Ritualized Violence against Sorcerers in Fifteenth-Century France

ALEKSANDRA PFAU
Hendrix College

In 1464, Jehan Sommet, a notary living in the town of Thiart in Auvergne, sought remission for the crime of murder. He described his disturbing night on the twelfth or thirteenth of June, when his wife "was greatly troubled in her sense and understanding, crying with a loud voice as if insensible, and wishing to throw herself out the windows into the street."[1] Jehan Sommet explained that he made a number of vows and pilgrimages, to both male and female saints, on his wife's behalf, but they did not help her. Upset about his wife's continued frenzy, Jehan Sommet began asking his "neighbors and other people" where this illness could come from, and if they knew of any possible remedy.[2] The response, which was presented in the letter as universal, rather than being attributed to one particular source, was that his wife had been poisoned by a ninety-year-old woman in the town, named either Guillaume or Guillemete de Pigeules called Turlateuse. The helpful, but anonymous, voices of Jehan Sommet's "neighbors and other people" further informed him that only Turlateuse could provide a remedy for her poisons, and that he would have to ask the sorcerer "nicely" (*doulcement*) to heal his wife. If Turlateuse refused, Jehan's advisors continued, he should "warm the soles of her feet," because on other occasions she had healed people of similar illnesses because of threats and beatings.[3] This method of starting with sweet words and ending with threats and violence appears as a pattern in many remission letters about sorcerers, though this is the only one where the protagonist had to have it explained to him ahead of time.

1. Archives Nationales Series JJ book 199 folio 276 number 441 (henceforth abbreviated as AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441): "fut fort trouble de son sens et entendement criant a haulte voix comme incensee soy voulant gecter par les fenestres en la rue."
2. AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: "a ses voisins et a autres personnes."
3. AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: "luy chauffast les solles des piez."

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This paper examines a small group of letters of remission clustered in the mid to late fifteenth century that describe a moment when a group of men decided to approach the "renowned" sorcerer living in their town or village.[4] These letters were written to the king of France to explain that a crime had been committed and to humbly request that he pardon the criminal, and were composed through a process of collaboration between a royal notary and the accused criminal, or his or her family members.[5] Remission was only available for capital crimes, those for which the punishment was death, so the letters only exist in cases where the offense was serious. The process of receiving the king's pardon was both time-consuming and expensive. First, a petitioner had to travel to the king's council, which could be difficult, particularly for people who did not live in or around Paris, a fact that is reflected in the general geographic scope of the letters copied by the king's chancery. Indeed, the king's own travel impacted the letters received and ratified, since some letters relating to crimes committed many years before were recorded when the king happened to pass through the area.[6] The king, or more likely an officer of the chancery, would then command a royal notary, together

4. There have been a handful of studies that examine sorcery in these letters. Pierre Braun has examined 97 letters between 1319 and 1556. According to his analysis, the earliest letters of remission involving sorcery dealt with false and slanderous accusations of sorcery, many for those accused of magical attacks on powerful political figures. He dates the earliest murder of a sorcerer to 1377 (AN JJ 111 fo 164 no 315). See "Sorcellerie dans les lettres de rémission du trésor des chartes," in *Études sur la Sensibilité au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1979), 257–78. Braun has also provided a more detailed analysis of an interesting case from 1459 of a physician in the Aure valley who claimed to be able to identify sorcerers. The male family members of the women he accused asserted that the physician himself was a sorcerer, and killed him. See Pierre Braun, "Un connaisseur de sorciers de l'an 1459" in *Histoire des Faits de la Sorcellerie: Actes de la Huitième Rencontre d'Histoire Religieuse tenue à Fontevraud les 5 et 6 octobre 1984* (Angers: Presses de l'Université d'Angers, 1985), 9–24. There are also discussions of sorcery as parts of larger projects on crime and folklore, respectively, in Claude Gauvard, *"De Grace Especial": Crime, état et société en France à la fin du Moyen Age* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2nd ed. 2012, 1st ed. 1991), and Roger Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans d'après les Lettres de Rémission du Trésor des Chartes* (Paris: Librairie Guénégaud, 1965). Gauvard makes some interesting observations, but tends to use the letters in order to generalize about attitudes to sorcery, rather than focusing on the intricacies of the individual narratives.

5. Aleksandra Pfau, "Madness in the Realm: Narratives of Mental Illness in Late Medieval France" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2008), esp. chap. 4; Gauvard, *"De Grace Especial,"* 66.

6. One of these, in AN JJ 99 fo 25 (in 1367), is a remission for a crime committed forty years earlier.

with the accused or (in cases when the accused was unavailable, often due to imprisonment) the family members of the accused, to compose a letter explaining the circumstances leading up to the crime and telling the story of the crime itself. To be ratified, the letter had to be read before the king's council, who, assuming the letter was satisfactory, would then provide the remission seeker with a seal. For an extra fee, the letter would also be recorded in the official record by the chancery scribes, so that there was an external source proving the existence of the pardon.[7] The price of the whole process was officially set at thirty-two Parisian sous in the fourteenth century: six for the redaction, six for the seal, and twenty for the registration in the chancery's books.[8] This was more than a week's wages for most artisans,[9] and although the king tried to control the price by passing ordinances, the ultimate tally could be much higher, particularly when the cost of a journey to Paris and accommodation while seeking pardon are added to the consideration. This was not the end of the process, however, since once they had been officially recognized by the king, the letters had to be taken back to the jurisdiction in which the crime was committed and read aloud by a local official in the presence of the adverse party, who had the power to raise an objection and potentially to annul the pardon.[10] As a result, the letters had to adhere to some generally accepted version of "truth," and can reveal a great deal about how people negotiated their own understandings of crime, criminality, and the law.[11]

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7. Christian Gut provides a diplomatic study of the documents themselves in "Autour des registres de la chancellerie française de Henri VI, roi de France et d'Angleterre," in *Pouvoir, Justice et Société* ed. Jacqueline Hoareau-Dodinau and Pascal Texier (Limoges: Presses universitaires de Limoges, 2000), 81–99.

8. Gauvard, *"De Grace Especial,"* 68–69.

9. Bronislaw Geremek, *Le salariat dans l'artisanat parisien aux XIIIe–XVe siècles; étude sur le marché de la main-d'oeuvre au Moyen Age*, trans. Anna Posner and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 90–94. Geremek provides the day wages of masons, carpenters, and their assistants as an example, noting in one case from the early fourteenth century that masons and carpenters were paid 4 sous a day, while their assistants were paid 2 sous. He also notes that the day wages were seasonal, since the combined earnings of one carpenter and his valet in the late fourteenth century were 5 sous a day during summer, but only 4 sous a day during winter, presumably reflecting the change in available working hours as the days got shorter.

