

B 8678 no 1; witch 168, Laurence femme Nicolas Viney, du Faing (Ste Marguerite)

25 July 1596; procureur for Chapter has been informed that Didier fils Didier Viney had been telling other children of village, on several occasions, how his grandmother Laurence had taken him to sabat. Was therefore brought before Jean de Guerre, lieutenant du maire at St Dié, and questioned.

Said he was about 12. 2 years earlier was living in house of grandparents with his father, mother and brother. Other adults were all at market, and around midday Laurence 'le print par les deux bras, estant lors au milieu de la cuisine et le jecta sur ses espauls et dict hault de par le diable, n'a aucunement retenu, ce qu'elle peut lors dire ne faire, et aussy tost ces parolles dictes, elle commença a monster a mont le gresmet et sortit par le tuyau de la cheminée au dessus duquel il y avoit une beste noire en forme d'une chievre, sur laquelle monta sadite grandmere et aussy tost ceste beste les porta viste comme le vent, dans un grand bois au hault d'une montagne ne scauroit toutesfois dire en quel endroit se pouvoit estre et en un certain endroit ceste beste noire les mit en bas, la ou il y avoit un grand feu et six a sept femmes a l'entour qui faisoient cuire des potz, avec ces femmes estoit un grand noire homme avec une cottle grise et luy dit sadite grand mere, que c'estoit son maitre, et s'appelloit Mre Navel.'

Asked if she said anything to him, said she wanted him to take Navel for master and renounce God, but he refused. Navel said 'qu'il failloit faire perdre les bledz des riches et garder ceulx des pauvres', after which the women beat stream with white sticks and it began to rain, but he saw no hail. After this the women, accompanied by three male minstrels (drum, flute, and 'bombarde') sat on ground by fire and had banquet. Meat he thought was goat, with bread, but no salt; did not eat meat because it tasted bad. Finally danced to sound of instruments, then everyone disappeared and he and grandmother had to make their way home; did not know way, but they passed by Viel Marché. Away from home for about an hour in all.

Had been on 2 subsequent occasions, in similar fashion. Grandmother had told him off severely when she found he was telling other children, and told him to say it was all untrue - if he did this he would not be beaten. Asked if she had any powder, said she carried small box of black powder around with her, but did not know what she did with it. Had heard recently that she had killed Colin Humbert's cow.

Sent to house of 'doyen ordinaire' to be kept in safety.

25 July 1596; informations preparatoires

(1) Jean le Clerc, de Ste Marguerite, 40

2 years earlier she had been working for him during haymaking; great cloud came up over 'montagne de Cambas' (presumably Kemberg), so they were raking hay into stacks, but she was leaning on fork looking thoughtful. Wife told her to hurry up and work, saying 'qu'est cé qu'elle faisoit la ainsy pensif et qu'elle pensoit peut estre estre sur Cambas faire de la gresle'. She was angry and told her she would repent, and immediately she fell ill, having to be helped back home. Became worse, and asked to take communion, saying she saw she must die. He remembered threats, and sent maid to ask Laurence to come to house on pretext of working flax. She said she knew why they really wanted her, and that they would soon come for her. Finally came and sat next to sick woman, telling her it would be nothing, put hand on forehead and muttered something they could not hear. Pain immediately ceased and she recovered - believed this had all been her doing, reputation 20 years.

2 years earlier at harvest time had contracted with her husband and son to reap field for him; she came to help, although she had been helping with plague victims, and he turned her away angrily. She said he did not want to let her reap, but would gain nothing; same day an ox worth 12 ecus sickened and died in 2 days, which he suspected was her doing. Same day his maid, who had quarrelled with her, fell ill for 9 months, and had always claimed this was her doing.

(2) Jennon femme du precedent, 25

Same story as husband about illness; when she came said she was 'frappée d'un mauvais aire, qu'elle savoit bien le remede pour la guerir, et qu'on avoit bien fait de l'envoyer querir'. Crossed her forehead 5 times with thumb, then murmured something, and said she would perform a 'neuvaine'.

(3) Benite femme Mengeon Henriat, 28

5 years earlier she came into house as she was putting baby aged 6 months in cradle, and 'commença a festoyer l'enfant qui estoit alors le plus gentille selon l'age'. Immediately became ill and died 5 days later; suspected she had been cause of this. Long reputation.

(4) Mengeon Henryat, 30

Reputation more than 10 years. Had lost several beasts, but had not quarrelled with Laurence, so did not suspect her. Every time he had asked her to cure sick animals they had recovered.

(5) Dediere femme Demenge Simoney, de Ste Marguerite, 45

Reputation several years.

