

B 8691 no 15; witch 226, Colas Gerard de Benifosse

8 March 1603; informations préparatoires

(1) Jean Didier Jacquemin, 70

7 years earlier his daughter Humberte, aged 12, had died after quarrel with son of accused; same evening she met him when she went out of house to relieve herself, and during illness claimed he had bewitched her, although witness tried to persuade her not to say such things. After various quarrels and threats he had lost animals, about which he complained to neighbours. Colas then spoke to them, saying 'Voyla, Jean Didier Jacquemin, qui perd beaucoup de bestial, je gaigeray, qu'il at opinion, que ce soit moy qui les faict mourir.' This increased suspicions, since even when neighbours confirmed statement made by Colas he took no action. Long reputation, and mother reputed a witch; wife was relative of 'le renommé sorcier' Jean Babel, 'qui peult estre luy a apprins de ses sciences'.

(2) Didier Jean Jacquemin, fils du précédent, 40

Sais that sister Humberte, quarrelling with son of accused over straying animals, said 'qu'elle ne voudroit, pour tout le bien de Mandray, avoir ung bruict pareil qu'ilz avoient'. During 3 days she was ill he wanted to go and fetch Colas as she asked, but mother and father would not allow it. 12 years earlier had heard from servant of Colas, Mongeon fils Demenge Babel of Mandray, that Colas and his wife had quarrelled 'pour ung pain qui fut esgaré, et que ladite femme avoit caché, par ce qu'autrement ledit Colas son marit, avoit tellement l'oeil sur leur menage qu'elle ne pouvoit faire l'aumosne aux pauvres, qui la demandoient à la porte.' Blame fell on servant; some days later Colas sent him out at night to flood meadow, where he had 'trois aventures', then became ill, had to be fetched home, and died soon after. 2 years earlier had wanted to sell cow to Colas, but since they could not agree price decided to take it to market at St Dié; it broke thigh on the way, and thought this too was his witchcraft. Had lost animals worth more than 100 golden écus, and believed that if he was witch as reputed he had caused this, so that 'pour la crainte de ses benefices' he had now moved to Contramollin. Claimed he had heard Anthoine Delatte of Mandray tell Colas he had bewitched his cow, which was giving blood instead of milk, without reparation being sought.

(3) Adam fils Jean Didier Jacquemin, 35

In connection with sister's death, said he had heard from Demenge fils Demenge Babel, servant of Colas, that 'ledit Colas son maître, avoit esté plus de trois semaines, en tres grande crainte, sans avoir repos au lict et n'attendoit que l'heure qu'il seroit apprehendé, ad cause de la mort de ladite Humberte sa soeur.' Also heard story of lost loaf and misadventures of Demenge, who became 'quasy demoniac'. He and his father had lost many animals, and suspected that if he was witch as reputed he might have been cause. Long reputation.

(4) Catherine femme Claude Reullemant, de Mandray, 40

In youth had been neighbour of Colas, and often in his house. One day, when they were dressing a dead child, Colas 'faisoit semblant de se douloir et pleurer, elle ouyt la premiere femme d'iceluy, qui luy dit, qu'il pouvoit bien pleurer qu'il estoit la mort mesme de ses enfans'. Also claimed to have heard his wife call out during illness 'ha, Genaux, Genaux, tu me tiens long temps icy.'

(5) Mongette femme Anthoine Delatte, de Mandray, 60

During first marriage to Jean Grande Claude they were neighbours of Colas at Benifosse. Had a horse which tended to stray on his land; warned husband to stop this or he would see what happened. When horse then lost use of legs, could find no remedy, so 'Ils s'addresserent à une femme du ban d'Estival, qui estoit appellée vers les quartiers de Mandray pour guerir ung garson malade qui y estoit, et obtiendrent tant qu'elle le guarit, mais elle dit, qu'ilz debvroient bien heu avoir gardé ledit cheval, d'aller a dommage sur l'advertissement que leur avoit été faict, par lesquels propos elle deposante entendit bien, que c'estoit sur ledit Colas Gerard qu'elle parloit.' Her husband had often quarrelled with him over watering of meadows, and became ill within year that Colas threatened him, saying 'Tu la lairra quelques jour ceste ealbe icy, gros loup, et plustost que tu ne pense'. Died after 5 months; often asked her to fetch Colas and said he wanted to see him for important reason, but did not say a word to him when he came.

Reported remark by Colas' wife about his being cause of children's death; did not know what she meant by this. Had heard from le viel Claude le Clerc of Mandray 'que luy allant ung jour, à la Croix en la compagnie dudit Coals Gerard et feu Jean Babel, oncle de sa femme (lequel Jean Babel est ce tant renommé sorcier de Mandray, tenu pour compaigne des diables) ledit Babel luy disoit, que s'il le vouloit croire, et faire ce qu'il luy diroit, il ne verroit jamais son pauvre jour, depuis et dela, iceluy Colas Gerard, estant tres pauvre, est maintenant tres riche et bien fourny de toutes sortes de bien, à l'estonnement de beaucoup de gens, qui ne scavent d'ou ilz luy peuvent estre ainsy venues.'

Colas had found their cow straying, and kept it overnight; within week it was giving blood instead of milk; husband had reproached him in public without any reparation being sought, but since then they had lost animals worth more than 100 écus, which she suspected had been his witchcraft. After her husband's death Colas contracted to feed 2 of her children; one of these died after reporting that he had seen Colas making sign of cross on belly of an ox.

(6) Jean Claude Curien, de Mandray, 50

Long reputation; called witch by Anthoine Delatte without seeking reparation.