10. Gauvard, *"De Grace Especial,"* 67. See also Pascal Texier on this process of ratification, called *entérinement*. By 1394, if this was not completed within a year and a day, the remission was automatically annulled. "La remission au xiveme siècle: genese et developpement" (Ph.D. diss., Limoges, 1991), 324–38.

11. Natalie Zemon Davis, in her study of sixteenth-century remission letters, discusses the ways that these texts are narratives that she argues pull from a shared knowl-

These tales of violence and sorcery reveal interesting interactions with renowned sorcerers in villages that had not yet become involved in the witch hunts that were beginning to break out in the mountains in eastern France, or become particularly concerned about the interaction of witches with the devil. Instead, their concerns with fertility and illness are familiar from so many later witchcraft accusations, and there is no effort to pull them into a demonological tradition.[12] Often, these sorcerers had integral roles in their villages as family members, friends, and healers, but they were fragile roles, easily disintegrating when a potion did not help, leaving the renowned sorcerer open to violence intended to persuade them to undo their spells. Robin Briggs and Robert Muchembled, among others, have focused on the ways that sorcerers were fully integrated members of their communities. Indeed, Muchembled even suggests that, in the sense that sorcerers were those who attempted to heal the community and protect it from real or imagined dangers, "everyone is a little bit of a sorcerer in the countryside, sometimes even in the village, in the sixteenth century."[13] Yet it is clear that these important

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edge of confession and storytelling. Despite her provocative title, Davis never insists on the fictionality of these letters as opposed to some true event, but rather draws attention to the ways that these are carefully composed stories. See *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-century France* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987).

12. Edward Peters notes for the fourteenth century that "In secular courts generally, jurists looked for damage actually caused by sorcery; in ecclesiastical courts canonists looked for indications that sorcery was practised by means that clearly savoured of heresy, especially the homage paid to demons in return for magical powers." See Edward Peters, "The Medieval Church and State on Superstition, Magic, and Witchcraft From Augustine to the Sixteenth Century," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe Volume 3: The Middle Ages*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 173–245, 218. More recently, Richard Kieckhefer has suggested that even the demonological mythology did not form a single, cohesive structure of which the Sabbath was the center point. See "Mythologies of Witchcraft in the Fifteenth Century," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 1, no. 1 (2006): 79–108. See also Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-Hunt* (London: Sussex University Press, 1975); Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987).

13. Robert Muchembled, *Sorcières, Justice et Société aux 16e et 17e Siècles* (Paris: Éditions Imago, 1987), 49: "Et, en ce sens, chacun est un peu sorcier à la campagne, parfois même à la ville, au XVIe siècle." Translation mine. Robin Briggs, *Communities of Belief: Cultural and Social Tension in Early Modern France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).

roles as healers could also be viewed with fear and suspicion, and powerful sorcerers could threaten the community as much as they supported it.

Norman Cohn argues that the lack of witchcraft accusations in the Middle Ages was due not to a lack of belief in popular culture, but rather to the legal system of ''talion,'' whereby the accuser, if unable to convince the judge of the guilt of the accused, would suffer as heavy a penalty as fit the crime. He cites the evidence of lynchings from the ninth century into the eleventh to prove that there was a widespread belief in witchcraft before the trials.[14] Significantly, however, the fifteenth-century French remission letters about the killing of sorcerers (or the accidental death of people rumored to be sorcerers) appear in the archive even after witchcraft trials had already begun in parts of Switzerland and eastern France.[15] Interestingly, there is no clear geographical pattern in these cases from remission letters, which come from all over France, including areas where witches were concurrently being tried in the secular courts. In fact, one letter from the Lyonnais in 1479 was sought for a group of men who killed Loys Niquer, a suspected sorcerer whose mother had been banished six or seven months earlier for having confessed to killing many people through sorcery.[16] This suggests that, even when local and royal justice systems were willing to prosecute witches, vigilante justice was still seen as a viable and in some cases preferable alternative. Robin Briggs, in looking at similar remission letters from the Duke of Lorraine in the sixteenth century, has suggested that these cases provide evidence that the legal system was not viewed as sufficiently harsh, leading ''to a high rate of acquittals and reduced sentences,'' so these murders were simply a way to get around the limitations of the law.[17] In her wider study of royal letters of

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14. Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 160–63.

15. Pierrette Paravy, ''À propos de la genèse médiévale des chasses aux sorcières: Le traité de Claude Tholosan, juge dauphinois (vers 1436),'' *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 91 (1979): 333–79. There were also a number of tracts and inquisitorial manuals dealing with witches that were already circulating. Bernard Gui's inquisitorial manual in the early fourteenth century mentions witchcraft, but he never convicted any witches. See Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 131. Nicolas Eymerich wrote his *Directorium Inquisitorum* in 1376. His manual for inquisitors discussed witchcraft, but only as one among many heresies. His focus was on the distinction between *dulie* and *latrie* of the devil, or worship (which is due only to God) and veneration (which is applicable to the saints). These two different levels of heretical behavior in the practice of sorcery determined the appropriate punishment for the sorcerer. Jean Gerson's treatise written in 1402, *De erroribus circa artem magicam*, circulated with the appended articles condemning magic by the University of Paris in 1398.

16. AN JJ 205 fo 248v no 437.

17. Robin Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 69. Alfred Soman also sees lynching as a response to the inadequacy of efforts

remission, Claude Gauvard suggests that "if death occurs, is that not in the end the best way to break the spell, by removing its instigator?"[18] However, in these letters the goal of approaching the reputed sorcerer does not appear to be the same as the goal of prosecuting them through the legal system. Rather, the process described aims at getting the sorcerer to undo his or her spell, and the murder appears to be an accidental side effect of the procedure, rather than the initial purpose. Indeed, none of the letters suggest that the death of the sorcerer removed the spell, and in some cases the murderer expressed concern about ensuring that the sorcerer receive care.[19] In each case, the violence against the sorcerer is claimed to be a method either of persuading or of forcing the individual to perform a magical healing. In this sense, the violence becomes part of a ritual, in which members of the community perform specified actions in an effort to gain a particular result.[20]

Jehan Sommet's case from 1464 provides a fascinating example of the transmission of knowledge about sorcery between popular and elite culture that is worth interrogating further. As an educated, literate notary, Jehan Sommet claimed that he was not aware that illnesses could be caused by the poisons doled out by renowned sorcerers. Once he had come to accept this source for his wife's illness, he did not know how to remedy the situation. Fortunately, his anonymous "neighbors and other people" were available to assist him in his efforts. Jehan Sommet asserted that he needed to have the process of approaching sorcerers explained to him in detail, and that detail provides a clear exposition of the means by which sorcerers were identified and dealt with at a local level.