(6) Colin Humbert Guidot, 28

2 years earlier had quarrel with her and husband, and she threatened he would repent. Immediately afterwards a mare became ill, with either legs or neck completely stiff, and finally had to be put down. A fine foal died suddenly in stable. Had another quarrel when her husband reported him to chapter (falsely) for cutting wood, and he lost an ox worth 8 ecus. At last St Martin a fine cow died suddenly, when they were angry because he had rented their son a room in his house. Believed she had caused all this - common repute more than 10 years.

(7) Pierratte fille Henry Colas, residant vers Anould, 18

2 years before she had been servant to Jean le Clerc, and when Laurence was reaping she complained because she did not bring enough to eat. Witness replied that she should complain to master and mistress, since she was only servant, to which she said 'qu'elle l'auroit en quel sorte que ce fut'. Immediately became ill, fainting in field for an hour. Remained ill for 6 months, and was trying pilgrimages when she met Laurence on way to Clefcy, who asked if she was still ill. Told her it had happened when she threatened her, to which she replied it was a fever, and she would soon recover if she had patience. In fact took another 6 months, and had always suspected her; general reputation.

(8) Claudon Valentin Flandrey, 40

Had cured his animals when he called her; up to now had not suspected her, despite common reputation.

(9) Claudon le Clerc, 35

10 years earlier had taken proceedings against her son for debt, and as he and officer went to house her husband came out with 'holbe' in hand, threatening to kill him, and saying he had wanted to do so for 7 years. Was later imprisoned at St Dié for this, and he and Laurence tried to have witness arrested too, but failed; next week he lost 3 cows, and following week 5 pigs. Had always suspected her over this; reputation 15 years.

(10) Vincent Henriat, 50

No personal suspicion; reputation 12 years.

(11) Colas Henriat, 40

2 years earlier had some animals ill, which she had healed. Did not know if she had caused this, and had no quarrel with her; general reputation.

(12) Humbert Guidot, 60

18 months earlier she had come to house asking to buy milk, but wife refused because they only had enough for themselves. She left grumbling angrily, and 3 days later a cow died, over which he had always suspected her. Also suspected her over death of another cow after quarrel with her husband; it had passed by their house, and died in field. Reputation 10 years, and he had always tried to avoid quarrelling with her.

(13) Claudey Michiel Flandrey, 30

Had called her to see a sick heifer a year earlier, and she said it would die because 'une mauvaise personne avoit eu mauvaise fantaisie sur elle' - died immediately afterwards. Did not know if she had made it ill, since she spoke with such assurance; reputation 7 years.

(14) Marguitte femme Humbert Guidot, 50

Had refused her milk 4 or 5 years before, saying that she did not dare give it her because husband complained she had several milking cows, yet was making no profit. Went out angrily, banging the door, and they lost a fine cow, over which they always suspected her; general reputation. Previous Lent had lost another cow, as husband had deposed. In all had lost animals worth 100 ecus, and if she confessed she might know more about this.

(15) Claudatte femme Colin Guidot, 30

Similar deposition to husband.

(16) Marie femme Claudey Michiel Flandrey, 35

Similar deposition to husband - according to her she said person had looked at cow 'd'ung mauvais oeil'.

26 July 1596; interrogation

Said she was about 80; had been married about 44 years, had lived for 20 years at Ste Marguerite, and 18 at le Faing.

Said that when working for Jean le Clerc his wife said wife of Colas Andreu was a witch, and she replied she was descended from many good people, and she did her wrong. She replied that perhaps she had been to the devil with her, which was cause of quarrel. Denied having been to see her. Agreed that le Clerc had asked her to visit sick ox, but she sent husband, who reported that it was poisoned, and it died.

Asked if she healed animals, said she had healed more than 40 with a prayer (Delcambre 28), which she had learned from her father.

Asked about loss of animals by Colin Guidot, denied being cause, and said 'qu'il n'est pas a la science dudit Colin ny d'autres de monstrier et prouver qu'elle soit sorciere'. Added that she 'ne trouva jamais mauvaise rencontre', so asked if she had any 'bonne rencontre'; said yes, several times going to fields, was told 'qu'elle avoit beaucoup de mal, mais qu'elle preine patience et que Dieu l'ayderoit' - did not know if this was good angels or something else. Also told how she and husband saw figure in white coming down from mountain, which disappeared suddenly.

Agreed to diagnosis of witchcraft for cow of Claudey Michiel Flandrey; it could not stand and mouth was cold. Denied all other charges.

Confronted with Didier, who retold story of going to sabat, she insisted he lied like 'une schelme'. When he finished only said he lied, sitting with head bowed. Finally said that mother had told her that she had been so angry about what he said that she had risen three times in the night intending to strangle him.

