

UC Santa Barbara

Volume 1, Issue 1 (Spring 2021)

Title

Demonolatry and Lorraine: Witch Trials of the Late Sixteenth Century

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/94q064n2>

Journal

The UC Santa Barbara Undergraduate Journal of History, 1(1)

Author

Ortega, Kassandra

Publication Date

2021-04-01

Peer reviewed

## Demonolatry and Lorraine: Witch Trials of the Late Sixteenth Century

*Kassandra Ortega*<sup>1</sup>

---

In the sixteenth century and early seventeenth centuries, Continental Europe became the epicenter for the “witch craze” that culminated into the trials of 40,000 to 60,000 persons tried and executed for witchcraft. Between the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Lorraine, an independent duchy located in present-day northeastern France and at the time within the Holy Roman Empire, oversaw roughly 3,000 witchcraft trials, making the region one of the most intense areas of persecution of witchcraft on the continent.<sup>2</sup> Although fears of witchcraft had been going on for centuries, the modern model for fears of witches arose in the mid-fifteenth century, especially after the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* or *Hammer of Witches* written by Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in 1486, which is arguably the most famous treatise of witchcraft. This work set the stage for later judges and “witch hunters,” such as the author of *Demonolatry*, Nicholas Remy of Lorraine, to write their own witchcraft manuals that guided other judges on how to prosecute witches while simultaneously confirming their own theories on witches.<sup>3</sup> Though it serves as a great resource for understanding the ideologies of early modern European society and how the witch mania came into play, demonological literature has garnered relatively little attention compared to the witch trials themselves.<sup>4</sup> Early modern historian Stuart Clark highlighted this lack of attention to demonology and what it has “to offer those seeking to explain the witchcraft trials.”<sup>5</sup> Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century societal notions about gender, class, age, and other environmental factors played an influential role in setting the stage for the rise of witch trials during the period. Lorraine’s village society became consumed by the trials as villagers who did not fit into these societal standards faced constant surveillance by their neighbors and later accusations of witchcraft.

Nicholas Remy was a French witch-hunter and judge in Lorraine in the late sixteenth century during the height of the witch trials in Western Europe. He authored the witchcraft manual *Demonolatry* in 1595, which provided a guide on how to detect and prosecute suspected witches. By comparing Remy’s theories on witchcraft and trying witches to the actual practice of prosecuting witchcraft in late sixteenth-century Lorraine based on the case summaries of historian Robin Briggs, we can see to what extent Remy influenced the testimonies and prosecutions in witch trials of Lorraine.

Along with analyzing Remy’s *Demonolatry*, I will be utilizing Brigg’s case summaries of primary documents from the Witch Trials of Lorraine that he used to complement his book *The Witches of Lorraine*. Since Brigg’s resources on the Lorraine trials are summaries and not direct translations, it is

important to note that there may be some further context left out of these cases. However, Brigg's trial summaries are extensive and offer insight about the accused including their gender, age, and social status. Although these are secondary sources based directly off the primary source trials, Brigg's prospectus of each case still provides readers with the overall essence of each trial and the social themes that arise from it. Out of the almost four hundred case sample summaries Briggs provides as a resource on the University of Oxford's witchcraft database, 83% of the accused experienced torture at some point during the proceedings, and about 71% of total persons tried were women.<sup>6</sup> Of the almost four hundred sample cases, I chose to analyze twenty-two cases between the first ninety-three cases listed. Each case I analyzed took place in the 1580s and 1590s during and immediately following Remy's tenure.

It is important to note that while Remy's claims to have overseen the execution of over 900 witches may be an exaggeration, his actual theories about witches can show us much about how people viewed society in Western Europe during the late-sixteenth century. Remy's theories revolving around trial proceedings regarding confession and torture show that these theories were often practiced throughout the trials. His theories perpetuated a cycle that worked to both influence the trial proceedings and confirm Remy's own theories. Here I compare Remy's theories on witchcraft to the details in the trials themselves and what this comparison reflects about gender, age, and social status. While there is some connection between Remy's theories and their actual practice in the witch trials of Lorraine in the late sixteenth century, it is important to recognize that Remy's theories about one's socioeconomic status and gender were not the root cause of accusations of witchcraft, but rather left the suspects more vulnerable to being accused. This played a crucial role in affirming Remy's theories about witchcraft and demons.

