

B 8700 no 2; witch 237, Demenge Masson de Vacqueville

13 June 1606; prévôt and gens de justice of St Dié have been informed by procureur of bishop of Verdun at Moyenmoutier of arrest of two boys, one from seigneurie of Moyenmoutier, the other vagabond, who had accused one another of being witches and attending sabbat. Vagabond is subject to ducal justice, so has been taken to St Dié and interrogated.

Said he was Demenge Masson, aged 10 by the account of his mother, who was still alive, native of Veney near Vacqueville. Father had been killed 3 years earlier while breaking stones in quarry by rock which fell on his head. Had mostly been with his mother, who lived by day labour, but previous year had gone off begging with an aunt. Had then spent a year at Gelacourt keeping sheep for Demenge Mallé.

Last Easter day, about 10 in morning, was guarding sheep as normal with his companion Pieron, when they saw man in black on black horse approaching. Thought it was curé, who had caught them swearing a few days before, coming to punish them. Started to run away, but he told them it was 'une bonne aventure', not the curé, and that maitre Pairsin had come to see them. Said that if they would believe in him he would give them fine clothes so that they would be 'bien brave comme luy'. Did seem very well dressed.

Persuaded them to renounce God, and pinched them on forehead, then told them to take sheep back to village and meet him again later. Did meet them after dinner, put them on his horse with Pieron in front and Demenge behind holding him round body, after which they were carried off at great speed through the air. More than 40 people awaiting them, old and young women and children, some still in cradle.

Pairsin sat in red chair, told them all to go and wash faces, then each of them had to circle around him holding a black candle, before kissing his arse through a hole in the chair. Passed candle from one to another; it seemed to be of leather, and stank strangely, as did Pairsin. Everyone did this except Pieron, who hid behind others, and the cooks named Jean fait le feu and Colas de la cuisine.

Then made to sit down, and Colas de la cuisine gave them all two small birds, with 4 for their master - unsalted, and had little taste. Looked at master, and saw that he had 'deux cornes moyennes, que son visage estoit entierement noir fors les levres de la bouche qu'estoient un peu blanchettes, des yeux gros au possible et espouvantable aussy tous noirs sans aulcune blancheur, avoit de plus le né fort laid gros et crochu, au bout duquel y avoit trois poinctes qui avançoient fort, et regardant plus bas vit qu'il avoit les jambes toutes poilleuses, comme ont les chevaulx, et les pieds aussy de mesme, sauf qu'il les avoit fendus au milieu, disant n'avoir trouvé en luy rien plus hideux ny contrefaict que le né.'

Then danced to sound of bombarde and flute played by the two cooks. Pairsin led dance with a big woman also in black. He and Pieron were given two girls a little older than them and 'des plus belles de la compagnie' as partners, since they were newcomers. Danced back to back, with 'saults estrange' which Pairsin made them perform one after another. Master himself sometimes jumped with his feet above his head, or went to play bombarde, sending cooks to join dance, where they performed somersaults with hands on ground and feet on air (gave demonstration at this point).

At this point judges suggested he was not telling truth, but rather 'fables et mensonges' - he insisted it was the truth.

Said that cooks had plucked some more birds - including 'doictras et masenges' - and put them to cook during dance; they ate these afterwards. Also

unsalted, and when he went back to master's house he ate too much salt, then had difficulty quenching thirst. Suddenly everyone disappeared, and they were left with their master, who took them back on his horse. Gave them birds' nests, saying that they should tell masters they had been seeking these in the woods if they needed to explain long absence.

Had only been to sabbat on one other occasion, about 2 weeks later; this time Pairsin was dressed in grey and rode a grey horse. Found him crying because he had been beaten by his master for losing one of his sheep. Told him he would give him something to kill 4 of them, and carried him off again on his horse. Gave him powder and a large black pin; to kill sheep was to prick back with pin, then put powder on same spot. Used this to kill 2 sheep which were always lagging and getting lost - they jumped around violently and died as if rabid. Killed two more next day, thinking of previous occasion when master had beaten him. Told him that first 2 had been taken by wolf, second 2 by carters who passed frequently and had fierce dogs.

