

WITCH HUNTS IN THE LOW COUNTRIES (1450–1685)

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The historiography of witchcraft has, to the present, depicted the Southern Netherlands (present-day Belgium, without the territories of the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, the Duchy of Bouillon and the Principality of Stavelot-Malmedy) as a region of terrible, organized witch-hunts, mainly by the Spanish Habsburg rulers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the same time it puts these so-called Spanish Netherlands in total contrast with its northern neighbour, the Northern Netherlands (present-day Netherlands), where mass witchcraft trials were very rare. Archival evidence and the number of people executed as witches seem, at first sight, to confirm this theory. However, we have to discern a clear internal difference – chronologically as well as in terms of the intensity of the prosecutions – between the Flemish-speaking part and the French- and German-speaking parts within present-day Belgium. The witch-hunts in the territory of the Prince-Bishopric of Liège – which belonged from 1500 until 1789 to the Lower Rhenish-Westphalian Circle (Niederrheinisch-Westfälischer Reichskreis) and included most of present Belgian provinces of Liège and Limburg – and the Duchy of Bouillon and the Principality of Stavelot-Malmedy will be studied separately.

Times and areas of the most intensive witch-hunting and the approximate number of victims

Like most European regions, the Low Countries experienced their real witch-hunts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At that time, the territory of the *Southern Netherlands* covered some major regions such as Flanders, Artois, Brabant, Maastricht, Malines, Gelre, Roermond, Namur, Luxembourg, Limburg-Overmaas, Hainault, Lille, Orchies and Douai, Tournai and Cambrai. Recent research has shown that at least 1,150–1,250 witches were executed in the Southern Netherlands during the period 1450–1685. This number considerably exceeds the 160 witches executed in the Northern Netherlands.

However, this absolute figure should be nuanced. Within the Southern Netherlands, a distinction has to be made between the prosecutions north of the linguistic frontier, on the one hand, and the prosecutions south of the linguistic frontier, on the other hand. While the first serious hunts took place in Artois, Lille-Orchies and

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Table 8.1 Total number of witches executed in the Southern Netherlands (1450–1685)

<i>North of the linguistic frontier (Dutch-speaking)</i>	<i>South of the linguistic frontier (French-speaking)</i>	<i>South of the linguistic frontier (French- and German-speaking)</i>
County of Flanders: 202	County of Artois, Cambrésis, Lille-Orchies, Tournai: 47	Duchy of Luxembourg: 358 (Dupont-Bouchat) between 2000 and 3000 (R. Voltmer)
Duchy of Brabant: 57	County of Hainault: 200–300	
Limburg: 9	Duchy of Brabant: 67	
Roermond: 46	County of Namur: 164	
in all: 314	in all: minimum 478– maximum 578	in all: 358 (Dupont-Bouchat) in all: between 2000 and 3000 (R. Voltmer)

Cambrésis, Namur and Luxembourg, during the first half of the sixteenth century, they were closely followed by those in Hainault, in the county of Flanders (including a first prosecution phase around 1530–1540). In the Flemish-speaking part of the Duchy of Brabant, the first big trials were yet to come.¹

In this early phase, one can hardly overestimate the impact of the famous trial that took place in 1459 against the Waldensians in Arras. Fifteen people, who admitted to having taken part in obscene sabbats and paying homage to a black goat, were burned at the stake.² The ever-increasing sorcery trials within the French-speaking regions south of the linguistic frontier were described in a similar way. Archival evidence contains the words “sorcherie” (sorcery) and “vauderie” (Waldensian heresy) as inextricable synonyms. At Nivelles, a woman was banned in 1459 on suspicion of being a “vaudoise ou sorcière”. Moreover, the crime of sorcery was increasingly mixed with fifteenth-century demonology. The pact with the Devil and his adoration by a sect had become standard. The short-term consequences of the trials at Arras launched large-scale inquiries at Tournai, Douai and Cambrai about potential witches. Several episcopal inquisitors became aware of the fact that they had to do with a new phenomenon and published treatises on this new maleficent sect. One of them, Jean Tinctor, had his tract against the Waldensians translated from French into Latin in Bruges. Preachers influenced the common flock by using demonological interpretations of sorcery, thereby articulating the cumulative concept of witchcraft and making everyone believe that witches belonged to an organized sect that serves the Devil. It is striking to historians, such as Monballyu, Vanysacker, de Waardt, de Blécourt, Gijswijt-Hofstra and Frijhoff, to see that this belief or interpretation of the crime of sorcery made no headway in the Flemish- (Dutch-) speaking part north of the linguistic frontier, nor in the Northern Netherlands.³ In the county of Flanders, sorcery was still punished only in combination with poisoning. After 1520, the county of Flanders intensified its prosecutions of sorcery. It took until 1532 to burn the first witches at the stake on suspicion “of having given themselves to the enemy of Hell” (Bruges). The Flemish-speaking part of the Duchy of Brabant avoided witch-hunting for a long time. The custom of buying off prosecutions from the officers of justice generally prevented trials. After a period of relative calm (1510–1570), during which

time witches seemed to have been replaced by Protestant heretics, new prosecutions based on cumulative witchcraft started.