### **Sixteenth-Century Lorraine**

Lorraine in the late sixteenth century was ruled by Duke Charles III in close relation with the Holy Roman Empire. The town of Nancy served as the capital of Lorraine. Lorraine was neither a "coherent geographical set [n]or a homogeneous cultural entity," and it contained mostly French and German speaking regions.<sup>7</sup> Lorraine's location between two powerful blocs, France and the Holy Roman Empire, set the duchy and its rulers up to be preoccupied with being drawn into the middle of international conflicts.<sup>8</sup> When King Henri II of France launched an attack on Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1552, the king seized episcopal cities of Lorraine and used them as a fortress. After a series of civil wars, hardships were placed on France who struggled to maintain its fortress in Lorraine. This led to a renewal of treaties that allowed Lorraine to maintain its neutrality as a duchy. Despite this neutral status, residents of Lorraine were still subjected to the burdens of intruding armies, and troops brought with them diseases causing epidemics and the devastation of crops and buildings.<sup>9</sup> The chaos

and disaster of war, famine, and widespread disease would help set the stage for the witch hunt as devastated villagers desperately looked for something- or someone- to blame for their plight.

### Legal System of Lorraine

Although the duchy of Lorraine was part of the Holy Roman Empire, the 1542 Treaty of Nuremberg granted the dukes a certain degree of independence from the empire, allowing Lorraine to differentiate itself more in its legal proceedings.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Lorraine still operated under the many rules and practices of Roman Canon law when it came to prosecuting witches, such as the interrogation, confrontation of witnesses, and the use of judicial torture to extract a confession. All orders of interrogation, torture, and execution had to be approved by the Change of Nancy in order to proceed. As explained by Briggs, a trial typically started by local officials taking testimonies from witnesses (who were usually the accused's neighbors), apprehending the suspect, interrogating the accused, and setting up a confrontation between the accused and some of the witnesses. After this procedure, the *procureur* would send a report to the Change of Nancy and recommend whether or not he believed torture should be implemented to extract a confession from the accused, or whether the judges should interrogate the suspect more. On rare occasions, the *procureur* recommended that the suspect be released due to doubt or insufficient testimonies of their guilt. After interrogation under torture, the suspect, usually unable to withstand any more torture, confessed to being a witch, earning them an automatic death sentence, where their execution would be approved by the Change.<sup>11</sup> Judicial torture was an integral tool in eliciting a confession, which was required along with two witnesses in order to secure a conviction. In witchcraft trials, where tangible evidence was almost impossible to obtain and finding two reliable witnesses was often difficult, the use of torture was implemented to make up for the lack of proof. In Lorraine, torture was deemed an essential method for reaching a confession. Of the twenty-two cases sampled from the period of Remy's influence, eighteen involved the use of torture, while the other four cases had circumstances where torture was not needed or possible, as the accused confessed prior to being tortured.

The notion that the Devil would physically intervene during the interrogation process was present in the Lorraine trials as well. In the trial of Margueritte Vaultrin in 1553, she claimed that for a long time she had wanted to confess, but whenever she had tried to do so, something would get caught in her throat or stomach, thanks to the interference of her "little master."<sup>12</sup> Even when torture was not enough to extract a confession, Remy believed that witchcraft was still involved. In the trial of Jean Coinsee, because he had endured multiple torture sessions without confessing, the *procureur* was convinced that it was because "que le diable suggère souvent à de telles personnes des billets de banque pleins de caractère ou de la drogue pour les rendre impassibles à tourmenter ou à ne pas avouer la vérité," assuring that the Devil had given Jean drugs that prevented him from confessing.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, torture was still regarded as a sure way to draw out a confession when interrogations

under normal conditions were unsuccessful. Common torture methods implemented during the process such as the rack, strappado, and screws for the thumbs and legs were, “worked upon the extremities of the body, either by distending or compressing them.”<sup>14</sup> In the trial of Didier Vosgien’s widow, after the accused had repeatedly denied accusations of witchcraft during her confrontations with witnesses, Remy himself asked the Change of Nancy’s approval for interrogation under torture. As soon as she was racked, she renounced her previous statements and confessed to her crimes.<sup>15</sup> This reinforced Remy’s beliefs on the role of torture in eliciting a confession and confirming his theories of witchcraft.

Remy made torture an important topic in *Demonolatriy*, believing that this method was the only way to get a witch to confess. Eighteen out of the twenty-two cases reviewed involved the use of racking and only in six cases a confession could not be elicited. Remy insisted that if witches were not interrogated under torture, “they always preserve as complete a silence as they can with regard to their crimes.”<sup>16</sup> Remy believed that the Devil had such a tight grip of power over his subjects that it would be impossible for them to confess willingly. Therefore, Remy believed that interrogating suspected witches under torture was a valid and acceptable way to extract a confession. Even during torture, Remy claimed that the Devil would do whatever he could to prevent his witches from confessing, often whispering into their ears that torture would be lightened or cease so they should continue to resist exposing themselves.<sup>17</sup> Remy also suggested that the Devil, who was often present lurking around his subject in prison, would even resort to physical violence to interfere with the confession process. Remy provides an example of this during the trial of Anna Xallea in 1587 when the Demon hid in her hair and forced itself down her throat hindering her ability to speak with a visible swelling lump in her throat.<sup>18</sup>

