

B 4103 no 3; witch 077, Nicolas George dit Sermemont, de Gripport

12 May 1615; rather repellent scene in which Bietrix, just before execution, was confronted with Nicolas. She insisted that her husband, who had died in prison, was a witch, and maintained accusation against Nicolas, whose pale face and faltering voice were noted as signs of guilt. She went through a parade of piety, and called him 'Colas mon bel amy', urging him to confess and avoid damnation.

14 May 1615; PG des Vosges calls for informations preparatoires, while he is held in prison

18 May 1615; informations preparatoires

(1) Claudon Chastelain, manouvrier, 60

Reputation 30 years (residence). Called witch by many, including witness, without taking action. In view of quarrels, and since he was neighbour, believed he had caused him great losses of animals. Had heard the late Husson Bourguignon, brother-in-law of accused and sharing house, call him witch and say he was not rich, but he would find enough means to have him burned. Had a daughter aged 12 who was so unwell she would be thought only 12, with illness which went around body; this began when she ate an apple, which he suspected had come from his house. His late wife was also reputed a witch.

(2) Marie veuve Nicolas Moyne, 58

Reputation 37 years (residence), as well as his wife. Daughter had been ill 20 years earlier with unknown malady, and after disputes had always thought he had caused this. Neighbour reported suspicions which witness had revealed, and he and his son Claudon approached her husband as he was ploughing; would have attacked him if he had not threatened to use his knife. Also believed he had caused deaths of many animals, and had heard that he and his wife had been chased out of Sermemont because of reputation.

(3) Pentecoste veuve Estienne Moyne, 65

He and late wife always reputed witches. Had many animals which died from strange illnesses; also had a son, Nicolas, who was ill from youth with unknown malady. Believed this came from his house, because had quarrelled with wife as neighbour rather than him. Story about flight from Sermemont.

(4) Margueritte femme Claudon Chastellain, 66

Long reputation, flight from Sermemont. Had lost many animals, and since he was neighbour suspected him - in view of reputation had been careful to avoid quarrels with him, but had disputes with sister Magdelaine who lived in his house.

(5) Francoise veuve Demenge Maillard, 50

General reputation. 8 years earlier husband had died after a year with strange illness, believing that Nicolas had bewitched him because he would not

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agree to take on keeping herd of Gripport, but took that of Socourt. Told him he would repent, and he fell ill within 2 weeks. Story of being chased from Sermemont.

(6) Jean Moine, ancien maire, 70

Personal suspicions had been against wife Isabel, not him. General reputation, and late Husson Bourguignon had called him witch, accusing him of killing his horses. Although Isabel was Bourguignon's sister he had called her witch too, saying that the late Gerard Remy, prévôt at Charmes, ought to have had her burned. Witness had talked with Nicolas about witches, and he had said 'Pensez-vous qu'il en soit. Ilz pensent le plus souvent faire des choses qu'ilz ne font pas.'

(7) Jean Aulbry le vieux, 60

Everyone in village believed he was witch - and late wife Isabel. He had had children dead of unknown illnesses, and suspected one or both of them was responsible; 2 sons and daughter died after he told prévôt that Nicolas had stolen some sheaves from cart when tithe was levied, and Isabel told him he would repent. Had been impoverished by loss of animals. Since Isabel's death had daughter who died after 5 years illness, which everyone thought was witchcraft; swollen and unable to breathe, thought she had a creature in her throat. Finally went to Beau Bernard and brought back vinegar, but she died next week. Believed one or the other was cause of this, and of his poverty and losses. Reputation 30 years, accusations by Husson Bouguignon.

(8) Claude Coinat jeune fils, 30

General reputation of household.

(9) Jean Coinat, ancien maire, 40

Father had believed him and household responsible for losses of many animals, including pig which strayed into garden and died on return as if rabid. Father would only take animals to spring after he had been, or with servants to escort them. In youth he and his mother were ill for a year, and this was thought to be their doing.

(10) Jean Aulbry le jeune, 40

General reputation. 20 years earlier father was exchanging mares with late Denis Parisot, and Nicolas wanted to make exchange himself. Denis refused, was told he would repent, and then both mares died. Had called him and members of household witch without any reaction; also told them he thought devil protected them, because he had never been able to do them any violence when he tried. Believed they had caused death of his brother and sister.

(11) Aulbry Aulbry, ancien maire, 60

General reputation and fear; knew of brother Jean's suspicions.

