

B 4488: Witch 081A, Jean Coinsse de Rolbes

22 September 1581; informations preparatoires, taken by Claude Bossuet prévôt de Châtenois. Charge of raping Ysabel fille François Cugin of Ravigny previous May, as she was guarding horses in field. Also common fame as a witch.

(1) Mengin Remy, 40+

3 years earlier had minor quarrel. At Easter was given small 'torteau' of white bread, as traditional gift to herdsman of cattle; feared to eat this in case he had poisoned or bewitched it. Gave it to two dogs, which died in agony two or three days later. General reputation - much feared.

(2) Remy Boyon, 32, and 5 other witnesses aged 20-30

General belief that he was 'un homme fort malin' and a witch. Stories about death of three horses belonging to first husband of one of witnesses. Also claim (by Bayon and his wife Laurence) 'et le craint tellement qu'il a bien peur de le fascher, lui faisant tous les plaisirs qu'il peut.' Belief that he had killed another horse one morning, touching it on back as he left stable after a quarrel.

(23 September)

(3) Remy Beurrard, 40

Common reputation and fear. 10 years earlier had been levying taxes, and charged him 6 gros, followed by threat (damage here). A few days later had his horses in field, and after Jean had been near them one died rapidly on the spot, another after being taken home sick. Thought he was at least 'empoisonneur'. Had heard story by witness (1) about bread, and that about 3 horses in (2).

(4) Catherine veuve Bertremin Houbellot, 30

Reputation. Also story about woman at sabbat - ? his mother - damage here.

(5) Eloyse Husson, 40

General reputation and fear. 6 years earlier Helleny fille Didier Thomas was servant in house of Mengin Coinsse, father of accused; he and his wife went out nightly to steal 'chenebrux', and she revealed this. he became very hostile, and gave her sickness from which she soon died - as Helleny told witness several times.

(6) Gerard Husson, 60

General reputation.

(7) Didier fils du maire Thierry, 25

General reputation. Some 7 or 8 years earlier his father had found Jean's wife and another woman with hatchets in wood, and confiscated these on behalf of his master M. de Bassompierre. When he met Jean latter told him 'qu'il se donne garde

de luy qu'il ne luy advient quelque chose'; soon after witness went to bed in good health, only to wake and find his arms and legs swollen and as if 'en pourriture', so that he became crippled, and was so for life. When he met accused latter would ask him how he did, and when he replied 'des fois bien, l'autre mal' he said 'ho ha je le scay bien.'

(8) Didier Elophe, 50

General reputation. 6 years earlier he had him fined for taking hay from meadow, for which 'il luy tenoit hayne'; immediately afterwards had an ox sick, which died after a week. Story about herdsman's dogs. 8 years earlier accused had been quarrelling with his own mother; she told him 'qu'il l'avoit engenachée' (she had been ill for a long time), to which he replied 'que le diable l'avoit fottu'.

(9) Demenge Regnauld, 50

General reputation.

(10) William Thomas, 50

General reputation. Had quarrelled with him 15 or 16 years earlier, threatened he would repent, later found 2 horses dead. Also story about mother as told by (8).

(11) Thierry Willaume, maire pour M de Bassompierre, 56

Same story as son about 'serpe' he had taken in woods - slightly clearer version. Jean found son with 'serpe', and asked him if it was any good, then wife took it from him. Also story about Remy Bourrard and horses.

(12) Basquotte femme Nicolas Hacquenel, 33

General reputation. Believed he had killed her first husband Gerard Poullier, after being forced to make reparation for spoiling some wheat, which made him very hostile. Some 6 years earlier had approached them outside house and tried to kiss her - she pushed him away. When they went into the house they became violently ill, and her husband died after being 'en grande langueur' from St Jean to St Remy. She recovered, despite being very ill for more than 15 days. Present husband had quarrel with him one Good Friday, then took horse out of stable - he came by and struck it on the back, then it died 8 days later, so they thought he was cause.

(13) Helleny veuve Mengenot Jean Martin, 50

General reputation. 6 years earlier had been telling mother furiously that she was a witch, and that devil had copulated with her. Had also heard his sister Alix, wife of Symmonel, tell him he was a witch and had made her children ill, to which he merely replied no.

(14) François Pierot, 30

General reputation. 8 years earlier had refused to cart some wheat for him, then one of his horses died - thought this had been in revenge for his refusal.

(15) Laurence femme Remy Boyon, 36

General reputation. Story of how 12 years earlier she had caught him stealing hay from first husband Grand Thiery Jandel; he said that if she took action she would repent, and fine horse belonging to her marriage portion died next day. Husband believed he had already killed 3 of his own horses.