### **Nicholas Remy**

Not much is known about Remy’s early life other than the fact that he was born in Charmes, France in 1530 to a Catholic family with a background as legal officials.<sup>19</sup> He took over his uncle’s post as the lieutenant-general of the Vosges in 1570, then a few years later he was appointed by Duke Charles III as a privy councilor in Lorraine. Remy was said to have been exposed to trying witches at an early age, and this experience later took a personal turn in 1582. Remy accused and tried a woman for witchcraft after his son became ill and died after Remy denied the beggar woman charity.<sup>20</sup> From that time, Remy went on to cement his name as one of the most infamous witchcraft prosecutors in Lorraine and France.

In 1592, Remy fled to the countryside to escape the plague and began to write his treatise on witchcraft and demons. Remy’s *Demonolatriy* was published in 1595, in which he claimed to have overseen the death penalty of 900 people convicted for the crime of witchcraft.<sup>21</sup> *Demonolatriy* resembled other witchcraft treatises of early modern Europe, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Jean Bodin’s *Of the Demon-Mania of Sorceres*, and Henri Boguet’s *An Examen of Witches*. In *Book I* of

*Demonolatriy*, Remy introduces the relationship between witches and the Devil, revolving around sex, worship, and offerings. In *Book Two*, Remy centers on the various crimes against nature that witches and the Devil commit such as contaminating youth, shapeshifting, and blasphemy. *Book Three* focuses on inflicting illness, healing, and proceedings in the trial.

Throughout the work, Remy confirms his theories by citing hundreds of witch trials throughout Europe. Some modern historians, most notably William Monter, have questioned Remy's claims that he oversaw the execution of 900 accused witches, since there are well-preserved records from Lorraine in the 1580s, when Remy was prosecuting witches, but only about 150 records that document Remy's involvement.<sup>22</sup> While critics do not provide an exact reason for why Remy would inflate his numbers, it may very well have been to make himself seem more credible. Whether Remy's claims are valid or not, it seems that Remy's theories and the trials themselves worked in a loop, with his theories reflecting the testimonies and evidence brought up in trial, and the trial simultaneously confirming these same theories.

## Gender

Modern conceptions of witches have remained remarkably consistent across time and reflect the cultural legacy of demonologists such as Remy in sixteenth-century Lorraine. Remy posits that women's qualities, making them more "weak-minded," leave them more susceptible to the Devil's influence. Remy states, "it is not unreasonable that this scum of humanity should be drawn chiefly from the feminine sex...Fabius says that women are more prone to believe in witchcraft."<sup>23</sup> This view of women surely played a role in leaving them more vulnerable to being accused of witchcraft, as a majority of those tried in Lorraine were indeed women. While one theory about the witch hunts of early modern Europe was that it was not a witch-hunt but rather "women-hunting," however this view fails to address the complexities and relations between genders at the time.<sup>24</sup> Remy's theories on gender and witches along with the witch trials themselves do not imply that women were deliberately being hunted as witches, but rather that societal notions about women left them more vulnerable to being suspected and tried as witches.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout his work, Remy refers back to his idea of women's weak and feeble nature that makes them more impressionable by the Devil's power. This notion, in conjunction with his claim that the Devil preys on those whose naïve nature takes them down the road to anger or desire, reflected why women of certain reputations might be left more open to accusations of witchcraft.<sup>26</sup> Those women who were targeted for witchcraft were often on the outskirts of their community- not completely alien, but seen more as constant nuisances within their social groups. Remy describes witches as constantly seeking out ways to ruin and subvert the interests of the public, and throughout the trial records, those on trial were women accused of wreaking havoc within their respective communities.<sup>27</sup> In Jacotte Raon's trial, she was accused by her neighbors of being a "femme riotteuse," a laughing woman, and

those who fought with her reported suffering soon after.<sup>28</sup> Once a woman made a comment deemed inappropriate she could later find her remarks being brought up against her as accusations of witchcraft. For example, Jennon was a woman feared more than loved by her neighbors and in her trial, it was revealed she had made a comment after one of her neighbors gave birth that the newborn child would not live long, and when it did indeed die two weeks later, the other women started to avoid her.<sup>29</sup> While Remy denies that the Devil can see the future, as it is a power only God has, the Devil knows all that has passed and is, therefore, able to deduce what may happen and relay that to his subjects.<sup>30</sup> When these ill-timed remarks turned out to have some predictability, coming from women who lacked power and status within the community, this coincidence made these women more likely to be suspected of working with the Devil. In a period where misfortune was rampant throughout villages in Lorraine, those women whose tone or character was deemed unsuitable became more liable to be suspected of witchcraft.