Jehan Sommet identified Turlateuse as the cause of his wife's illness through local networks of information in Thiart. Initially, Jehan explained,

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to prove witchcraft accusations through a legal procedure. "Witch Lynching at Juniville," *Natural History* 10 (1986), reprinted in *Witch-Hunting in Continental Europe: Local and Regional Studies*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Garland, 1992), 114–18.

18. Gauvard, *"De Grace Especial,"* 446: "si la mort s'ensuit, n'est-elle pas finalement la meilleure façon de conjurer le sort en supprimant son instigateur?"

19. This is consistent with the claims in the *Malleus Maleficarum* that the death of the sorcerer would make the spells permanent. Though there is no evidence that the composers of these letters were reading any of the theoretical works about witchcraft, this may have been a wider cultural belief. Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, ed. and trans. Christopher Mackay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2 vols.; V. 1, 320 and V. 2, 151.

20. My thoughts about the meanings behind these acts of violence are much influenced by Natalie Zemon Davis's article "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France," *Past and Present* 59 (May 1973), 51–91.

he sought religious avenues for healing. It was only when religious aid was unavailing that he began asking around to see if his community could provide him with alternative explanations and solutions. His neighbors informed him that the illness came from poison administered by Turlateuse, and they supported this accusation by explaining that the ninety-year-old woman was "held and reputed to be a great sorcerer and a bad woman."[21] Turlateuse's bad reputation and the rumor that she was a "great sorcerer" were sufficient grounds for Jehan Sommet to suspect her as the cause of his wife's illness, and not only in an extralegal sense. Communal opinion was central to legal theory and practice in the Middle Ages. The wider community's knowledge of an individual's character, as represented in common reputation and renown could be used to affect the outcome of legal cases.[22] Indeed, bad reputation could be a self-fulfilling prophesy, with those considered infamous in their community moving further and further into criminal activities.[23] The maintenance of good reputation was essential in an economy based on face-to-face interactions.[24] Professional jurists and judges determined what forms of common knowledge and reputation could "count" in a legal setting, tracing a fine line between unacceptable gossip and acceptable, "disciplined," community information.[25] At a time when basic "facts" of identity, such as birth dates, marriages, diseases, and deaths, were not necessarily recorded in written documents, witnesses' testimony about common knowledge was used to establish this information when it was pertinent to a case.[26] Thus, Jehan Sommet, the legally trained notary, relied on his neighbors' assessment of Turlateuse's reputation based on sound legal theory, rather than being persuaded by mere gossip.

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21. AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: "tenus et repputee estre grant sorciere et mauvaise femme."

22. Edward Peters, "Wounded Names: The Medieval Doctrine of Infamy," in *Law in Medieval Life and Thought*, ed. Edward B. King (Sewanee, Tenn.: University of the South Press, 1990), 43–89. See also G. R. Evans, *Law and Theology in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2002), 123–29.

23. David S. Chambers and Trevor Dean, *Clean Hands and Rough Justice: An Investigating Magistrate in Renaissance Italy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 23–24.

24. Thomas Kuehn, "*Fama* as a Legal Status in Renaissance Florence," in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca,N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 27–46, 27.

25. Ibid., 29.

26. F. R. P. Akehurst, "Good Name, Reputation, and Notoriety in French Customary Law," in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 75–94.

Jehan further asserted that he had no knowledge of how to approach the renowned sorcerer, suggesting that not only was he, as an educated notary, outside the network of knowledge that could reveal the source of his wife's illness, but he was also outside the category of those who sought sorcerers for aid. This is significant, as twenty years later Heinrich Institoris, in his magisterial *Malleus Maleficarum*, would note that "what is commonly tolerated becomes general practice, even if it is unlawful, and it is common practice for those affected by sorcery to rush to superstitious womenfolk, by whom they are very often freed and not by priests or exorcists."[27] Thus, by claiming a lack of understanding about the protocols involved in seeking the aid of a sorcerer, Jehan Sommet was placing himself firmly in a more intellectual category, from which he needed to be advised by those same anonymous "neighbors and other people" about how to ask Turlateuse for aid. The guidelines they provided were clear and specific. While he needed to begin with a humble request for aid (presumably at first avoiding any actual accusation against the sorcerer), if this mild solicitation did not provide the results he was seeking, he needed to "warm the soles of her feet," a threatening action that should cause her to respond with more alacrity.

This recommendation that Jehan Sommet "warm the soles of [the sorcerer's] feet" appears to be a widely recognized tactic in dealing with magical practitioners who refuse to remove their spells. Indeed, it appears in one of the very earliest letters of remission involving a sorcerer as victim, when in 1380 a local *bailli* sought remission for having arrested two women he suspected of having ensorcelled his daughter so that she could not eat or drink. He persuaded one of them to undo the spell by "putting a little bit of hot coal under the soles of her feet." The sorcerer's efforts at undoing the spell were successful, but the local officer of the law sought remission precisely for having warmed the woman's feet.[28] The practice seems to have a larger geographic and temporal extent, as well. Robin Briggs has discussed the case of Alice Gooderidge from 1597 in Stapenhill, England, where "a cunning man was called in who subjected the wretched old woman to a form of torture, putting her close to the fire with new shoes on her feet," though in

27. Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, Mackay, ed. Translation from V. 2, 351. Latin from V. 1, 492: "Preterea, hoc quod communiter tolleratur in vsu practicatur, licet sit illicitum, sed hoc communiter practicatur quod tales maleficiati currunt ad mulierculas superstitiosas, a quibus sepissime liberantur et non per sacerdotes aut exorcistas."