Were far fewer people present at second sabbat. After taking them back Pairsin gave them small baguettes to make hail, by beating first water they found three times in name of the devil - tried this and produced hailstones the size of nuts.

Asked if he had committed any other maléfices, said he had not. On second visit to sabbat had a St Humbert in leather in his pocket, which Pairsin took and threw away. Had told them that if their masters beat them they should call on him, and he would make hail fall to destroy their crops - since they were not beaten this had not happened. Frightened lest he be found out over death of sheep, had run away with Pieron to Moyenmoustier, where for 12 days he had kept cattle for Claudon Josel.

Pairsin had appeared to him one last time at Moyenmoustier, dressed in black but without a horse. Told him his companion was to be arrested because he had killed a foal; he should say nothing, and if Pieron accused him should strike him, as he had tried to do. Aske him if he had brought the clothes he promised, he said he had not, so he saw he had been tricked and he was 'un bordou et un abuseur'.

Admitted he knew he had done wrong to renounce God; had been under persuasion of Pairsin, who promised him fine clothes, also threatened to beat him with an iron chain, and said he had a hole in the ground ready to bury him in. Said he was 'fort déplaisant et repentant'.

23 June 1606; interrogation

Repeated earlier confessions. Said he knew it was Easter day, because they had eaten no meat for long time before, ate a lot that day and continued to eat meat thereafter. Pairsin had promised to take them somewhere where they would eat cherries and he would give them money.

Added to description of sabbat that Pairsin had pushed a small pin into their shoulders, which he did not feel at all. Candle gave off blue flame. Said that one of the women present gave birth to a child, which Pairsin took off; when he gave it back to her it seemed bigger. Was told that Pieron had said the child was cut into pieces and cooked in a pot, after which they all ate it; he said that he had seen nothing of this, and Pieron was a liar if he said such things.

Had been given purse which seemed full of money, but turned out to be animal dung.

Asked if he had seen master since he had been in house of prévôt, said he had been praying to God night and morning, and taking holy water from church

every day. Had not seen him, and no longer feared him. Added that he remembered that on day of temptation he had not prayed to God or made sign of cross. Asked to be rebaptised, saying he would do all he was told and would behave better than in the past.

27 June 1606; interrogation

Questioned about great variations between his confessions and those of Pieron. Insisted that he had told the truth, and pointed out that Pieron had said his father and mother had been burned, whereas as he had explained his mother was still alive, and father had been killed by falling stone in quarry.

1 July 1606; C.M. Rémy asks that he be whipped, then placed in a monastery to learn duties of a good Christian. If there is evidence he has continued to follow the devil he will be liable to greater punishment when he has reached suitable age. Change de Nancy recommends that he be put to death.

March 1607 (?)

Rémy points out that after trial duke had been made aware of the case, and decided with usual mercifulness to suspend the sentence until he had taken a personal decision. Since then boy had remained in house of prévôt at St Dié, and shown himself 'fort adonné à la devotion et pieté'. Costs were becoming heavy, so he begged duke to come to a final decision.

23 July 1607

In response to further complaint from prévôt, who declares that there has been an obvious danger to all his family and household from the presence of the 'petit garçon sorcier', while costs are heavy and he fears receveur at St Dié will refuse to pay them, Rémy states that he has been using all his personal powers to get a decision from the duke or his council, but so far without success.

23 March 1608

Ducal order that boy be released and returned to care of his mother in village near Vacqueville in bishopric of Metz. Notes that prévôt has been bringing him up among his own children, and has seen no sign that he has continued with any kind of witchcraft. Local curé to be warned to keep a close eye on him for any sign of trouble.

This is followed by further note from Jean Lamance, the prévôt, that even after order was given the duke was still unwilling to put it into effect - then he died. It was only when Lamance was in Nancy on business that he finally obtained the document from the clerk of M. Maimbourg on 26 August 1608. Fears that because of discrepancy in dates he would have difficulty over costs during interval have turned out to be correct; asks for action over this. Again protests about danger he has run having boy in his house, from which only grace of God has preserved him.

20 November 1608; note from curé at Wacqueviller (G. Fabry) that boy has been returned to his mother, and that he has asked that he be sent often to be catechized.