Remy's work reflected sixteenth- and seventeenth-century views on what traits constituted femininity, such as motherhood and fragility. These beliefs left older, argumentative women that were no longer bound by the confines of femininity to be subjected to more scrutiny by their neighbors.<sup>31</sup> Throughout the Lorraine trials, witness testimonies constantly referred to the accused women's "reputation" as wicked women and whores, who constantly picked fights with their neighbors. In the testimonies against Jacotte Colin, witnesses consistently cited her long-standing reputation as a witch and unhappy woman, who was feared by many in her village.<sup>32</sup> Four witnesses claimed that Didier Vosgien's widow had a long reputation as a whore who frequented with the curé.<sup>33</sup> The constant surveillance of these women who did not "fit in" allowed for the slightest infractions to be interpreted as works of witchcraft.

While Remy did perpetuate the image of women as witches, it is important to recognize that this was not part of a deliberate plot by men to target women, as these accusations against women typically came from within their gender spheres, not from men located on the outside of this sphere of influence. During this era, women and men typically interacted daily within their gendered domains and were less likely to interact with those outside their gender unit unless in a family setting.<sup>34</sup> In *Book Two*, Remy refers to the Devil and witches' relationship to infants and children, with witches often taking out their revenge on their enemies' babies and young children.<sup>35</sup> Childcare and maintaining the family unit was a central role for women in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and these mothers would often become quite defensive when harm came their children's way. Since child-rearing was regarded as an important qualifier for womanhood, any perceived threats to this ability to bear and raise children often caused a sense of defensiveness and distress.

Remy's theory that it was a practice of witches to use corpses to devise potions, spells, and charms also extended to witches' use of women's abortive births.<sup>36</sup> In the trial of Didier Vosgien's widow, she confessed to burning a still-born child and proceeding to make a magic powder out of its ashes.<sup>37</sup> A

witness accused Ambroise Gillot of being responsible for her stillborn infant after touching her pregnant belly and telling her, "I pray that you can never give birth."<sup>38</sup> Ambroise's threat to her neighbor's childbearing future struck fear among the women around her. Abortive births, along with the premature deaths of fetuses, both of which Remy referred to as "shameful deaths," may have served as a trigger for women who felt their image of both motherhood and womanhood was being jeopardized. Children's illness and the state of childlessness often evoked a fierce passion and fear in mothers, which in part influenced them to make them search for answers. Since women carried out various acts of childcare within groups bound by their gender, it was the women within their community whom they looked at with blame and against whom they made accusations of witchcraft. As Remy centers on female witches in his theories about sorcery and the family unit, this focus is also reflected within the Lorraine trials themselves. When it came to accusations about the harm inflicted upon the family, both the accusers and accused were women. Men were often absent from the childbirth process, including abortive and premature births, so it was less likely for them to be linked with witchcraft in that sense.<sup>39</sup>

Although Remy and society primarily depicted witches as women, this did not exempt some men from being tried in Lorraine as well. It is important to note that Remy did not completely ignore the fact that men could be witches too, as one-fourth of the witch cases he cited were about men.<sup>40</sup> He often used the "generic" male pronouns, but he failed to confront what made men witches in the same way he had done with women.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, men made up about 28% of those tried in Lorraine.<sup>42</sup>

Men who were accused of witchcraft were often open to suspicion because of their proximity to women, including their mothers, sisters, and wives, who were reputed witches, or if they had any criminal record.<sup>43</sup> It was a combination of their reputation and their association with unrepentant women that made them more open to being attacked with witchcraft accusations. In Claudon Jean Gerardin's trial, witnesses brought up that many of his female relatives were also suspected witches, and he was often referred to as an evil man.<sup>44</sup> But there were even instances where an association with male relatives that had reputations of witchcraft left men vulnerable. Brothers Jean and Claudin Aulbry and their father were tried and all three men were noted by witnesses to have reputations as feared witches. One witness described their reputation as "fort craings et doubté d'un chacun," (strongly feared by their neighbors.)<sup>45</sup> Having suspected family members left men vulnerable to close examination, and when this was coupled with a negative personality or criminal history, it left their actions to be interpreted as proof of witchcraft.