28. AN JJ 117 fo 41 1380 in Roger Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la guerre de Cent Ans d'après les Lettres de Rémission du Trésor des Chartes* (Paris: Librairie Guénégaud, 1965), 230: "gehennier un pou de feu de charbon dessoubz les plantes des piez."

this case the goal appears to be to elicit a confession, rather than a cure.[29] Interestingly, in Heinrich Institoris's *Nuremberg Handbook* from 1491, he specifically named a process of placing ''glowing shoes'' on the feet as an example of what he considered excessive and invalid torture.[30] Claude Gauvard has also recognized the prevalence of the use of fire to seek disenchantment in remission letters from the reign of Charles VI. She suggests that it is not only aiming toward cure, but also has ''a magical aspect. The sorcerer who knows the secret of the elements can only be destroyed by them.''[31] Jehan Sommet's case certainly centers on a pattern of escalating violence aimed at convincing the sorcerer to undo the spell. While there is no reference to Turlateuse's control over the elements, fire clearly has a significant role to play in persuading the woman to respond to his demands.

Armed with this helpful advice from his neighbors, Jehan Sommet and two of his wife's brothers went to the home of Turlateuse on the ninth of August, two months after his wife began to exhibit these symptoms. The three men asked Turlateuse to help Jehan Sommet's wife by healing her or providing an antidote to the poisons, but, according to the letter, she refused to do so. Naturally, they proceeded to apply a hot iron to her feet in an effort to force her to help them, adding in a few beatings around her neck with a stick. Unfortunately, Turlateuse remained obstinate in her refusal to help them. Having completed all the advised tasks with no success, the three men departed, each one back to his own home. However, this was not the end of their interaction with the sorcerer. Two days later, on September 30th, the day after the feast of St. Michael, Jehan Sommet's wife worsened, becoming more frenzied than before. In his anger, Jehan Sommet called together his four closest friends, the same two brothers of his wife and two other men, and informed them that, in order to heal his wife, they were going to take Turlateuse out of her home that night and warm her feet again, this time ''with a hot fire.''[32] This detail suggests that Jehan and his friends believed it was their leniency, not the tactic itself, that had caused their earlier failure. Increasing the heat of the fire, they determined, might produce better results. However, if this was not enough, Jehan Sommet also recommended that they pinch her heels ''with a pair of pincers.''[33] In his frustration, Jehan began to

29. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 60.

30. Henricus Institoris and Jacobus Sprenger, Mackay, ed., V. 2, 550–51, note 422.

31. Gauvard, *De Grace Especial*, 444: ''un aspect magique. Le sorcier qui connaît le secret des éléments ne peut être détruit que par eux.''

32. AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: ''dun feu chault.''

33. AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: ''dunes tenailles.''

extrapolate beyond the advice of his neighbors and other people, suggesting more varied forms of violence that might persuade the sorcerer to aid him. When one of his henchmen protested that perhaps Turlateuse's neighbors would bring them to justice for breaking into her house, Jehan Sommet replied that all her neighbors knew she was a bad woman, and would not meddle with them. Clearly Jehan was relying on the reputation that had drawn him to suspect Turlateuse initially to prevent any interference in his plans from her neighbors, but again he was moving beyond the initial advice he had received.

Jehan Sommet himself returned home to his sick wife, who was being watched by several neighbors, but his friends went to Turlateuse's home around nine o'clock at night, where they found her "completely naked" in her bed.[34] The men pulled her from her bed, giving her no time to prepare before taking her out of her home. Her unclothed state appears to be significant to the composers of the letter, as the detail is repeated multiple times through the narrative that follows. They took her to a nearby churchyard, where they beat her with sticks so hard that she fell on the ground, and kept beating her until she told them that Jehan Sommet's wife had recovered. One of the perpetrators went to Jehan Sommet's house to verify Turlateuse's statement, where he found the woman's health improved. Jehan then went to the churchyard himself and found Turlateuse, naked and lying motionless on the ground. He claimed later that he was very angry to find that his friends had beaten the sorcerer so badly, and he insisted that she be carried back to her home. One of his friends did so, but, finding the door locked, left her, still naked, on the doorstep, where she was found the next morning, dead.

Jehan Sommet's narrative allows readers, like the royal notary to whom Jehan told his story, to join him in his bewildering quest to help his wife. Like Jehan, the reader does not know who the sorcerer is or how to address him or her once identified. It is easy to imagine and even sympathize with the literate notary who cannot find a solution for his wife's baffling illness, despite turning to all the right saints and engaging in pilgrimages, which must have been not only expensive but difficult with a frenzied wife in tow. Turning to neighbors to find another possible avenue seems perfectly natural, and the source they propose: poisoned by a woman with a bad reputation, explains Jehan's wife's illness in a way that provides an obvious solution as well as taking the pressure off Jehan himself. Jehan's neighbors prescribed a pattern of approaching a renowned witch and attempting to persuade her to undo

34. AN JJ 199 fo 276 no 441: "toute nue."

her magic by slowly escalating from "sweet" words to violence and, ultimately, a form of torture. It is worth noting the way that this extralegal interaction with the accused follows the pattern of a legal trial.[35] Indeed, several letters of remission for individuals or groups who killed a sorcerer include at least one official or someone, like Jehan Sommet, with legal training.[36] Nevertheless, the goal of this interaction, while allowing for confession as part of the process, was to cause the accused to perform further magical acts in order to undo the initial spell. Also, and, given the tragic consequences of all of these interventions, perhaps more significantly, the torture in these cases was performed not by a professional executioner with training in just how much pain and damage a human body can withstand but by members of the community whose inability to judge these limits was often seen as the cause of the accused sorcerer's death.[37] In these ways, the extralegal procedure departed significantly from a legal process. Similarly, since the condemnation of sorcery by the Theology Faculty of the University of Paris in 1398 it was considered illicit "to use for a good end magic arts" or "to repel sorcery by sorcery."[38] Thus, Jehan Sommet's goal in approaching Turlateuse was in and of itself illegal, regardless of whether she survived the encounter.

In a similar case from Auvergne involving slightly less strategic violence, but still a level of ritualized escalation of threats, there is no educated notary who needs guidance on finding and approaching the local sorcerer. Indeed, Guille Moler, in his letter of remission from 1452, claimed that he was simply pulled out of bed one Saturday evening in August at eight o'clock by Jaures Menefevre, who asked Guille to join him and Thogny de la Villate, who was

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35. The pattern of beginning with questioning, escalating to confronting the accused with witnesses, and finally moving to torture can be seen in all inquisitorial procedure. For just one example, in an impressively well-documented case, see Peter Morton, ed., Barbara Dahms, trans., *The Trial of Tempel Anneke: Records of a Witchcraft Trial in Brunswick, Germany, 1663* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

36. See, for example, the letter for the *bailli* referenced above, AN JJ 117 fo 41. This was even more common in the sixteenth century, according to Alfred Soman, who found that all the cases of lynching he examined included the involvement of local officials. "Witch Lynching at Juniville," 114–18.