(10 March 1603)

(7) Henry Finance de Mandray, 50

Had been working by the day for Jean Grand Claude during fatal illness, and heard him say 'ha, sorcier, sorcier, tu me tiens longtemps icy'. Was taken to father's

house in Mandray on a cart before he died, and made similar remark as he passed Colas. Long reputation.

(8) Colas Grand Didier, de Mandray, 50

Long reputation, no personal suspicion.

(9) Claude Colas Matisse, de Mandray, 40

Had served him for several years without seeing any sign he was a witch. Didier Anthoine of Entre-deux-Eaux had once said at mill that Colas had told him he saw his mother one night greasing a broom, on which she flew up chimney; he imitated her and did the same, ending up at sabat. Long reputation.

(10) Anthoine Delay, de Mandray, 42

Repeated essential of wife's deposition, and he also told of conversation with Jean Babel 'le tres renommé sorcier de par deça'. Reputation 12 years (residence).

(11) Curien Colas Andreu, de Belrepaire, 40

Reputation 12 years; had heard from his brother-in-law Demenge Collenel of Benifosse that he thought Colas prevented him making any profit from animals after quarrels they had had.

(12) Marguitte femme du precedent, 53

Long reputation.

(13) Jean Colas Lyenard, de Sarrux, 34

Told how Colas had wanted to seek reparation from Colas Vincent Maurise of Mandray, who had called him witch. When he discovered that procureur wanted a franc for day's work he would offer only 6 gros, so he abandoned whole idea.

(14) Claude Jean Didier Cunin, de Mandray, 40

6 years earlier had been taking horse over field sown with wheat when Colas saw him and told him to use public way. Obeyed because he was frightened of his reputation, but horse developed trouble with foot and died a week later. Suspected this had been his witchcraft - long reputation.

(15) Didier Anthoine, d'Entre-deux-Eaux, 50

Said that 27 to 30 years earlier his mistress, who was cousin of Colas, had reproached him for quarrelling every day with his mother; he replied that she was a witch and went out by the chimney at night. Mother had been arrested but not convicted.

(16) Pierron Bonabel, de Mandray, 50

Last Easter Colas was among those taking communion in church at Mandray; the vicaire, Mre Noel, called out to him several times that he must swallow the host. Witness was among those singing in chancel, so could not see if he was refusing or merely delaying eating it.

19 March 1603; interrogation and confrontations

Said he was about 50, laboureur of Benifosse, where there were 3 inhabited houses and one deserted one; was native of village and had always lived there. Agreed that Jean Goery of St Lyenard had accused him as witch, and maintained this at confrontation, but said Goery had damned himself. Also agreed that first wife had been niece of Jean Babel, saying he would not have married her had he known Babel was 'tel homme qu'il estoit'.

Said he had not quarrelled with Mengeon Babel, although he had later done so with his brother Jean, who succeeded him in his service. Mengeon was 'sy vigilant, que de soy mesme il faisoit tout ce qui estoit à faire à la maison et pour les ouvrages, qui y estoient à faire.' Had fallen ill after working too late soaking flax.

Asked if he had bewitched his late wife, said they did him great wrong to suggest such a thing, and if he could have bought her back with money when she was called to God he would have done so. Asked about Jean Grand Claude's horse, and identification by 'devineresse', denied he had been cause of this. Asked about mother going up chimney, said they had no chimney so this could not be true.

Confronted with witnesses, no reproaches. Explained wife's remark that he was cause of death of children by saying he had been in place where there was plague, and had brought 'quelque mauvais air' back with him. Simple denials of all other points.

23 March 1603; procureur for chapter asks for question ordinaire et extraordinaire

24 March 1603; Change de Nancy declares that indices are insufficient to justify torture, and that he should be renvoyé unless procureur can produce more evidence

17 April 1603; interrogation under torture

No explanation for delay, or decision to ignore advice from Nancy court. Withstood thumbscrews, but started to confess when racked. Said that 27 to 30 years earlier his mother had taken him to sabat; father Claude Gerard was dead, and he was married and sole heir, so mother was living with him. She persuaded him to go to a place where he would find a good master who would ensure he would never want; yielded too easily because she was his mother and he never thought she would make him do anything against God and reason. She greased 2 brooms on which they flew up through chimney after saying 'hault de par le diable'. Went to sabat between Remémont and Fouchifol, where there were 10 or 12 other persons of both sexes, and he was seduced by Persin and encouragements of his mother. Was given money (leaves) and

black powder. Could not recognize others because of masks; all they did was feasting on unsalted meat. Went back home on brooms as they had come.

Tried powder out on a dog, which died. Had killed Jean Grand Claude 15 years earlier because of quarrels over water. Also killed his first wife Barbeline, 'pour ce qu'elle l'importunoit journellement, et le soubçonneoit d'aller voir la femme dudit Grande Claude' - this was some 6 years ago.

Also confessed to causing death of Humberte fille Jean Didier Jacquemin, and 2 of his cows which did damage, but had not caused his other losses. Had killed Toussaint son of Jean Grand Claude, who had told story about his performing ceremony around his oxen.

Had been to sabat many times, although he gave master a hen each year to be partly exempt. Saw le gros Mathieu Blaise of Ste Marguerite, the wife of Didier Anthoine of Entre-deux-Eaux, Jacques Sixtéz, Jehenne fille Demenge Martin and her brother and mother (already executed), all of Mandray, also la fille Tendon de Saulcy femme à Mongeon Bonipaire.

Confirmed earlier confessions later that day.

18 April 1603; further repetition of confessions and accusations

19 April 1603; procureur asks for death sentence

21 April 1603; Change de Nancy approves