A man's criminal past or his negative disposition also put him in a precarious position within his community, where his behavior and interactions were left to be construed in a different light by the people around him. While Remy linked women's vulnerability to the Devil's power because of their weak nature, he claimed that violence was enough to easily persuade men to practice sorcery.<sup>46</sup> Men in the village who had been previously convicted of crimes such as theft and rape were perceived as evil



and violent, which allowed suspicious neighbors to link them to witchcraft. Jean Coinsee had a violent reputation and had previously been charged with the rape of Ysabel, another reputed witch. Jean's hostile behavior toward his neighbors made them fear him and led them to blame him for misfortunes that came their way. Jean often quarreled with his neighbors, one witness recounted that after he had fought with the accused, Jean told him he would repent and the witness's two horses were later found dead.<sup>47</sup> The societal notions that associated men with violence and women with fragility led to extreme monitoring. Thus, as with women who broke the mold of female of fragility, men who stepped out of bounds on what was "acceptable" male violence would find their activity more likely to be perceived as witchcraft compared to that of other people who did not "stick out." Gender thus played an important role in defining who was considered more vulnerable.

### Age

In conjunction with Remy's views on women, he further posits the image of witches as elderly women, so bitter and weak that they make primary subjects to the Devil's whims. Elderly women also made up a large portion of those who were tried for witchcraft in Lorraine. As in the case of gender, however, simply being elderly was not enough to be deemed a witch, especially considering that throughout the trials, these older people often had been suspected by their neighbors for decades. Indeed, most of those accused were older, but their reputations preceded them for years, starting as young or middle-aged women. These decades of grievances built up against them and eventually culminated into outright accusations of witchcraft by the time they reached old age.<sup>48</sup> In the case of older women, this was also the time when they became less detached from the image of motherhood and instead were viewed as dependent and helpless.

Throughout *Demonolatry*, Remy paints the image of the old witch, age making them senile and impressionable to the Devil's control. Remy insists that those in old age are powerless and weak, "just as, in the depth of winter, we become more sluggish and languid; and when we come to old age, which is as it were the beginning of death, all our senses are duller and more torpid."<sup>49</sup> However, Remy also linked old age to a deep-seated profaneness, reflected in many of the trials for older accused witches, where witnesses often remarked the accused's personality as obscene and vulgar. For instance, Remy asserts, "and so the Devil, for the most part, has for his servants' filthy old hags whose age and poverty serve but to enhance their foulness."<sup>50</sup> This negative connotation of older residents, especially older women, as nasty crones, therefore, linked them to witchcraft and the Devil's filth. Although old age was not enough to charge the person as a witch, it helped expose them to more suspicion from their village.

Remy's views on age paralleled most of society's perceptions of the elderly, painting them as weak, and burdens on their families and community. Many of the witness testimonies in Lorraine attest to this notion. As older people became unfit to work for a living, they would have to become dependent

on their children for support. Marriage was one way to avoid dependence on others, but for older women who became widowed, finding a new husband was very difficult. Older women were then left with few options to make a living. Often they resorted to the roles of beggars or dependents, which both placed them as burdens to their families and community. In the trial of the sixty-year-old Jeanne Thihard, she was accused of having poisoned her son after he tried to put her out of his house.<sup>51</sup> And in the trial of Claudon la Romaine, a widow of fifteen years, she was described as “bothersome” by a witness and their family when she constantly showed up to the witness’s home to eat supper and warm herself by the fire. Claudon’s continued visitations became so irritating to her neighbors that they even tried to eat their supper early to avoid her.<sup>52</sup> While being viewed as an annoyance was not enough to garner an accusation of witchcraft, this supposed burden they placed on their village worked in conjunction with other negative associations about their age to make older people more likely to be suspected. This resentment built up between older residents and their neighbors left the elderly in a precarious position that helped make them more easily subjected to accusations of witchcraft, compared to younger villagers. However, this does not mean that younger people were exempt from being accused in Lorraine.

Remy’s theory that older people were more likely to be servants of the Devil was heavily reflected by the numbers of older people who were tried for witchcraft. And although he focuses less on youth and younger-middle-aged adults, they were also subjected to their fair share of accusations. For most of the elderly tried for witchcraft, the charges brought up against them did not just emerge out of recent events but were instead a result of ten to even thirty years of grievances built up against them. Even though Remy primarily targets the elderly, he does state that many of the witches may have begun their sins with the Devil years prior.<sup>53</sup> One witness claimed that neighbors had suspected Jacotte Roan of having an “evil reputation for 25 or 30 years.”<sup>54</sup> Claudon la Blanche, over sixty years old, confessed that she had been a witch for thirty years.<sup>55</sup> Jean Mallebarbe, also sixty, admitted to being seduced by the Devil twelve years earlier.<sup>56</sup>