(16) Alix femme Symon Jean Richard, 30

Was sister of accused, agreed he had a very bad reputation, 'et elle mesme en a la suspicion'; he hated her and her husband for no good reason, and previous year she had told him 'qu'il avoit consulté et fait malade un sien enfant', which was very ill for 13 weeks - all he did was deny this charge. Also story about his accusing their mother of being a witch.

(17) Barbe Mathis femme Pieron Pollut and 9 others - general reputation only.

(18) Ysabel fille François Cusin de Savigny, 12

Described attempted rape; he threw her down and put finger in her vagina, but was driven off when other girls responded to her cries. Fled across fields keeping low so as to avoid being seen. She had been ill for a week afterwards and unable to work.

(? date) Interrogation

Said he was about 40, native of village, married for 14 years. Generally denied charges, although he admitted that he had taken things from his parents' house. Asked about killing animals, replied 'Non, qu'il n'use de tel art.' Also seemed to deny attempted rape - document almost illegible here.

Seems to have begged to be released, on promises of good behaviour, and on basis that if anyone else fell ill in his house he could be convicted.

4 October: prévôt orders that he be returned to prison for case to be completed.

10 October 1581; confrontations

(1) Mengin Remy, laboureur.

Accused said he knew him well as native of Rolbes, 'mais il n'est son amys', and that they had quarrelled. Said that he had already had reparation before justice for an insult from Mengin, and that latter had been present at death of a man. Mengin said these reproaches were 'vaines et abusives', accused that 'il seroit bien marry qu'il fut tel qu'il le declare en sadite deposition.'

(2) group of witnesses - only reproached Nicolas Hacquenel, whom he believed bore him a grudge after he had him fined for taking some wheat.

(3) Remy Bourrard, laboureur

Knew him well - resident for 20 years. 11 years earlier had obtained formal reparation from Remy's first wife who called him 'genot'. Thought he might have 'quelque inimitié contre luy, et ainsi sondite deposition pourroit estre contre luy' - witness denied this.

(4) Catherine veuve Bertremin Houbellot

(5) Aloyse Husson

(6) Didier fils Thierry Villaume

No reproaches

(7) Didier Elophe - some minor disputes over land.

(8) Villemin Thomas maire.

Was native of village and neighbour. Did not hold him to be 'homme de bien'. Had been found misusing rights in seigneurial woods, and horses had damaged field of accused.

(9) Thierry Villaume

Claimed he had taken father's side in quarrel with witness 15 years earlier, and he might accordingly wish him ill.

(10) Laurence femme Remy Boyon

She had married cousin of his wife. During her previous marriage had discovered she was selling grain from household without husband's knowledge, and because of 'alliance' with other he had revealed this.

(11) Ysabel fille feu François Cusin

Was chambrière of Mengin Remy that year - thought she was 'une mauvaise garce' to make such a charge against him. Did admit having approached her in field, but claimed he had not touched her or had such intention.

Two girls who had run to help Ysabel then produced; had not actually seen assailant, merely heard her crying out, then found her in distressed state.

15 October 1581: prévôt asked for torture

20 October 1581: Change de Nancy agrees (signed by Remy)

23 October: interrogation under torture (in castle at Châtenois)

At outset said it was a false accusation, then denied all charges when racked. When given another turn cried 'mon dieu je suis mort, le grand tort que vous me faites'. The had some water poured into mouth. Finally asked to be put down, and agreed he might have borne some ill-will over 6 gros he was charged, but had not killed horses.

Racked again, called out 'misericorde, ayez pitié de moy, mon dieu ne me laissez pas je suis a vous et non au diable.' Then said they were killing him and breaking his limbs. Still denied rape of Ysabel - at this point seemed to lose consciousness, so torture was brought to an end.

6 November 1581: long supplication (by P-G des Vosges at Mirecourt, Martin ?), saying that denials must be blamed on 'la force et vigueur de son corps, ou aultres moyens illicites.' His crimes are manifest, 'aultrement il faudroit inferer que tous les temons ouys aux informations preparatoires sont meschants' - yet he had only reproached a few, and that very lightly.

Suggests 'que le diable suggere souvent a telles gens des billets plains de caracteres ou drogues pour les rendre impassibles au tourment ou ne point confesser la verité.' Wants all body hair shaved off, then torture by most expert executioner of Lorraine in presence of several 'gens de justice' and 'quelques officiers entendus'.

17 November 1581: Change de Nancy declares he is not sufficiently convicted, and orders renvoi jusqu'à rappel, but P-G can arrange further investigation.

2 July 1581: single sheet on which Jean Coinsse recognizes that charges are being brought, but claims that case 'se trouvera (a correction) abusive et faite a [] de Mengin Remy de Rolbe son ennemy capital, pour luy faire convenir (?) le peu de bien qu'il peult avoir.' He asks for details to be given to him so that he can defend himself. P-G agrees that he should be allowed to enter his justifications.