(12) Jacquat Jacquat, laboureur, 40

During his youth his father Didier Jacquat lost so many animals over 3 years that they were worth over 2,000 francs. Mother quarrelled with Isabel after accusing her of taking earth from her plot of flax, then became so ill she had to go to Beau Bernard. Father became so desperate he wanted to kill him; threatened him with axe while making accusations, but prevented from attacking him by arrival of third party, while he said that if his wife was a witch he could not help it. Later Nicolas came to say he had made terrible charges, and ask if he maintained them. Father replied 'sy je cognoissois le juge qu'il conviendrait m'adresser je te ferais brusler', after which a mare died next day. Since losses were continuing, and witness and his sister Mengeotte were ill, 'fut conseillé d'aller a Bainville sur Illon vers une devineresse nommee Marie. A laquelle ayant racompté son intention, luy fait veoir en un miroir lesdits Sermemont et ladite feu Isabel sa femme comme aussy Magdelaine soeur audit Sermemont, et le diable qu'estoit avec eulx, desla fut conseillé par une pauvre mendiante estrangere'. She told him to get bread and salt from his house, and when this was given to witness and sister to eat they recovered. Also told that if he kept some of these in house they would not be able to do him any harm; witness still had some which had been blessed by priest carrying relics of St Humbert some 26 years earlier, and was not corrupted. (Signed)

(13) Laurent Simonin, ancien maire, 48

Long reputation.

(14) Le maire Francois Renaudin, 33

General reputation.

(19 May 1615)

(15) Remy Grand Remy, manouvrier, 40

General reputation. Had heard from his brother Jean Gerdalle, maire at Herbemont, that when he lived there 40 years earlier he was generally feared. Asked witness how his son was faring at Gripport, and he replied that because of family reputation he could not find a wife.

(16) Denis Barbel, ancien maire, 45

As boy in house of stepfather Didier Jacquat had seen many quarrels and losses of animals; knew he had wanted to kill Nicolas. Told of sick horse which was jumping up in stable; late Claudon, smith of Chamagne, had come to see it and sprinkled holy water on it. When it fell dead, he said it had been bewitched, and told them to sprinkle 4 corners of house with holy water before dawn on 3 consecutive days, after which they would be protected from any harm. Losses did then stop; sick animals, notably cows, kept on eating until deaths. Called witch by their household without taking any action. General reputation; was much feared.

(17) Jannatte femme Nicolas Jean Nicolas, 38

Her late father Villemin Masson had been neighbour, and suffered great losses of animals. Horse was tended by smith of Xarounal, but still died, and father became convinced he was bewitched. Two children had strange illnesses; father

took one to Beau Bernard, where he was assured child was bewitched, and it died. On return asked them to visit other sick child, her sister, and thought one of them came and gave her something to eat, after which she recovered. Father had told her that on one day he lost a horse, a cow, a sow and her piglets. Also suspected her over sudden illness of her mother, which came on so suddenly that within a quarter of an hour she was thought to be dying.

(20 May 1615)

(18) Hannix Masson, femme Francois Cuguin de Marainville, 50

Reputation 30 years. Told of father's losses; had confessed on deathbed that he sometimes carried a pistol with intention of killing him. Story of own illness; Isabel heard from another woman that she was ill and came to see her. Touched her on neck, and said she was not dead, suggesting that she might have eaten peas or something similar in fields. Said a soup might make her throw it up, and at request of others made her one, after taking which she vomited copiously and gradually recovered. Also suspected him over death of her first husband Pieron Thiebault, who died from strange illness; had been angry with him because he had bought a plot for his 'fumier' alongside theirs. Remembered being in vines, and seeing him and his people leaving; then fell and twisted her knee, which she put back into place with loud noise. Believed this had been his doing, because she and her father were hostile to suit of his son Jean, who wanted to marry her.

(19) Martin Maillard, bourgeois drappier de Charmes (native of Gripport), 36

His late mother Alizon had told him how they lost many animals, and suspected him and his family, who hated them. After father's death 6 out of 7 cattle died. Father had wanted to kill them, had called them all witches. As ward of her uncle Villemin Masson was guarding horse which died suddenly, and he suspected Nicolas or his family. Also told how mother was sowing with other women, and had hair burned when lightning struck; later lost sight in one eye, which was generally suspected to be witchcraft on their part.

(20 May 1615)

(20) Colin Rembault, laboureur de Girecourt, 40 (native of Gripport)

When father Mengin Rembault was alive, 20 years earlier, told how he heard exchange between Nicolas and his wife in vines. Speaking of Didier Jacquat and his wife, she said 'ces mauvaises gens se sont prins a moy et nous ont menasséz de nous faire prendre disans que nous sommes sorcier et sorciere et que nous avons faict mourir leur bestail', to which he replied 'Il les fault laisser faire et dire s'ilz nous font prendre, nous en ferons prendre des autres'. Always suspected.

(21) Isabel femme du maire Gerard du Hault, de Vaudigny, 46

In youth at Gripport her father Demenge Masson suspected his wife of causing great losses of animals, and threatened to kill her. Did not remember any suspicion against him.

