels, 24 October 1785.

*'Only the Early Bird Catches the Worm': Sleep Time*

During the summer of 1734, the examining magistrates of the Vierschaar opened an investigation in a case of manslaughter. Gilles De Backer, a master cobbler, was under suspicion of having murdered his own wife. According to his statement, they had been as thick as thieves. On the Sunday in question, they had shared some drinks in a Berchem inn. When they came home around half past nine in the evening, Gilles's wife had checked on the children, who were already in bed on the first floor. When his spouse did not return, the cobbler called impatiently: 'Come to bed my love, I have to rise early tomorrow.' There was no response and Gilles dozed off.<sup>59</sup> Not surprisingly, Maria – Gillis's stepdaughter, who had been in bed on the first floor – told a slightly different story, as she testified that her parents had had a blazing row before she heard a loud slap followed by a dull thud.<sup>60</sup>

Even though the family tragedy was a bit of an exception, Gillis's remark about the advanced hour was a typical. Testifying in a case of suicide in 1752, the publican, tailor, fiddler, and jack-of-all-trades Guilelmus Colenberger told the judges how he had accompanied husband and wife Vanderneusen home on a wintry Sunday evening around half past eleven. According to Colenberger, Vanderneusen had urged his wife to hurry up, saying 'I have to rise early tomorrow'. Less than a quarter of an hour later, he was dead – a fight between the spouses had probably gone out of hand.<sup>61</sup> On average, Antwerpers went to bed (relatively) early between ten and eleven o'clock, an unsurprising statistic as they were also early birds. Usually, they rolled out of bed somewhere between five and six in the morning. Even in a best-case scenario – where they fell asleep almost instantly and happily slumbered on till dawn – most Antwerpers barely got seven hours of sleep a day.<sup>62</sup> There was not much room for nocturnal adventures (fig. 6). Only lucky devils such as Clara Cornelia Van Eijck could afford to stay in bed until eight or nine o'clock.<sup>63</sup>

During the eighteenth century, there was little if any evolution in bedtimes that might point to a creeping nocturnalization (tab. 2). Despite the bright light of the *réverbères*, the same held true for London, where data from the Old Bailey Proceedings show a significant later bedtime for 1800 (23h21) than in 1750 (22h50), while by the 1830s the average bedtime had reverted to that of the 1760s level (22h46).<sup>64</sup> In Amsterdam, life also came to a near standstill around eleven o'clock.<sup>65</sup>

Nocturnal escapades were simply impossible for unskilled laborers, craftsmen, retailers, and other blue-collar workers, at least on a regular basis, if they wanted to have enough sleep. Working people also became very aggressive if their precious night rest was jeopardized by rowdy pub-crawlers, noisy nightclubbers, or other troublemakers. On a summer's eve in

59 FeA, v 95, Interrogation of Gillis de Backer, 29 August 1734: 'Mijnen liefsten maet comt slaepen, ick moet morgen vroegh opstaan.'

60 FeA, v 95, Interrogation of Maria Hallaerts, 29 August 1734.

61 FeA, v 103, Interrogation of Guilelmus Colenberg, 17 December 1752: 'ick moet morgen vroeg opstaen'.

62 Verhoeven, '(Pre)Modern Sleep'.

63 Paklons and Verhoeven, 'While my husband was away'.

64 Voth, *Time and Work*, 101.

65 Pierik, *Urban life on the move*, 57-58.



Fig. 6 Nicolas Regnault, Bedroom interior with woman getting out of bed and an enthusiastic looking young man, 1756-1810, engraving, 41,5 × 30,9 cm, Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

Tab. 2 Estimated sleep duration in Antwerp based on recorded bed times (n=378).

Year	Start time		End time		Sleep time
	Average	Median	Average	Median	
<1750	21h48	22h30	04h50	05h15	06h45
1750-1775	20h43	22j15	05h57	05h30	07h15
1776-1790	21h06	22h30	06h10	06h00	07h30

1779, Peter Genaert, a cotton spinner, was already in bed at somewhere between ten and eleven o'clock when he was disturbed by some youngsters singing all sorts of lewd songs in the streets. Fuming with indignation, he addressed the dismal ensemble, telling them sternly 'that it was not permitted to make such a racket on the street and disturb the peace. We are people who have to earn our living and have to be at work early.'<sup>66</sup> The rabble were not impressed, and one of their number hit Peter with a club, but he was soon rescued by some neighbors who also denounced such antisocial behavior in every possible way. Once again, it is striking that these nighthawks were youths. Files such as these, where workers tried to safeguard their night's rest, are thick on the ground. Nighttime noise also appears frequently in the petitions of civilians protesting against boisterous activities in the evening or morning to the city council. It was also strictly regulated by the local bye-laws.<sup>67</sup> Both illustrate that nocturnalization was anything but a mainstream phenomenon in eighteenth century Antwerp, but remained a privilege of a (very) small flock of the usual nightbirds.

### Conclusion

Even though they shed light on (almost) every dimension of everyday life in eighteenth-century Antwerp, the *examinatieën en informatieën* provide little if any evidence for a process of nocturnalization. At least, not in the sense of the mass phenomenon suggested by Richard Steele and other contemporary spectators: the rhythms of society – the traditional times to work, relax, shop, eat, and sleep – simply did not move into the night. On the contrary, they remained remarkably stable during the eighteenth century. One could, in line with Koslofsky's hypothesis, argue that this was not really a surprise, as the principal prerequisite for nocturnalization was missing in Antwerp: modern street lighting would only arrive in the nineteenth century. However, time-use analysis from London, Amsterdam, and other cities that bathed their citizens in the bright light of the *réverbères* has shown that, even when these preconditions were met, daily rhythms did not fundamentally change in the eighteenth century and were – by and large – not very different from a city that was still steeped in darkness. Nocturnalization was probably limited to a small group of night revellers, who either had the time or the money to stray from the strict synchronization of society. These included people such as Cornelia van Eijck, who could wine and dine, read, play cards, or chat until the early hours, but could also sleep until ten

<sup>66</sup> FeA, v 114, Interrogation of Peter Genaert, 26 June 1779: 'Et en is niet gepermittert sulck straetlawijdt te comen maeken, ende onse ruste gedurigh te comen stooren, wij zijn menschen die onsen cost moeten winnen, ende 's morgens vroeg op ons werck moeten sijn.'

<sup>67</sup> Buelens-Terryn and De Coster, 'Mag het iets stiller?.'

o'clock in the morning, or those who, inhabiting the seedier side of society, catered for the nighthawks. Youths were also prone to burning the midnight oil.

Even though Antwerp did not go through a process of nocturnalization in the late eighteenth century, it was highly nocturnalized from at least the late seventeenth century onwards. Life was already largely uncoupled from the solar cycle long before the Industrial Revolution. Antwerpers spent a staggering amount of time in the dark, especially in winter, when they were up and about long before sunrise and active long after sunset. Lacking modern street lighting, they had to make do with candles and oil lamps, lanterns, torches, or – if even these alternatives were unavailable – with moonlight, but that did not seem to have hampered their nocturnal activities. Technology, when finally arriving in the form of modern street lighting in the nineteenth century, would not fundamentally alter the traditional rhythms of early modern society, as Antwerpers in the eighteenth century already squeezed as much activities in a day as was biologically possible. What remained of night was simply too brief for an extra bout of nocturnalization.

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