

Vosges 3 C 239: Witch 341, Martin l'Hoste de Pexonne

Dominicque Recepveur et Pierre Braconnier of Pexonne were parties formelles against Martin l'Hoste of same village, accused of witchcraft.

18 August 1657; 'Sur diverses plainctes et et doleances a nous cy devant faictes par la pluspart des habitans de Pexonne, de la perte continuelle et maladies journallieres de grande quantité de leurs bestiaux qu'ils soubçonnet et attribuent au Sortileges et malefices de quelqu'uns et quelqu'unnes de leurs cohabitans, partie desja accusés et maintenus jusques au feu a Raon la Tappe sont environ cinq ans, aurs sabitués audit lieu de Pexonne sans attestation du lieu de leurs Naissances et sortie, et que l'on dit estre enfuys de leurs Lieux pour mesme Crimes de Sortileges, tous de race de Sorciers et pour telz tenus et apprehendés par le peuple dres un fort longtemps, notamment le nommé Martin l'Hoste de Pexonne detenu pour mesme Crime es prisons fermes de Badonviller de la part de ladite principauté, Nous suppliants instamment qu'il y soit au plustost remedié par Justice autrement que tous Ils estoient resolu d'abandonner ledit Village infecté de nombre de sorciers et sorcieres, qui leurs causoient journallierement tous lesdits Malheurs, qu'aussy tost que l'on avoit quelques differends ou querelles avec eulx l'on en ressentoit incontinant les effectz des vengeances par des voyes extraordinaires et occultes dont ils les menacoient; seroit par la providence divine arrivé que ledit Martin prevenu sont environ six semaines a l'ore du jour d'un dimanche, seroit esté veu et reconnu avec Marie sa femme Habilés tous deux tout comme s'ils venoient de quelque festin de Nopces, ayant vestus leurs linges blanc, retourneront des champs et entreront ainsy en leur maison les portes de laquelle estoient toutes ouvertes qu'ils fermerent a leur rentrée, dequoy estant enquis a l'amyable le mesme jour Demenge leurs fils aagé d'environ quatorze a quinze ans, auroit déclaré nottament et sans variations quelconques qu'il y avoit arrivé la mesme nuict un grand homme noire en leur Maison, ayant des cornes comme un cerf, et les pieds fendus comme leurs vaches, auroit porté son pere, sa mere, et luy sur lesdites Cornes a une grande assemblée, et ce grand homme noire, apres les avoir bien fait menger et dancier, les auroit reconduict au logis, nomma ensuutte ceulx quil avoit reconnu en ladite assemblée nocturne au nombre de sept.'

27 August 1657; Marie femme Martin l'Hoste was brought before the court at Badonviller. Said that the statement made by her son Demenge was false, and had been extracted from him by force. He was then produced, and also denied his statement was true. Said neither his mother or father had been present, but did continue to accuse Claudin le Clerc, his wife Margueritte, the wife of Demenge Florentin and her daughter Margueritte. After mother left said she had been there, but his father had not; had been frightened she would beat him, which was why he had withdrawn charge. Then changed story again, saying that he had been scratched on forehead by 'le violon' of the assembly and that his father had been there 3 times. Said all this smiling, but with difficulty in speaking. He and his mother were then renvoyés jusques à rappel - no further indication of action against them.

20 and 21 August 1657; confrontations of witnesses with Martin l'Hoste, in presence of court at Badonviller and Mre Jean Roy, licencié en droict and prévôt of Lorquin.

Martin accused le sieur Charpentier and his servants of having set one of his fields on fire, and having failed to return an iron chain - these acts were denied. The damoiselle Jean Harette, wife of Charpentier, claimed that since his arrest she had heard from his son Demenge that at their last assembly his father and his accomplices had plotted to kill her husband. He said she was 'une medisante', and she agreed she had said before the church that if her husband had met him that day 'il n'auroit plus mangé de pain', but this was because of the plot by him and his accomplices to kill their animals.

In reply to Catherine femme Jean Mengin, said that in 1637 she, with father and mother, had taken some grain belonging to him they found in an old barn. She agreed that some grain and dried pears had been taken during famine that year, not knowing whose they were, but they had made restitution later; she herself had been small at the time.