37. Edward Peters, *Torture* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 57; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Religion and Sexuality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 205.

38. These are the fifth and sixth article. "The Theology Faculty of the University of Paris Codemns Sorcery (1398)," ed. and trans. Alan Kors and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: A Documentary History*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 131.

waiting for them with Beguite Clote.[39] In many ways, Guille's letter follows the side narrative of an accomplice to the crime, rather than focusing on the main actors. It was not Guille himself who had been bewitched, but his friend Thogny. Beguite "as it is said, had ensorcelled the said Thogny and made him languish in a certain illness by virtue of certain evil arts such that he had lost his good, natural senses and that he was out of good memory."[40] Again, the letter emphasizes the reputation of the sorcerer, asserting that "it is said" by anonymous and therefore omnipresent voices that Beguite was guilty of sorcery. Interestingly, Thogny, despite believing that Beguite had been the cause of his illness, had asked her to heal him, which she promised to do but never managed. The events of this evening in August were a follow up to earlier requests and need to be read as a continuation of the negotiations between Thogny and Beguite.

When the three men confronted her initially, reminding her that she had promised to aid Thogny and had not been successful, Beguite did not wish to do anything in response. Hoping to escalate the situation, the men resorted to rigorous words, but the sorcerer still refused to help Thogny. Finally, they beat her with "little" sticks, much like those used on Turlateuse, until Beguite finally promised to heal him. It is interesting that the promise of future healing was acceptable to the men, despite their assertion that she had reneged on such promises in the past. Nevertheless, according to Guille's letter, the three men then left her alone, and she decided to go to sleep under a tree, where they suggested she may have taken cold after having been so vigorously "moved and warmed," despite the fact that it was an August evening, or she may have been more severely injured than they had thought, and failed to take sufficient care of her wounds.[41] Whatever the cause, she died the same night and her body was found under the tree the next morning.

Just as Guille Moler was not the primary victim of Beguite Clote's magic, other cases involved multiple remission seekers, and reveal complex connections within the community. There are three different versions of a 1453 narrative about Brennenne, the wife of Auchan Gautier from Mare in Anjou,

39. There is no indication in the letter of any kin relationship between these three men, which suggests that the gathering of people to aid in an attack on a renowned sorcerer could be based on friendship as well as kinship ties. Claude Gauvard refers briefly to this letter. *"De Grace Especial,"* 444.

40. AN JJ 181 fo 67v no 123: "come len disoit avoit ensorcele ledit thogny et le fait languer en certaine maladie par vertu de certain mauvais art tellement quil en avoit perdu son bon sens naturel et quil en estoit hors de bonne memoire."

41. AN JJ 181 fo 67v no 123: "esmeu et eschaffie."

each seeking remission for a different individual involved in the case.[42] The first letter, composed for Jehan Barbereau, explained that Brennenne had conceived "a great hatred" for Jehan when he refused to marry her and instead married another woman. When, for around six months, Jehan Barbereau found himself unable to have sexual relations with his wife, despite both being in good health, he suspected Brennenne, who was "publicly" known "to be a sorcerer and user of charms."[43] He went to see Brennenne and requested that she undo what she had done, offering to give her anything she wanted. Brennenne told him to go back to his wife, but the request backfired, making Jehan's situation worse. A little while later, Brennenne came to their home and drank and ate, and since that time, Jehan's wife was "customarily ill."[44] Noting that it was renowned throughout Anjou that Brennenne had caused many other people to suffer in a "similar languor by other things that she had had them either drink or eat without poison," he went back to see Brennenne several times to ask that she cure his wife, but she told him "that his said wife never had anything wrong with her."[45] This made Jehan so angry that he, Michau Pestiau, Jehan Pestiau, and Olivier Moreau took sticks and went to Brennenne's home after sunset. Taking her out of her home, they threatened her and hit her on the soles of her feet and on her arms. Jehan Barbereau also used the stick he carried to give her "three or four strikes on the breast."[46] In response to this violence and continued requests to undo her spells, Brennenne finally said she would do it. They stopped beating her, and she made "several crosses and signs" in the air, then said that "at that time she did not know how to undo it, but that before noon the next day she would undo it."[47] According to the letter, the four men believed Brennenne, returning her to her home and leaving her there, "because she told them that she felt very well."[48] Unfortunately, around noon the next day she died.

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42. Interestingly, they are not listed back to back in the archives. The first, for Jehan Barbereau, is AN JJ 182 fo 51 no 85, the second for Jehan Pestiau, the priest of the parish, is AN JJ 182 fo 53 no 88, and the third, for Michau Pestiau, is AN JJ 182 fo 53v no 90.

43. AN JJ 182 fo 51 no 85: "tresgrant hayne"; "publiquement"; "destre sorciere et user de charmes."

44. AN JJ 182 fo 51 no 85: "coutumellement malade."

45. AN JJ 182 fo 51 no 85: "semblable langueur par autres choses quelle leur avoit fait ou beuve ou mengier sans poison"; "que sadite femme navoit jamais tant de mal."

46. AN JJ 182 fo 51 no 85: "troys ou quatre copz par les reins."

47. AN JJ 182 fo 51 no 85: "pluseurs croix et signes"; "atelle heure elle ne le savoir deffaire maiz que avant que feust le lendemain midj elle le defferoit."