22 May 1615; interrogation

Said he was 72, native of Saintremimont, son of Claudon George and his wife Nicolle. Had married Isabel Bourguignon of Gripport about 50 years earlier, when they were both in service of grand prévôt Remy; marriage was because he had made her pregnant. Lived at Sermemont 5 years, then went to Gripport because his wife had expectations of property there and her relatives suggested he come. Asked if he had not quarrelled with his brother-in-law Didier and Husson, said they were 'de sy gros propos' that they called his wife witch, but not him. Added that they were 'gens de mauvaise langue'; his wife had not lived with them for 20 years, and they gave her reputation in hope of getting her 'peu de bien'.

After hesitation said he was prisoner because of accusation by Bietrix, which he denied. Asked what a witch was, said he knew nothing about it, then said a witch was 'une personne qui a renoncé dieu son createur et s'a donné au diable, font mourir des personnes et du bestail et font plusieurs autres maux'. If anyone had called him witch, it had been when there were no witnesses.

(23 May 1615)

Asked why he had not taken brother-in-law Husson to court if he called his wife witch, said he did not have the means, and did not want to proceed against relative. Continued to insist on his innocence, saying depositions had been frivolous. Finally was warned that in view of evidence against him he was sure to be tortured, and urged to make confession and spare himself this.

25 May 1615; confrontations

In reply to Françoise veuve Demenge Maillard said he might well have told her husband he would repent, but this had been with good intentions, since the herd of Gripport was worth more to herdsman than that of Socourt.

In reply to Jean Moyne said his brother-in-law Husson had grievance against him because he had wanted his share of house. Might have said to Jean, speaking of witches, 'qu'il ne pensoit qu'il en fut'. As for Jean Aulbry, his children were 'boussais' or 'pousifs', while poverty was due to bad management.

Pentecoste femme Estienne Moyne added story that she refused to hang his lard in her chimney, having already promised place to Martin Moine, but all his lard was eaten 'par les Lotz et ratz'.

He said of father of Jacquat Jacquat that he never possessed animals to value of a thousand francs. At end of confrontations for the day said it was all lies, and that witnesses were 'tous ferus d'un mesme poinct'.

(26 May 1615)

Confrontations completed; no reproaches, but continued to deny all charges.

27 May 1615; interrogation

In morning (about 11) said he wanted to speak to prévôt, who went to prison. Encouraged him to make confession, but then saw he had 'tombé en extase et devenu noire, cause que nous avons jugé que le diable l'occupoit et empeschoit de parler'. Called sergent to give him a shaking, and he recovered himself, but would only speak about his personal affairs. Finally left with further remonstrances.

At hour of Vespers was called again, and he now said he wanted to save his soul, given his age, and that he freely confessed he was a witch. 16 years earlier had been cutting wood when great black man appeared to him and said he had many troubles, offering to help him. Name was Belsebut; told him many wished him ill, but he would avenge and defend him. Gave him 'sacquet' of powder with which to avenge himself, by throwing it on people or animals.

Tried it out on a cow which died - did not know whose it was. Since he hated his neighbour Didier Jacquat, he then used it to kill 2 of his horses. Said he had been to sabat several times, and saw Bietrix and Didelon there. Had been several others there, but did not know their identity.

28 May 1615; interrogation

Confirmed previous confession, but claimed he had not committed any other maléfices.

29 May 1615; PG des Vosges asks for question ordinaire et extraordinaire, so that he can be questioned more fully about misdeeds and accomplices.

1 June 1615; Change de Nancy approves

2 June 1615; interrogation under torture

Given thumbscrews, was asked about sabbat. Said others had danced, but he had never been a dancer, and looked after the horses. Suggested he was not feeling much pain, so screws were tightened; cried out that he had not killed any people, but a cow and some horses. Said he had killed mare belonging to maire Claudon Regnauldin, but nothing else.

Now given thumbscrews on toes, said that master of Bietrix and Didelon was called Percy, and was also at sabat. Kept saying he knew nothing else, and they would make him tell lies. Finally admitted killed mare belonging to Husson Aulbry, and others belonging to François Noirchamps and Demenge Coinat.

Racked and asked about charges of harm to people, being told it was impossible he was not guilty of some of the other charges. Would not confess more, and surgeon said he could be given another half-turn. Still said those who testified against him were mistaken, but he forgave them. Was then decided by judges and surgeon that he had endured enough torture.

After release begged them to do no harm to his son Claudon, saying he was 'un bon enfant'.

Confirmed confessions later same day.

3 June 1615; interrogation

Confirmed earlier confessions, but would add nothing.

3 June 1615; PG des Vosges asks for death sentence

5 June 1615; Change de Nancy approves

6 June 1615; formal sentence from court at Charmes