Devotion to religion also plays an important role in what made older women more vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft, as Remy theorized that the elderly were more likely to fall prey to the Devil under a false sense of virtue. This belief was constantly reflected in the Lorraine trials, as many witnesses and older defendants reverted to the importance of worshipping God and the saints as a defense against the Devil and accusations of witchcraft. Remy posited the idea that the Devil tricked older women to operate their malfeasances under a false sense of purity that they believed justified their actions, as “Satan often deludes men by an appearance of righteousness.”<sup>57</sup> Chesnon la Triffatte denied accusations of witchcraft and instead claimed that she had cured people by the “grace of God” and by calling saints.<sup>58</sup> The belief in calling on saints, who were thought to have the ability to inflict illnesses and cures, was also a major source of suspicion of witchcraft by Remy and Lorraine villagers. Remy states, “I write with special reference to certain old women who are forever talking of their lucky Saints,

and how necessary is it to make pilgrimages to their shrines.”<sup>59</sup> Remy, who argued witches’ powers were often the Devil’s illusions, was able to confirm his theory when witnesses testified that the accused talked a lot about making devotions to the saints. In one example, a witness accused Ambroise Gillot of encouraging her to make an offering to Saint Genens to cure her sick cow, and after the witness followed Ambroise’s orders, the cow recovered.<sup>60</sup> This reflected Remy’s argument that older women who tried hard to work under false senses of purity, had fallen prey to the Devil’s tricks that what they were doing was virtuous.

### **Social Status**

Sixteenth-century Lorraine, like the rest of Europe in the early modern period, was a highly stratified society, and throughout *Demonolatry*, Remy theorizes that those more susceptible to the Devil’s charms are the poor and destitute, who often struggle to survive without the financial means to support themselves and their families. With the Devil’s false promises of material wealth, they are then left with little choice but to resort to making a pact with him. Remy states, “if they [demons] do indeed produce and display any such wealth, they do so with no intent to enable men to make use of it, but rather use it as a bait to lure their dupes to destruction, ruin and death.”<sup>61</sup> The poor and destitute made up a large portion of those tried for witchcraft as their economic status left them far more vulnerable to accusation than those of higher social classes, however, there were instances of prosecution within higher social classes. Sixteenth-century Lorraine, like most of continental Europe at the time, was a highly stratified society where people were expected to know and remain in their place, so those who stepped out of line were left open to be scrutinized. It is important to note that the poor were not subjected to a “hunt” against them because of their social status, as most accusations were made within social groups. Ultimately, the compounding effects of gender, age, and social class made individuals more vulnerable to witchcraft accusations.

Remy proposes the theory that the Devil can have so many people fall prey to him because of the promises of material wealth and success the Devil makes to his victims and, indeed, many of those accused who were poor confessed that the Devil persuaded them with promises of wealth. Remy claimed that these promises always turn out to be “glamours,” as the money the Devil gave to witches was always revealed to be coal, feces, or leaves.<sup>62</sup> Catherine Tarillon, a poor woman, claimed that after she consented to a pact with the Devil, the money he gave her was revealed to be leaves,<sup>63</sup> and Catherine Lhuillier claimed that her money was unveiled as a cinder.<sup>64</sup> The Devil was believed to seek his next subjects when they were most vulnerable, which often meant when they were in financial stress. The destitute Denyse Pottier confessed that the Devil seduced her as she waited to receive alms, promising her that he could give her more than bread.<sup>65</sup> And Ysabel Seguin, the elderly woman previously cited, also confessed that she had been seduced by the Devil when she was at a point of extreme poverty.<sup>66</sup> This notion that it was the poor who were pushed into these situations because of financial need, in

conjunction with any “suspicious” characteristics that could set them apart from the rest of their community, contributed to the likelihood of them being accused.

During the sixteenth century, a period in Lorraine defined by unprecedented misfortunes that often affected villagers’ livelihoods, finding a scapegoat for their financial struggles was imperative. Stuck in the middle of a war between France and the Holy Roman Empire, many of Lorraine’s villagers were in stressful economic situations, as they struggled to provide for themselves and their families. Land devastation, unpredictable climate, and other unforeseen environmental problems resulted in devastating crops, which formed the livelihood for most of Lorraine. Remy blamed witches, under the supervision of the Devil, for destroying crops as a way to wreak havoc on nature.<sup>67</sup> The failure to grow crops posed a great economic threat to people, and the anxiety that came with it caused people to seek out answers for their misfortune. Many testimonies involved accusations over damage to crops and livestock. One example is seen in testimony against Jacquotte Gardeux, where the witness believed Jacquotte was responsible for the death of three cows after they had given birth.<sup>68</sup> When the accused quarreled with neighbors over issues such as land and animals, which later resulted in some calamity, suspicion arose. A person’s low social status, in conjunction with other factors that caused suspicion by their neighbors, allowed for grievances over economic misfortunes to build-up for years and eventually culminate into an actual charge of witchcraft.