48. AN JJ 182 fo 51 no 85: "par ce quelle leur dist quelle sen gran bien."

This case is particularly interesting because of the existence of two other letters, one for Michau Pestiau and the other for Jehan Pestiau, priest of the parish. These narratives do not include the initial section from Jehan Barbereau's account detailing the development of Brennenne's hatred of Jehan and her attacks on his marriage. Instead, they begin the evening that Jehan Barbereau gathered his friends to go to Brennenne's home, explaining briefly that she ''was reputed and renowned to be a sorcerer or charmer and to have poisoned this Barbereau, as he said that she had created an impediment between this Barbereau and his wife.''[49] This far more truncated version of the story, which focuses only on the attack on Brennenne, follows Jehan Barbereau's narrative almost word for word from this point, and clearly demonstrates the careful construction of these narratives. In this case, it is easy to imagine the men coming together to unify their stories. Significantly, both letters emphasize that it was Jehan Barbereau who hit Brennenne on the chest, suggesting that these were the blows that were considered most likely to have caused her death. All three letters also maintain that the men were concerned about Brennenne and only left her at her door when ''she told them that she felt very well and they did not see that she was in danger of death, even though she was since the next day around the hour of noon she died.''[50] The letters suggest that her death was most likely caused by a lack of care for her wounds, laying the blame on Brennenne herself or on her husband. While this is clearly an effort to exonerate the individuals who were seeking remission by blaming their victim, it also suggests that Brennenne's reputation may have prevented her from finding the care she needed.[51]

49. AN JJ 182 fo 53 no 88: ''famee ou renommee destre sorciere ou charmeresse et poison icellui barbereau comme il disoit quelle eust une empeschement entre icellui barbereau et sa femme.''

50. AN JJ 182 fo 53 no 88: ''quelle leur dist quelle sen grans bien et ne voient quelle feust en dangier de mort ainsi quelle estoit car le landemain prouchain ensuivant environ heure de midi elle trespassa.''

51. It is significant to note, however, that from the fourteenth century the law increasingly employed surgeons as expert witnesses to determine whether a wound was fatal. Thus, the idea that an individual might die not from the wound itself but from a lack of care was central to the legal system's understanding of culpability. Michael McVaugh has documented this for the Crown of Aragon in *Medicine Before the Plague: Practitioners and Their Patients in the Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 207–18. For an example of the practice in France, see *Registre criminel de la justice de St. Martin des Champs à Paris au XIVe siècle*, ed. Louis Tanon (Paris: L. Willem, 1877), 18–19. Robin Briggs has also noted the prevalence of these references in the remission letters about witchcraft from the sixteenth century, *Witches of Lorraine,* 193.

A case from 1457 in the village of Audille near Loudon provides an even more carefully scripted interaction with a sorcerer. The accusations against Thomine Leffayre, a sixty-year-old woman renowned as a sorcerer, were varied, suggesting that a large proportion of the local population had problems with her activities. In fact, this letter appears at first to follow a far more stereotypical narrative of mob-driven vigilante justice than the other letters. The most significant of Thomine Leffayre's crimes as represented in the letter was the suspicion that she had ensorcelled Pierre Parmant, who had accused her of theft three or four years earlier. As Keith Thomas has persuasively argued, witchcraft accusations in rural England were often made against individuals who had some clear motive to harm their purported victim and may have uttered curses against them.[52] According to the letter of remission, Thomine was also believed to have killed some livestock, made a young girl so crazy that she ran through the fields naked, and caused the death of another man's wife.

On Saint Steven's day, the 26th of December, rumors began to fly about the problems her neighbors believed Thomine had caused. As a result, that night between eight and nine o'clock, a group of three men, including Pierre Parmant, went to her home and found her sleeping in her bed, dressed in a chemise and wearing her shoes. They got her out of bed and took her out of town "without beating her" and interrogated her about Pierre Parmant's illness and the other sorceries, saying if she had done these things then she should undo them.[53] Thomine replied that they should go find a man named Gaudin, who had a reputation for undoing magic. It is at this point that the narrative departs from the expected lynching story. Despite all the factors against Thomine, including her bad reputation, her prior record of stealing, her renown as a sorcerer, the various accusations against her, and the anger of the mob who accosted her after a day of murmuring about her activities, according to the letter composed on behalf of Pierre Parmant and his companions, they listened to Thomine and, again without beating her, left her outside the home of her son and daughter-in-law, supposing that they would open the door and let her warm herself. The next morning, this elderly woman was also found dead and undressed on a doorstep, having, as her tormenters claimed, frozen to death during the long December night.

Pierre Parmant's letter of remission emphasized that the gang of four men who approached the sixty-year-old woman to demand that she undo her acts

52. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 505.

53. AN JJ 187 fo 89v no 173: "sans la batie."

of sorcery only used verbal, not physical, violence against her. This, in addition to their stated expectation that Thomine's son and daughter-in-law would open the door for her, significantly mitigates their guilt in her death, but it is also interesting given the claims of Jehan Sommet's neighbors (and other people) that physical violence was the only way to force sorcerers to aid their victims. Perhaps this initial interaction with Thomine was merely intended as a prelude to the kind of escalation into violence that appears in other narratives. Given that her reputation for sorcery was fairly wide-ranging, it seems unlikely that the community would have failed to continue to persuade her to undo her spells. Nevertheless, it is also clear from this narrative that the purpose of their interaction was not to kill Thomine Leffayre, despite all the factors that seem to make the mob ripe for murder.

Not all the witches who were beaten (or, in the case of Thomine Leffayre, ostentatiously "not beaten") by gangs of young men were old women, though the deliberate escalation from request to violent demand remain strikingly constant.[54] In 1496, Jehan Secretani sought pardon for a crime he had committed four years earlier in the town of Montarhait. Jehanne Secretani, the sister of Jehan and new wife of Mare Grenault, fell into an illness that made her "troubled in her sense and understanding such that she was in danger every day of injuring herself and the fruit with which she was pregnant."[55] Estienne Mollet, who was known as a healer in the town, had been spending a lot of time at Jehanne's father's house, so her brother suspected that he had put a curse on Jehanne or perhaps given her some poison. Jehan approached Estienne Mollet and remonstrated with him, asking him to heal Jehanne, but Estienne did not respond. On the 12th of November 1492, which was the day after a fair in their town of Montarhait, Jehan Secretani and his companions drank all day, until they developed a plan to go to Estienne Mollet's house to try to convince him to heal Jehanne Secretani. The link to the fair may be more significant than a simple indication of the date. Fairs, markets, and saints' feast days were all moments of celebration

54. Despite the preponderance of female witches elsewhere, in France, at least in the early period, the ratio seems to be less skewed. Alfred Soman also found this to be the case in the *écrous* of the Conciergerie du Palais, the prison of the Parlement of Paris. He also found that very few accused sorcerers were killed. See Alfred Soman, *Sorcellerie et Justice Criminelle: Le Parlement de Paris (16e–18e siècles)* (Hampshire: Variorum, 1992), x.

55. AN JJ 227, no 62, fo 32: "fut fort troublee de son sens et entendement et estoit toute incensee et en dangier de chacun jour precipiter elle et le fruit dont pour lors estoit ensaincte."

and holidays from work, when young men in particular often spent their time carousing and ultimately engaging in violence.