Jean Mengin said that after arrest he told the maire 'qu'il avoit un mauvais garçon et que le valet le Sieur Charpentier estoit un petit diablottin et que c'estoit le diable qui travailloit dans ces affaires la'. When quarrelling with Charpentier earlier had said that if he did not punish his valet he would act himself, without saying how. Martin claimed that witness had stolen some pewter utensils; he said his sister had found some near house, and did not know whose they were; Martin had claimed them without obvious justification, but he had nothing to do with it. Added that if Martin and Claudin le Clerc could have killed him they would have done so.

Demenge fils Demenge le Maire said that since arrest he had spoken to his son Demenge, who said that the minstrel at the assembly gave his mother some grease to kill animals. Witness said that Claudin le Clerc would not go to dance with them any more, to which he replied 'qu'il y viendroit assé'. Had heard that when his mother was small she made grease with her mother, and told similar stories about assemblies and dances, but promised 'les pastarées' she would give them 'lardons' if they would not accuse her. Martin said that he had forced his son to say what he had, but he denied this.

Accused claimed that Demenge le Maire had taken grain in region of Veho; he said that during famine in 1636, when grain was rotting in the fields, he and others had gone to take what they could. Similar charge against Humbert Jacquemin, Mre Echevin, who agreed that he had cut grain there in 1636, but claimed it had been by agreement, and in any case some soldiers came and took what they had cut.

In reply to Elizabeth femme Demenge Geoffroy again referred to taking of grain between 1636 and 1638, this time from his barn, and she agreed that they had made restitution after taking it in ignorance of whose it was.

Jeanne femme Demenge Thomas told of how after lawsuit over field her husband cut his hand while harvesting there. This was 4 or 5 years earlier, and after losing case accused had said in presence of procureur fiscal and others 'qu'il avoit desseing de les ruyner.' Nicole femme Nicolas Symon added that accused had told her at mill 'qu'il vouldroit bien scavoit ceulx qui avoient mis en avant que son fils faisoit des Moulches'.

The herdsman Claude Bailley added that 4 days earlier Demenge, son of the accused, had said to him that he had been to the 'assemblée nocturne' 4 or 5 times

since father was imprisoned, taken on horns of the 'violon'. When they arrived violon said to him 'bougre au diable tu es cause que ton pere est en prison'. Had also talked of using grease to kill a kitten, but then said he had none and was frightened to ask in case he was beaten.

Claimed that Abraham Martin le jeune had called him witch, and had taken planks from a ruined house. Witness agreed about planks, but said he had bought the house later, and accused admitted this was true.

Abraham Martin le viel added that when accused lived at Bertrichamp he heard his first wife Margueritte Calve say 'qu'il se levoit la nuict et alloit tirer leurs vaches et emportoit le laict, qu'elle avoit eu nombre d'enfans mortz nez, et que quand elle en auroit encor d'autres ils n'auroient poinct de Baptesme tant que sa belle mere vivoit d'aultant qu'elle l'avoit ensorcelée, qu'elle scavoit bien que ledit prevenu estoit sorcier, mais d'aultant qu'elle estoit avec luy par mariage, elle ne le vouloit scandalizer, et qu'il estoit forcé de vivre avec luy, que ledit tesmoing a de plus ouy dire a deffuncte Epne Adam seconde femme audit prevenu que le diable soit de la famine elle est bien cause qu'il m'a faillu prendre ce sorcier cy parlant dudit prevenu.' Accused claimed that he had given false testimony in lawsuit over some land, and that he had beaten him - denied both allegations.

Jean Mongeotte, jeune fils, said that before his arrest witness had often been followed by cats and wolves in fields, especially a black cat which he could not drive off with a stick, but which disappeared when he made sign of the cross. Had seen no such animals since imprisonment. Martin said he was 'un diable incarné et avoit le diable au corps'; his son had told him that Jean and other boys had forced him to say what he did.

Were evidently 62 witnesses in all, of whom 22 were confronted with accused.

30 August 1657. Martin was pricked for mark by the executioner, who claimed to have found one mark below throat and another on head. Was also noted that his back was covered with blue marks, as if he had been beaten - suggestion that this had been work of his master.

According to accounts, case began on 1 August and ended with Martin's execution on 6 September 1657. Costs came to 707 francs - this included 24 francs for beating 24 resaulx of grain (6 wheat, 2 rye, 16 oats). Change de Nancy had been consulted in normal fashion, torture was probably on 3 September.