

A MACAT ANALYSIS

CARLO GINZBURG'S

THE NIGHT BATTLES

WITCHCRAFT & AGRARIAN CULTS
IN THE 16TH & 17TH CENTURIES





An Analysis of

Carlo Ginzburg's

The Night Battles

**Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults
in the 16th and 17th Centuries**

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with
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REASONING – creating strong arguments

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CRITICAL THINKING AND *THE NIGHT BATTLES*

Primary critical thinking skill: CREATIVE THINKING

Secondary critical thinking skill: INTERPRETATION

In *The Night Battles*, Carlo Ginzburg does more than introduce his readers to a novel group of supposed witches – the Benandanti, from the northern Italian province of Friulia. He also invents and deploys new and creative ways of tackling his source material that allow him to move beyond their limitations.

Witchcraft documents are notoriously tricky sources – produced by elites with fixed views, they are products of questioning designed to prove or disprove guilt, rather than understand the subtleties of belief, and are very often the products of torture. Ginzburg placed great stress on variations in the evidence of the Benandanti over time to reveal changing patterns of belief, and also focused on the concept of ‘reading against the text’ – essentially looking as much at what is absent from the record as at what is present in it, and attempting to understand what the absences mean. His work not only pioneered the creation of a new school of historical study – ‘microhistory’ – it is also a great example of the creative thinking skills of connecting things together in an original way, producing novel explanations for existing evidence, and redefining an issue so as to see it in a new light.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE ORIGINAL WORK

Carlo Ginzburg was born in 1939 in the Italian city of Turin during the oppressive regime of dictator Benito Mussolini. His parents, a novelist and a professor of Russian literature, were both active in the anti-fascist movement. As a scholar, Ginzburg went on to found the influential school of 'microhistory,' an approach focusing on very specific events and people as a way to explore and explain a wider social context. He has spent his career teaching in Italy at the universities of Pisa and Bologna, and in the United States at the University of California, Los Angeles.

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ABOUT MACAT

GREAT WORKS FOR CRITICAL THINKING

Macat is focused on making the ideas of the world's great thinkers accessible and comprehensible to everybody, everywhere, in ways that promote the development of enhanced critical thinking skills.

It works with leading academics from the world's top universities to produce new analyses that focus on the ideas and the impact of the most influential works ever written across a wide variety of academic disciplines. Each of the works that sit at the heart of its growing library is an enduring example of great thinking. But by setting them in context – and looking at the influences that shaped their authors, as well as the responses they provoked – Macat encourages readers to look at these classics and game-changers with fresh eyes. Readers learn to think, engage and challenge their ideas, rather than simply accepting them.

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Andreas Schleicher
Director for Education and Skills, Organisation for Economic
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Professor William Tronzo, University of California at San Diego



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WAYS IN TO THE TEXT

KEY POINTS

- The historian Carlo Ginzburg was born in the Italian city of Turin in 1939 and is particularly noted for his influential work on the Europe of the early-modern* period (roughly the end of the fifteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century).
- *The Night Battles* is a study of men and women of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy who believed they left their bodies at night in the form of animals to battle witches in order to protect their communities.
- In *The Night Battles*, Ginzburg developed an approach to historical research—“microhistory”*—that focuses on specific events, communities, and individuals.

Who is Carlo Ginzburg?

Carlo Ginzburg is an Italian historian noted for his books on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe and for the method of research and analysis he developed to write them—what is known as “microhistory”. He was born in the northern Italian city of Turin in 1939. At the time Italy was led by the fascist* dictator Benito Mussolini,* whose regime was characterized by the aggressive suppression of dissent and political opposition.