The gang of young men actually had to seek out the guardian of the keys to open the gates of the town, which had already been locked for the night. They went together to the cave where Estienne Mollet lived, and woke him up. Because his fire had gone out, they borrowed some flame from one of his neighbors and started a fire in his hearth. When he refused to help them, the young men beat him with the firewood they had brought into the house, even throwing him into his fire. After kicking him a few times, one of the young men grabbed the tap from a barrel and hit him two or three times with that, and another found a small knife on the table and stabbed him with it, then hit him with the pallet from his bed, which they had set on fire, so that it burned him. Finally, they left his home and went back to town. The next morning, Jehan Secretani returned to Estienne Mollet's home, to see how he was, and to give him something to drink and to eat and ask that he not register a complaint against them. According to Jehan Secretani's story, Estienne replied, "Go on! Good boys sometimes follow bad advice."[56] Unfortunately, Estienne Mollet died, and four years later the local justice was not so obliging about "boys will be boys," thus necessitating a letter of remission.

Though this letter about Estienne Mollet appears to involve less of a ritualized pattern of violence than the others, a letter from 1480 about another male sorcerer living in Palluau-sur-Indre, Laurens Berge, reveals a very complex escalation moving gradually from requests for help to violence. Jehan Lubier's family provided an unusually long history of his interactions with the renowned sorcerer, who along with his wife was suspected of "keeping several people in languor through sorcery" and had been arrested and charged with sorcery previously, though he was released with the stipulation that he not practice sorcery in future.[57] In Jehan Lubier's case Laurens Berge had placed some powders on him and in his drinks, such that he had become ill in his heart and his stomach, feared he would suffocate, and eventually lost his senses and became insane so that he and his wife could not have sexual relations. Lubier, his father and mother, and several other members of his family all requested "several times" that Berge or his wife help Lubier, and finally, in exchange for twenty sous tournois from Lubier's father, Berge agreed. He came to Lubier and "touched the said Lubier so he was discharged

56. AN JJ 227, no 62, fo 32: "allez enffans bons avez en mauvais conseil."

57. AN JJ 208 fo 11 no 20: "tenoit plusieurs personnes en langueur par sorcerie." Claude Gauvard refers to this letter briefly, *"De Grace Especial,"* 444.

of the said sorcery," and he and his wife were both healthy again.[58] This brief reference to the economy of witchcraft practice and accusation is unusual in the remission letters, but follows patterns that historians have noted in trial records.[59] Given the relative value of sous parisis and sous tournois, Lubier's father paid exactly half the cost of a remission letter in his effort to cure his son. Clearly, Lubier's relationship with the sorcerer and his wife was a complicated one, able to shift apparently seamlessly between accusation, supplication, and economic transaction.

Unfortunately for everyone involved, this costly healing was not the happy ending of Lubier's troubles. Instead, rumors began to spread that Berge had disenchanted Lubier and his wife, so "for fear of being retaken by the justice system he threw the spell back onto the said Lubier and his wife, such that they returned to the state in which they had been before, both in their persons and in the state of their marriage."[60] There are interesting echoes here, too, of patterns found in later trials. The sorcerer, as an integral part of the community who is turned to when problems arise, can be persuaded by money or threats to perform magical acts, even though he or she knows that the magic is illegal.[61] The idea that the mere threat of being pursued by the law for undoing magical harm would be significant enough to cause Berge to allow Lubier to fall back into a state of bewitchment is fascinating, however. In some ways, Lubier and his relatives appear to be blaming the legal system for exacerbating their already significant problems with their local sorcerer. This also suggests that these extralegal proceedings were considered preferable, since clearly Lubier would have been easily able to bring Berge to the attention of the justice system, merely by encouraging the rumors that were already circulating. Instead, he and his companions continued to try to work with Berge on their own terms.

Together with Anthonie Berthault and Mace Gunnent, Lubier went to Berge's house at night and

58. AN JJ 208 fo 11 no 20: "touche ledit lubier il fut descharge de ladit sorcerie."

59. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John Tedeschi and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

60. AN JJ 208 fo 11 no 20: "lequel pour doubt destre reprins par justice gecta de rechief sort sur ledit lubier et sa femme tellement quil les revist en tel estat quilz estoient au paravant tant de leurs personnes que de lestat de marriage."

61. Mary O'Neil found this in the cases she examined from Modena, where the Inquisition often chose lighter punishments in recognition of the social pressures on magical practitioners, particularly magical healers. "Magical Healing: Love Magic and the Inquisition in Late Sixteenth-Century Modena," in *Inquisition and Society in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Stephen Haliczer (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 88–114.

forcibly made him get up and beat him a little bit and after the said late Berge told them of the said sorcery on the said Lubier they brought him to the home of the said Lubier and gave them drink and food and the said late Berge removed the said spell from the said Lubier and his wife, and they did not feel bad during the time when the said late Berge was in their home, and they had carnal relations together, which during the said illness they could not have, and as soon as the said late Berge was outside of their home the said Lubier and his wife returned to their previous state of illness in which they have been ever since.[62]

Here there is a slight escalation in their interaction. In the first instance, Berge was convinced to come and undo the spell with money, but his fears about the legal ramifications of his actions caused him to become less accommodating. The second request for aid had to be supplemented with "a little bit" of violence. Immediately after they beat him, Berge became compliant, discussing the problem with them and accepting their hospitality. However, even with this second attempt Lubier's relief was only temporary. As soon as Berge left their home, again suggesting that the power lies in the body of the sorcerer himself, Lubier and his wife immediately fell ill. This time, Lubier endured the illness for three years before trying a third time to convince Berge to help him.

Lubier's third attempt, interestingly, was his first unmitigated failure. He and his friend, Colin Tucher (yet a third named companion), went to Berge's home again at night, hoping that this time they would be able to find a more permanent cure. They took Berge from his bed, but on this occasion "they gave him time to anoint himself with certain ointments that he had and to drink certain beverages so they did not have any power to harm him."[63] Because of this inability to harm Berge, Lubier could not get the sorcerer to help him, and had to leave without any alleviation of his problems. In fact, his illness not only continued but began to worsen, making him "run

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62. AN JJ 208 fo 11 no 20: "le furent lever par force et le batirent quelque peu et apres ce qui ledit feu berge leur dist deladite sorcerie ledit lubier le menerent en lostel dicellui lubier et leur donna boire et a menger et osta ledit feu berge ladit sorcerie ausdis lubier et sa femme et ne sentirent nul mal durant le temps que ledit feu berge fut en leur hostel et eurent compaignie charnelle ensemble ce que durant ledit mal ilz ne pouvoient avoir et incontinent que ledit feu berge fut hors de leur hostel ledit lubier et sa femme retournerent en leur premier estat de maladie ou ilz ont depuis este."

