

B 8680 no 7; witch 177, Didier Pierrat de la Ruelle de Saulcy

9 August 1597; confronted with Mengeatte femme Claude Tendon (witch 175), who had accused him; maintained charges despite his denials.

Informations preparatoires are missing

16 August 1597; interrogation

Said he was laboureur aged about 45; had been married around 30 years, and always lived in father's house.

Admitted that Henry Bergier and others had called him witch, but did not have means to seek reparation.

Asked if he had not consulted Jean Colas Chenal and Dieudonné Alizey 2 years before, asking if he had not better flee before he was accused as a witch, said he did not know.

Asked if he had caused death of wife of Claudon Mariot in childbed, and had said that if Mariot had asked him to visit her he would have saved her and her child, he denied this.

Agreed he had quarrelled with Jacques Hugo over fishing rights, but denied threatening him or causing illness of 2 horses. Did agree he had offered to heal them for an ecu, and did so with prayers his father had taught him (Delcambre no 15 and no 3). Also knew a prayer for horses (Delcambre no 16), and claimed to know several others for various animals which it would take too long to say.

Denied killing Didier des Gouttes of St Lienard by witchcraft. Agreed he had punched son of Jean Claude Noel when he called him witch some 10 years earlier, but said he was not responsible for illness which saw him unable to eat properly for 2 years. Agreed he had advised his father to send a pilgrim to St Claude, saying this would be sure to cure him.

Denied having said he could charm an arquebus so that a hare would wait until it had fired.

Asked whether he had taken his daughter Marguitte to the sabbat on 3 or 4 occasions, was astonished, but finally said he had not, and he did not believe she had said such a thing. Was then assured she had, and would maintain it before him. He insisted he was a good Christian, but asked why his father had brought him into the world.

Asked if he had killed animals of Mengeon Jean Perry, denied this, adding 'pourquoy il a fait tant de bien sur la terre que s'il est sorcier qu'il puisse estre dampné et qu'on fasse bien tost la fin de luy'.

Asked about incident 3 years earlier when he was returning from St Marie with Mengeon maire Aulbry, and they were surprised by night near Wisembach, whereupon he said that if he had known he would have made something no bigger than an egg which would have lighted them for ten feet around. He denied this.

Also denied killing 2 horses of Dieudonné Tatay, or saying 7 or 8 years earlier to Claude Demenge Colin that he did ill to call him witch, and that for more than 7 years 'il taschoit de l'avoir'. Had not killed his animals.

Admitted that at last St Jacques at Mandray he had told Jean Girard Anthoine of le Souche that he and Claude Tendon would soon be arrested; rumour was going round at time.

Denied killing animals of Dieudonné Alixey, but agreed he had used prayers to heal pig belonging to Colas Laurent of Contramolin, which had been savaged by a wolf.

Denied causing losses to Jean Demenge Colin of Saulcy, or making remarks to Dieudonné Grand Didier about purchase of a meadow. Had wanted to lease a cow from Jean Didier Mathieu previous summer, but was not responsible for its death.

21 August 1597; confrontations

Agreed he had made threats to Colas fils Jean Claude Noel, but denied being cause of his illness. No reproaches, but no other admissions. Were at least 22 witnesses.

Said that if they enquired throughout prévôté of St Dié about people and animals he had healed by prayers he had recited they would find he had healed 'pour plus de son pesant d'or, et que nous debvrions bien y avoir esgard'. Reply was 'que ne croions nullement que ladite oraison ait ceste vertu que de guerir indifferemment toutes personnes et bestiaux qui sont malades, et qu'il les guerit plus tost par le moyen du diable qu'aultrement.' He responded 'que donc a la malheur son pere luy at il apprinse et que s'il est genot qu'on le fasse bruller.'

Was then confronted with his daughter Marguitte, who insisted that he had taken her to sabat, carrying her on his back with a broom under his arm while they flew out of chimney and to a mountain. Then gave description of sabat, where they ate poor meat and her father danced with the others, led by a black man. He then said that if this was true they should burn him alive, and that his daughter had been suborned.

