

Witch 277A, Catherine Ancel 1

Witch 277A; B 8713 no 1, Catherine veuve Didier Ancel, de Benifosse

21 March 1614; informations preparatoires

Taken at request of substitut for PG de Lorraine at St Dié.

(1) Demenge Alix, 60

Reputation since she came on marriage 20 years earlier; mother executed as witch at Lusse. About 10 year earlier one of his lambs had got into her house by mistake on return from fields, and when his wife went to look for it found her wishing it to the devil. When she got it home it started to turn round and foam at the mouth, then died on the spot, so they believed she was cause. Later she came to house to borrow some grain, and she saw a hen had just laid - said they had plenty of eggs, but her own hens would not lay. A few days later his wife told him she was astonished that hens had stopped laying, which made him remember her words and suggest she might be responsible - hens sometimes seemed frightened, going into chimney and elsewhere. Having also lost many animals, he and several others of the village resolved to seek out prévôt and ask for her arrest. Her late husband heard of this and went to see him, and when he sat down by fire the hens started to behave wildly again. Witness suggested that this was evidence of his wife's witchcraft, but her husband begged him not to proceed, promising to talk to her and ensure that she gave no more cause of discontent. Touched his hands as he said this, and finally he agreed to withdraw; lost a horse and a cow after this, but did not know if she was cause.

(2) Colas Jean Mourel, 18

When he was 12 his late mother had a fine heifer; one day Catherine asked if it was theirs, and next morning it was ill, dying the same night. This made them believe she was cause, in view of reputation. Later his sister had dispute with her, during which she accused her of killing the heifer; said it had died on 'jour des chandelles', to which she replied it had been the next day.

(3) Marie femme Jean Ancel, 36

Long reputation. About 12 years earlier she and her husband were living in house of Didier Ancel, her father-in-law, and while husband was away Catherine took some of their hay. It was very dear at the time, and witness complained, saying they needed it for their own animals. Quarrel ensued, although no threats, and next day a cow sickened; was unable to stand unaided, and died after 3 weeks despite all efforts to save it. Around same time found a lamb dead in the morning, and she suspected she had been cause of losses, although could not affirm it for certain. A few days earlier had told witness that she had been accused by a mairesse of village of Robache, convicted of witchcraft, but she had later discharged her, and that she had obtained a formal document stating this. Still lived with her, but had seen no other harm in her.

(4) Jean Ancel, 40

Long reputation. His late father had told him he regretted having taken her from where she was to marry her. Knew of wife's suspicions, but could not say if she was cause of losses.

(5) Margueritte femme Demenge Colin Jacquemin, 70

Already had bad reputation before she came to village, but had no personal suspicion or quarrel to relate. 2 or 3 days earlier had told her about accusation and discharge at Robache.

(6) Didier Colas Moirel, 26

Some 15 years earlier his late father and Catherine's husband had divided a garden, but she reserved right to collect some leeks she had sown on wrong side. When season came to harvest these mother of witness asked her to take them so she could sow ground herself, but she was angry because she wanted to keep them for seed. Finally took them up, and later his mother became ill, dying after 3 months; was always referring to the patch of garden, saying that if God did not help her it would cost her dear, so believed she 'avoit mauvaise fantaisie et opinion contre icelle Catherine'.

(7) Jean Vincent Alix, 34

Already suspected before she came to village; had no personal suspicion, but his father had greatly feared her. Had told witness that one day as he returned from Frapelle he was passing outside her house, and started to think of losses of animals of which he suspected her; stated his suspicions out loud, adding that if she came out he would give her a good beating - she heard this but made no reply. Some 12 years earlier had come to house asking to borrow a tub for washing, but was told they were busy and could not lend her one. She replied 'qu'il estoit assez descombré, mais que ce n'estoit pas pour elle'. That night or the next a fine heifer died in the stable, having seemed perfectly well before, and he and his father suspected this was her doing, although they could not affirm it for certain.

(8) Demenge Colas Mourel, 32

Had heard that her mother had been burned at Lusse, having accused her then discharged her, and that she had a document to this effect. Then told story about garden and leeks, as by his brother (witness 6), followed by mother's death. She was ill for 14 weeks, and for last 6 could move nothing but her tongue. Previously Wednesday had been present when she said she intended to give all her property to Jean Ancel; she had no child herself by her late husband.

(27 March 1614)

(9) Denize femme Colas Malgendre, de Neufviller, 50

Long reputation. Some 12 years earlier had passed her house on way home from market at St Dié, and she asked witness for some hay. Told her she had none left, to which she replied that she knew well she still had enough, at which she invited her to visit house and take any she found. At time she was keeping 7 cows, and next day (Wednesday) the cream on their milk turned, so she made no profit

from it, and could only make cheese. Returned to original state after Sunday, so suspected it had been her doing, although she could not be sure.

(2 April 1614)

(10) Bastienne veuve Jean Demenge Moirel, de Remommeix, 40

Had known her 16 years earlier when living at Benifosse, and she was already reputed a witch. 14 years before they had leased animals from lieutenant at St Dié, and a young bullock worth 6 écus suddenly became ill. Husband wanted her to fetch Catherine, whom he suspected; she objected, but finally agreed to go and ask her. She did come to see it, and said it did not want to die, giving it salt to lick, after which it slowly began eating again and recovered. After this husband criticized her for unwillingness to fetch Catherine; when she said one should not think ill of anyone, and that they did not know she was cause, he insisted that she was a witch, as recovery of animal showed. Had gone to nurse Margueritte femme Colas Mourel during last illness, which she heard her say she suspected had been caused by Catherine because of dispute over garden.