63. AN JJ 208 fo 11 no 20: "lui donnerent espace de soi oindit de certains onquemens quil avoit et de boire de certains beuvraiges ilz neurent aucun puissance delui faire mal."

through the fields as if he were out of his senses and understanding."[64] This hitch in the pattern of Lubier's interactions with Berge, where Lubier had always previously been completely in control and able to gain the help he sought, backfired so dramatically that the fourth time he confronted the sorcerer, Lubier was considerably more cautious, but also ready to be more forceful in his requests.

This time, Lubier followed Berge to his new residence in another parish, where Berge had fled because he had been accused of sorcery and imprisoned before being released with a promise of responding to the accusations against him. Instead, knowing he was guilty, Berge fled, and Lubier pursued him with Anthonie Berthault and two others. They entered Berge's new home, but Berge knew they were inside and hid behind a tree. Finally, the men managed to corner Berge and began to threaten him, this time with fire, but again Berge was able to use his powers to combat their efforts. They "placed one of his hands in the flame of the fire that they held and the said Lubier felt the pain of the warming that was done to him [Berge]."[65] The sorcerer was able to transfer the pain from his own hand to Lubier's. Understandably, Lubier demanded that they stop, and insisted that they all take Berge back to his home. They left him in the road near his new residence and each went back to his own home, but despite the transferal of pain, Berge still died of his wounds and Lubier was imprisoned and awaiting trial for the murder when his family sought remission.

The narratives in these letters of remission about witchcraft revolved around issues of trust, threat, and reputation in the community. They revealed and simultaneously sought to mend deep fissures in the ideals of communal support. The victims of malefaction became the central figures of a narrative of communal reconstruction at the expense of the reputed sorcerer. However, the letters also illuminate the roles that sorcerers were expected and even, occasionally, required to play in the neighborhood. Some of the letters seem to indicate that the judicial procedures that were beginning

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64. AN JJ 208 fo 11 no 20: "quil en courir les champs comme hors de son sens et entendement." This was considered a common sign of insanity. See Pfau, "Madness in the Realm," 180, and Annie Saunier, "'Hors de sens et de mémoire': une approche de la folie au travers de quelques actes judiciaires de la fin du XIIIe à la fin du XIVe siècle," in *Commerce, finances et société (XIe–XVIe siècles) : recueil de travaux d'histoire médiévale offert à M. le Professeur Henri Dubois*, ed. Philippe Contamine, Thierry Dutour, and Bertrand Schnerb (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1993), 489–500.

65. AN JJ 208 fo 11 no 20: "mist ung des mains en la flambe de feu dont et du chauffement que lui estoit fait ledit lubier eut pain."

to target sorcery were seen, at least to those seeking remission, as disrupting the delicate balance between these magical practitioners and their communities. Rather than turning the accused sorcerer over to a legal system that was now willing to prosecute the crime, these men had a clear system in place to deal with magical acts on a local level.

Their process has clear parallels to the inquisitorial procedure, but it also had distinctly different goals. Generally, these sorcerers were sought out originally on the pretext of desiring magical healing, not because they were immediately presumed to be, or at least accused of being, the cause of the illness. There were multiple possible ways to obtain the sorcerer's aid, ranging from simple and ''sweet'' requests to gifts of food or money. It was only after the sorcerer's attempts failed, or he or she refused to help, that the narratives escalated into violence.[66] Indeed, according to Jehan Sommet's ''neighbors and other people,'' the violence itself was embedded within the community's understanding of how to counteract sorcery. However, at least within the logic of these narratives, the violence against these sorcerers was never intended to lead to death. Rather, the sorcerers' bodies were subjected to beatings and torture as part of an effort to force them to act, and in every case the death occurred later, rather than at the scene of the encounter. Given the requirement that remission letters be read aloud by a local judicial official, the cause and timing of death would need to follow the inquisitor's report fairly closely in order to be believable. Thus, it seems inaccurate to call these encounters ''lynchings'' as many historians have done.[67] Instead, perhaps these episodes need to be reinterpreted as part of a complex system of interaction between magical practitioners and their communities, where violence is

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66. The sorcerers' social position appears in some ways similar to that of the Jews studied by David Nirenberg. He argues that outbreaks of violence against Jews were deeply embedded in specific social, political, and ideological conflicts that were locally based. In fact, Nirenberg suggests that coexistence was predicated on just such occasional outbreaks of violence, which could dissolve the tensions of everyday life. This argument casts new light onto considerations of ''othering,'' violence, and community, suggesting that persecution did not intend to purify, but to enable cohabitation. See David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). It is also worth noting, as Miri Rubin points out, that violent episodes against the Jews were not only localized and particular, but also manipulated and comprehended through narrative constructions. Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999).

67. Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine*, 38; Soman, ''Witch Lynching at Juniville,'' 114–18; Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*, 163.

merely one facet, and perhaps not the most important one at that. Unfortunately, the limits of the source material means that we cannot always see what might have been the more common and more successful versions of these interactions, where the sorcerer survived and continued to provide the community with cures. However, the case of Laurens Berge, whose aid was sought by Jehan Lubier three times before the violence became so extreme that it caused his death, suggests that there may have been other interactions that did not end in tragedy.

The violence against these magical practitioners could be both ritualized, with Turlateuse's burned feet in the churchyard, and simply brutal, with Estienne Mollet beaten with whatever weapons were at hand. Perhaps the violence against Thomine Leffayre, ostentatiously untouched but left to freeze to death outside her son's home, is the most troubling. Men get beaten, and in the case of Estienne Mollet in incredibly brutal and detailed ways, but male bodies are not left exposed to the elements in the ways that these three women's bodies were, naked on doorsteps. These unclothed bodies of old women appearing on the doorsteps of their homes, after being accused of causing the illness of a young woman or man, provide a fascinating counterpoint to the naked images of witches that fired the imaginations of sixteenth-century artists.[68]

68. Lyndal Roper, *Witch-Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004), 152–54.