24 August 1597; Change de Nancy approves question ordinaire et extraordinaire

26 August 1597; interrogation under torture

Withstood long session of questioning while given thumbscrews, rack, and tortillons, insisting he would be damned if he confessed to being a witch. Made some difficulty about renouncing devil, but finally did so. In the end was released, with warning of further torture next day.

27 August 1597; interrogation

Now made curious request that his case should be sent to the duke, and if it was found he had not been tortured enough he would confess his crimes and be put to death rather than endure more torture. Asked why he would not tell them now, said God would not allow it, and he was making a sufficient submission.

Told this was not enough, and he would be tortured further, then said there were many others in prison for same crime, and if any of them accused him he was content to be put to death.

In respect of his daughter, said she was in hands 'des scribes et des Pharisiens' and had been made to say things; asked to be allowed to speak to her himself. Did not want any of the judges to fetch her because they were all 'des docteurs et taschons de le faire damner', so asked that she be fetched by a townsman, and that he should speak to her uninterrupted.

This was allowed, and she then repeated her story, insisting that none of the officers had told her to say anything. He then said he saw he was damned, and would have to admit things he had never done.

Finally started to confess. Had been seduced 16 to 18 years earlier, when fishing one evening near St Lienard. Man in black called le petit diable appeared,

promising him means to catch as many fish as he liked; after some hesitation he renounced God. Gave him powder to kill men and animals, and to enable him to catch fish. Nets seemed to be full, but turned out to be nothing but stones, so he saw he had been tricked.

Said he had used the powder on so many people and animals he could not remember. Included an ox belonging to his 'serorge' Jean Colin of Raves, who would not allow him to buy head of a cow he had killed on credit, and cow of Jean Didier Mathieu which he would not lease to him. Asked not to be questioned further, saying he had confessed enough to deserve death, which he would endure patiently.

Was told he could not be forgiven his maléfices without confessing them all, and then made further series of admissions. Had killed wife of Claude Mariot at suggestion of his master after quarrel, and pig of Dieudonné Alzey, who called him witch.

Agreed he had taken daughter to sabat; she had been troublesome child who was always crying, and one day he wished her to the devil. 2 years later his master said he had given her to him, and persuaded him to take her to sabat as she had described, where they eventually got her to renounce God. Le petit diable pinched her forehead, then took her aside and he did not know what happened (but implication is clear enough). Said she was no more than 8 or 9, and he did not know if she had committed any maléfices.

Those he had seen at sabat were Colas François of Sarrux, Didier fils Gros Didier de Vainchieres, the late mother of Mengeon Renardin and his wife, both of Contramolin, and the wife of Henry Colas Claude of the same village. Also Colin le maire d'Anoulzey, widow of Didier Babey of le Chasnoy, Colas Noel of Ruxey de Saulcy, and Marguitta femme Jean Bonipaire of Saulcy.

Also said he had taken his eldest child Mengel (now 15 or 16) to sabat some 6 years earlier, when he had renounced God, but did not know if he had received any powder or committed any maléfices (this was all quite unprompted by any question). Suggested that both children should be reconfirmed.

Said he had made pact with his master for 2 hares every year, one in May and other in autumn, to go only 4 times a year to sabat and not be obliged to make storms. Gave description of various sabbats in conventional terms, and named his accomplices again.

Said his master had visited him and urged him not to confess. Had been in his ear during torture, so that he did not feel the pain, and would have escaped if they had not begun again that day; he saw now that justice was far stronger than the devil.

30 August 1597; confirmed previous confessions, and asked to see a good confessor.

1 September 1597; interrogation

On news that he now wanted to withdraw all his confessions he was questioned again. Said he was willing to be burned, but wanted to save his soul, and he was not a witch.

4 September 1597; death sentence from Change de Nancy, saying that no notice should be taken of his retraction.

Witch 177, Didier Pierrat 4

9 September 1597; Jean Didier Mathieu, Claudon Malriot, and Dieudonnee Alzey were read his confessions, and agreed they had suffered losses in the fashion described there.

23 September 1597; sentence carried out