Accusations of witchcraft came from within communities and not typically from across social status lines, and it was the poor within the villagers’ community who were left particularly vulnerable to suspicion. With the deteriorating economic situation, many villagers were forced into poverty and resorted to begging, and others grew to resent their presence in towns and villages. Many of the poor who were tried for witchcraft in Lorraine often survived off charity and unstable jobs and disputed with their neighbors when they were denied alms. When these neighbors later suffered economic misfortunes, they may have felt guilt when they had denied the suspect alms, and instead blamed the accused for witchcraft.<sup>69</sup> Sixteenth- and early-seventeenth-century Lorraine was plagued with turmoil that left many residents resentful of their misfortunes and often searched for somewhere, or someone, to place blame. Residents were angry at their bad-luck and had a lack of empathy to give during these times of adversity and directed this anger at the most vulnerable people in their community: other poor neighbors.

While the poor did make up a large portion of the accused, with seventeen out of the twenty-two cases involving poor or destitute persons, but that did not exempt people from higher social standings to be tried as well. People defined as “comfortable” (according to Brigg’s trial descriptions) in their economic status were accused as well, albeit to a lesser extent than poor residents, but still, an important factor to consider. Villagers from all social statuses, comfortable and poor, had faced economic troubles. Because of that, better off people were just as determined to maintain their economic position in society and became less tolerant or accommodating to neighbors that they felt

threatened their wealth.<sup>70</sup> In the Lorraine trials, accusations against comfortable people often had to do with issues over property. For instance, in the interrogation of Jacotte Roan she claimed, “que par la grâce de Dieu, ils ont rassemblé beaucoup de beaux biens; et croit fermement que c’est la cause principale de ce que cela peut être haïe ou mal voulu de certains habitants,” meaning her neighbors had resented her because of the good fortune God had granted her.<sup>71</sup> Although Jacotte claimed that her wealth came from the grace of God, it served as a source for her neighbors to accuse her of witchcraft. While in the trial of Margueritte Vaultrin, she confessed to the accusation that she had indeed poisoned her brother because he held control over the land she thought was rightfully hers.<sup>72</sup> Resentment or desire for a suspect’s property left Lorraine’s more comfortable residents open to be attacked by their neighbors.<sup>73</sup> As the poor were left vulnerable to suspicion because of their lack of capital, those under comfortable economic positions were left vulnerable to accusations because of their capital.

### **Conclusion**

Sixteenth-century Lorraine was defined by being the location of one of the most intense witchcraft persecutions in Europe. Remy very likely was not the grand witch prosecutor he painted himself out to be with his extraordinary claim that he oversaw the conviction of 900 witches. Nevertheless, Remy’s book presents an important glimpse into the history of witchcraft in sixteenth-century Lorraine. While his theories about witches and demons lack logic by today’s standards, they were very much reflective of the views of Lorrainers in the 1500s. *Demonolatry* perpetuated a cycle, where Remy’s theories worked to influence Lorraine’s trial proceedings and confirm his theories at the same time. Remy, like most of Lorraine, pictured the image of a witch as an elderly, poor woman, and this is indeed very reflective of who was tried the most frequently in Lorraine. However, Remy does largely forgo the fact that people not considered the most vulnerable in society; men, youth, and those of higher social and economic status, were also subjected to witchcraft accusations as well. The compounding effects of being elderly, poor, and a woman made individuals more vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft as they were more likely to be on the outs with the community, leaving their behavior and interactions to be more heavily scrutinized, compared to those who had more power in society.

## Notes

1. Kassandra Ortega is a student at the University of California, Santa Barbara.
2. Brian Levack, "Introduction: The Trial of Francatte Camont in Lorraine, 1595." In *The Witchcraft*.
3. Virginia Krause, "Confessional Fictions and Demonology in Renaissance France," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35, no. 2 (2005): 327–348 at 342.
4. Lara Apps & Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe*, (Manchester: Manchester Press University, 2003), 95.
5. Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) vii.
6. Robin Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 71- 73.
7. Jean-Claude Diedler, "Cats, Wolves, Bears, and other Cocodemons: Zoomorphism Demonic in the Imagination of the Vosges Mountain Dweller of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 48, no. 97 (November 2015):475-495 at 481.
8. Briggs, *Witches of Lorraine*, 12.
9. Briggs, *Witches of Lorraine*, 12-14.
10. Briggs, *Witches of Lorraine*, 60.
11. Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine*, 63.
12. Robin Briggs, "Woman Daisy Anthoine Vultrin, Rebeuville," 1553, W081, B 4444, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
13. Briggs, "Jean Coinsse de Rolbes," 1581, W081A, B 4488, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
14. John H. Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof: Europe and England in the Ancien Regime*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 15.
15. Briggs, "Anon widow Didier Vosgien, Bassing," 1594, W093, B 5312 no 3, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
16. Nicholas Remy, *Demonolatriy*, ed. Montague Summers and trans. E.A. Ashwin (London: John Rodker, 1930), 167.
17. Remy, *Demonolatriy*, 164.
18. Remy, *Demonolatriy*, 165.
19. Montague Summers, "Editor's Introduction" in *Demonolatriy*, xxvii.
20. Rossell Hope Robins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*, (New York: Bonanza Books, 1981), 408.
21. Remy, *Demonolatriy*, 1.
22. William Monter, "Fiscal Sources and Witch Trials in Lorraine," *Magical, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 2, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 21-48 at 17.

23. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 56.
24. Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 263.
25. Apps & Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe*, 35.
26. Remy, *Demonolatry*, vi.
27. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 125.
28. Briggs, "Jacotte Woman Nicolas François Raon, Xennenay," 1598, W013, B 2521 no 1, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
29. Briggs, "Jennon Widow Didier Ramaixe, Blamont," 1599, W024, B 3317 no 2, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
30. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 172.
31. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 264.
32. Briggs, "Jacotte Femme Demenge Romary Petit Colin, Seuche," 1594, w012, B 2512, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
33. Briggs, "Anon widow Didier Vosgien, Bassing," W093.
34. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 273.
35. Remy, *Demonolatry*, Book II: Chapter II.
36. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 99.
37. Briggs, "Anon widow Didier Vosgien, Bassing," W093.
38. Briggs, "Margueritte widow Jean Gallier, Hanriotte widow Jean des Boeufs, Claudin Clerget, and Ambroise wife Gillot Gillot, la Neuveville- sous-Châtenois," 1586, W084, B 4500 no 2, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
39. Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 267.
40. Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine*, 332.
41. Apps & Gow, *Male Witches*, 98.
42. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 261.
43. Apps & Gow, *Male Witches*, 32.
44. Briggs, "Claudon Jean Gerardin dit le Plomb, Girecourt," 1597, W055A, B 3743, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
45. Briggs, "Jean and Claudin Aulbry, St Prancher," 1586, W083, B 4500 no 1, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
46. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 2.
47. Briggs, "Jean Coinsse de Rolbes," W081A.
48. Briggs, *Witches of Lorraine*, 92.
49. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 10.
50. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 38.

51. Briggs, "Jeanne widow Valentin Claude Thihard, Le Void de Belmont," 1591, W055, B 3728, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
52. Briggs, "Claudon la Romaine, widow Bastien Thiery, Charmes," 1596, W070, B 4077 no 2, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
53. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 184.
54. Briggs, "Jacotte Woman Nicolas François Raon, Xennenay," W013.
55. Briggs, "Claudon la Blanche, widow Claudon Aulbry, St Prancher," 1584, W082, B 4495, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
56. Briggs, "Beard woman Jean Mallebarbe, Charmes," 1596, W069, B 4077 no 1, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
57. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 32.
58. Briggs, "Chesnon la Triffatte, Charmes," 1596, W071, B 4077 no 3, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
59. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 138.
60. Briggs, "Margueritte widow Jean Gallier, Hanriotte widow Jean des Boeufs, Claudin Clerget, and Ambroise wife Gillot Gillot, la Neuveville- sous-Châtenois," W084.
61. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 7.
62. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 7-8.
63. Briggs, "Catherine wife Adam Tarillon, Bassing," 1594, W091, B 5312 no 1, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
64. Briggs, "Catherine widow Jean Lhuillier de Maizieres, Domnon," 1594, W092, B 5312 no 2, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
65. Briggs, "Denyse widow Anthoine Pottier, Rouvres-la-Chétive," 1598, W086, B 4535 no 1, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
66. Briggs, "Ysabel widow Nicolas Seguin, and his daughter Gauthine, Neufchâteau," 1596-8, W087, B 4535 no 2, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
67. Remy, *Demonolatry*, 67.
68. Briggs, "Jacquotte wife Florentin Gardeux, and Marie wife François Canot, la Neuveville-sous-Châtenois," 1586, W085, B 4500 no 3, Lorraine Witchcraft Trials, University of Oxford.
69. Briggs, *Witches and Neighbors*, 276.
70. Brian P. Levack, *The Witch Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1995), 151.
71. Briggs, "Jacotte Woman Nicolas François Raon, Xennenay," W013.
72. Briggs, "Woman Daisy Anthoine Vultrin, Rebeuville," W081.
73. Levack, *The Witch Hunt in Early Mod Europe*, 152.