(11) Beniste fille Claudon Grand Ferry, de Rememont, 25

Some 7 years earlier had been servant in Catherine's house, where she stayed for 2 years. Had seen no harm in her, although several had tried to dissuade them when her mother took her there, alleging her reputation. At end of time decided to enter service of Jean Ancel, stepson of accused, at which Catherine told her she might not serve the whole year there, and it would be too late to repent. 3 days after leaving fell ill, so she could not stand, and finally mother had to take her home, sending young sister in her place. Remained ill for 2 years, until her mother (who suspected Catherine) persuaded her to come and visit her. She gave her some white bread, telling her to take courage, and she could serve her for another year. After 7 weeks was rather better, so she made pilgrimage to Ste Barbe at Bertrimoutier. On return passed by Benifosse, where it was feast day; Catherine saw her and took her to house, where she gave her 'bonne chere', including some little cakes and tarts in her apron for her mother. After this got steadily better, but was not sure whether she had caused illness or not.

(24 April 1614)

(12) Jean Malgarde, de Neufviller, 30

General reputation. 15 years earlier had been going to wedding feast at Colroy with others, including Catherine, when some suggested he should let her ride on his horse, since she was not a good walker. He refused, and soon the horse began to stumble and give difficulties, throwing him several times. When he reached Colroy looked in its eyes, but could see nothing wrong; that evening he returned home, and horse went as well as it had done in the morning before trouble began. Could not say if she had been cause, so did not suspect her unless she was a witch.

1 May 1614; substitut for PG orders arrest and trial

9 May 1614; interrogation

Said she was about 60, daughter of George Vincent of Lusse and his wife Margueritte; latter came from Nayemont, and had been executed as witch. She had been at Benifosse for 18 to 20 years. First marriage had been to Claude de Grand Rux, by whom she had one child which had died; marriage only lasted 18 months before his death, then she was in service at Robache before second marriage to Didier Ancel, by whom she had no children.

Denied having ever spoken of maiesse of Robache, but said she was told her mother had spoken of her when she was tried, and also accused one of her sisters. She applied to Sr de Reynette, and to her then lord the Sr de Barbas, who assured her that mother had said nothing of the kind - she still had written statement to this effect which she could produce.

Asked if she knew why she was under arrest, said 'que ouy et le scait fort bien, et estre pour ce que les fils de Colas Mourel dudit Benifosse, ont esté au devin et la voudroient faire sorciere, s'ils pouvoient, ce que toutesfois elle n'est pas.' Knew this because Mengeon Colas Mourel himself had told her, and they suspected her on account of her mother, although she was a good Christian.

Asked 'Sy autrefois elle n'a pas voulu mal, et soubhaîté quelque déplaisir a Demenge Alix dudit Benifosse,

A repondu que non, et sy quelque autre personne luy a voulu et causé quelque mal a son instance qu'elle n'en peult rien quand a elle et que sont ja plusieurs années qu'il y avoit une femme dudit Benifosse nommée Jehennon femme a feu Xaramond presentement decedée, chargée et soubconnée dudit crime de sortilege, ainsi qu'elle avoit ouy dire, laquelle ledit Alix soubçonnoit fort, et lequel ung jour mit quelque chose (ne scait quoy) dans ung sac et commença a le battre et frapper, de sorte que ladite Jehennon en estoit devenue malade, Ce qu'ayant ouy dire, la fut veoir, et estant aupres d'elle, vit qu'elle rendit des gros clostés de sang caillé par la bouche, mais ne scait sy cela provenoit de ce que ledit Alix avoit ainsy frappé sur ledit sac ou non.'

Agreed that Jehennon had been neighbour, and that they had kept company together; knew she was suspected, but had never seen any harm in her.

Remembered occasion when lamb had been found in her house, but had simply told wife of Demenge Alix to look in stable, and uttered no curses. Denied series of further charges, often saying she knew nothing about them. As for fatal illness of Colas Mourel's wife Margueritte, latter now knew whether she had done well or not to suspect her.

In case of Denize femme Colas Malgence, agreed to having asked her for hay, but not to quarrel. As for cream, did not know if Jehennon might have caused this, since she went about asking for milk, and was relative of Denize.

Denied remembering anything about giving salt to bullock of Jean Demenge Mourel. Asked about illness of Beniste Ferry, said she had not caused this, and 'les maladies arrivent a d'autres aussy bien qu'a elle, sans estre données'. Claimed she had not even known she was ill, and had not visited her. Had no memory either of going to wedding at Colroy.

14 May 1614; confrontations

Didier Colas Mourel added that she had made his mother a soup during her illness, which had done her no good. No reproaches to any witness. When Jean Malgendre reminded her of specific wedding at Colroy she agreed she had been there after all, and had asked for ride on his horse, but denied causing its behaviour.

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Several times remarked that she and others had lost animals, which should not be attributed to witchcraft.

24 May 1614; substitut for PG de Lorraine asks for question ordinaire et extraordinaire. Change de Nancy approves question ordinaire only.

9 June 1614; interrogation under torture

Was given thumbscrews and rack, but persisted in firm denials that she was a witch. Reiterated that people and animals often suffered from suddden illnesses without anyone being the cause.

19 June 1614; substitut recommends that she be renvoyée.

25 June 1614; she was released with admonition to behave with proper modesty towards her neighbours.