27 July 1596; confrontations

Agreed that she had cured Jean le Clerc's wife with prayer taught by father which was to heal those affected by 'ung mauvais regard' given by another. Asked who could do this, said 'qu'ung enfant qui aura alaicté par trois mois de May venant a regarder une personne entre les deux yeulx le greve et le fait devenir aussy tost malade, et que n'estant promeu promptement ces maladies causeroient la mort.' Then wished to show she was good Christian by reciting prayer, which began with name of sick person; 'Jean ou Marguite, qui es gredee ou feine, dieu du ciel tu vueille reslargir, la Vierge Marie tu vueille pardonner de peche, ainsy bonnement qu'il est vray, que notre Seigneur a esté tiré a l'arbre de la Croix, par le jour de grand Vendredy, Au nom du pere, et du fils, et du benoist St Esprit.' To be said 3 times, followed by 5 paternosters and ave marias, and while saying prayer forehead to be crossed with right thumb. Asked how she knew what was wrong with her, said she did not, but when asked to treat someone she said this prayer, and if the illness was of this kind they recovered, otherwise not.

Le Clerc's wife was not confronted with her because she had gone into childbed previous evening. No reproaches to any witnesses, but denied all charges.

Confronted again with Didier, he repeated accusations. Insisted that no-one had told him what to say.

27 July 1596; procureur for Chapter asks for question ordinaire et extraordinaire

29 July 1596; Change de Nancy approves thumbscrews only, in view of her age.

31 July 1596; interrogation under torture

Given thumbscrews on hands and feet, she continued to deny charges. Threatened with greater torture, and reminded of accusation by grandson, she begged them not to torture her further, and started to confess. Mre Navel, who was black with claws instead of hands, had approached her with promises of making her rich and happy if she would renounce God. Claimed she had refused, and even when threatened again with torture said she had not renounced God. Did however admit taking grandson to sabat once, where there were 5 other women who were masked. Told to make hail and spoil crops, she objected that she would have great need, but others carried on. Cloud they raised was however dispersed by ringing of bells.

Finally admitted to renouncing God before going to sabat, and receiving black powder - but claimed she had thrown this in fire unused. Pressed on this point, then admitted killing a cat, after which having seen 'la force de ceste pouldre' she threw it on fire. Gave further description of sabat, following that of Didier.

At this point was lightly racked, and confessed to killing pig of Menegeon Henryat, because he accused her of killing his child, which she had not done. Had also killed cow of Humbert Guidot which passed by house, just by cursing it - master had told her she could kill animals without powder by cursing them in his name. Cursed ox of Colin Guidot, which died.

Now said that she had cursed wife of Jean le Clerc and thrown black powder on her; healed her with yellow powder in soup. When he asked for payment of debt used powder to kill a horse. 4 and 5 years earlier had also killed a cow and a heifer of his.

Asked how long she had been witch in that case, said it was 20 years. Seduced while living at St Marguerite, given 3 kinds of powder, black/kill, yellow & white/heal. Now gave list of those she had seen at sabat. Colas Colin and wife (both dead), and wife of Claudey Flandrey, of le Faing, widow of Jean Peu de Cuyr of Remomeix (already arrested as witch), Demenge Milan of Remomeix, Jean Colin Blaise of St Marguerite (already arrested), the sister of Claudey Flandrey's wife (now dead), and Agatte wife of Colas le Moictrier of le Faing. also called monsieur de Guise.

Another description of sabat. According to her Navel 'commença a dire qu'il failloit faire perdre les bleds et fruitz des champs, qu'il y avoit ung pot de terre, dans lequel il y avoit du froment, du seigle, de l'orge, des poix, des febves et de l'aveine, et qu'apres qu'elle et ses compaignes auroient battu l'eaue d'une fontaine joidante Il debvoit jeter en l'air tout ce qu'estoit dans ledit pot, et que tous les bledz et grains des champs seroient gastez, estantes lors prestes a fleurir, Mais elle prevenue, ayant grande compassion du malheur qu'arrivoit aux pauvres gens a cause de la cherté, en passant proche dudit pot, elle le renversa, et a ce moien ne furent les bleds gastés pour ceste fois; Combien qu'il fit quelque nuée'. Was well beaten by her master for doing this.

Said she had been to sabat more times than she could remember, but had only once helped to cause damage - a great wind some 15 years earlier. Later contradicted this by describing another occasion when she helped make hail. Added to those she had seen Humbert Guidot and his wife Margo of le Faing, Claudatte

widow of Michiel de la Hault Rue of le Vieux Marché (executed) and her daughter Jacquatte, and Marion wife of maire Demenge le Masson of St Dié.

Had been great number of persons, both men and women. from various mairies present, but could not identify others because of masks. Each group had their officers; Demenge Milan was their greatest master.

1 August 1596; interrogation

Confirmed earlier confessions. Repeated names of accomplices.

1 August 1596; procureur asks for death sentence

9 August 1596; Change de Nancy approves, subject to further repetition of confessions without any threat of torture.

12 August 1596; brief confirmation of earlier confessions

13 August 1596; sentence carried out