North of the linguistic frontier, the actual witch-hunt only began in 1589. In the Duchy of Brabant, there was the witch year of Lier (1589), with the execution of Cathelyne van den Bulcke and the trials against women and girls in Breda and Hertogenbosch. The county of Flanders began its witch-hunt with the burning at the stake of Lievine Morreeuws in Furnes. In Brabant, Peelland and Maastricht, the witch craze seems to be confined to around 1612, with forty-two executions. The year 1595 was particularly bloody: from June until September 1595, the Flemish-speaking part of Brabant executed twenty-nine women and three men. In the county of Flanders, the first peak lasted until 1628, with at least 161 executions. Westhoek – Furnes, Nieuport, Diksmuide, Sint-Winoksbergen, Dunkirk, Hondschote, Broekburg, Casel and Ieper – was especially prone to witches. Cities like Bruges (in 1595) and Ghent (in 1601) also had “witch years”. The region of Roermond, in the Southern Netherlands, had its witch craze in 1613: forty executions, followed in 1622 with yet another three. In the Duchy of Limburg and Overmaas, Eysden noted seven executions between 1609 and 1613, and Valkenburg had two in 1620.

There was another prosecution peak north of the linguistic frontier around the years 1630–1646. In Bruges and Mechelen, there were four executions in 1634–1635 and three and four executions in 1642 respectively. The most striking characteristic of the witchcraft prosecutions in the County of Flanders is the fact that it did not end until late in the seventeenth century. In Nieuwpoort, there were still four prosecutions between 1650 and 1652; in Olsene, there were two in 1661; in Heestert, three between 1659 and 1667; and in Belsele, the last witch was burned in 1684. In all, there were at least twenty-three executions after 1650.

As far as the Flemish-speaking regions of the Southern Netherlands are concerned, the essential difference with the Northern Netherlands is clearly time related (much later) and not so much the intensity of the prosecutions (314 versus 160 executions).

The situation south of the linguistic frontier was totally different: the prosecutions were much more violent.⁴ After an early initial phase, most of the regions had a second peak in witch-hunting from 1570 to 1630. In some places, cities continued their witch-hunts deep into the seventeenth century, as was certainly the case for Artois and Cambrésis. Nevertheless, Namur and Luxembourg – with respectively 270 trials and 144 executions between 1509 and 1646 and 547 trials with at least 358 persons executed between 1560 and 1683 – were among the most ardent witch-hunters in the Southern Netherlands. According to Voltmer – although she only recently produced real evidence – there could have been possibly 2,500–4,000 trials with at least 2,000–3,000 persons executed in Luxembourg. Leaving aside the discussion between Dupont-Bouchat and Voltmer, archival evidence points out that the jurisdictions of Bitburg, Arlon, Grevenmacher, Luxembourg and Remich – all German-speaking – were especially zealous. The proximity of the Diocese of Trier of Archbishop Johann VII von Schöneburg, who ordered around 350 executions between 1581 and 1591, and the direct influence of the demonological tracts of the latter’s suffragan bishop, Peter Binsfeld (1545–1598), together with the typical jurisprudential method of “Hexenausschüsse” or “Monopoles” – travelling experts gathering all possible information on witch crimes within villages – surely influenced the attitude of Namur and Luxembourg towards the crime of witchcraft.

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In the northern provinces of the Low Countries, the *Northern Netherlands* (present-day Netherlands), trials for witchcraft were rare, with very few mass persecutions. As de Waardt has noted, some areas, like the province of Friesland, remained completely free of witchcraft trials, while in other regions prosecutions began relatively late. As already mentioned, around 160 persons were executed between 1450 and 1608. Despite a considerable lack of archival evidence, the Northern Netherlands seems to have experienced their highest level of witch-hunts within the third quarter of the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the province of Groningen already witnessed its first wave of trials in 1547, when twenty women and one man were executed. In the 1550s, the region between the Rhine and the Meuse Rivers was affected. In the mid-1560s, especially in 1564, the western province of Holland experienced its heaviest persecutions. The last execution on Dutch soil took place in 1608 in the town of Gorcum (province of Holland), after a woman confessed to having made a pact with the Devil and bewitching several people.⁵

As Seibert has indicated, in the territory of the *Prince-Bishopric of Liège* the jurisdictional system under the rulers Ernest (1581–1612) and Ferdinand (1612–1650) of Bavaria, adopted since the beginning of the early modern times, has strongly influenced the attitude towards the crime of witchcraft.⁶ A centrally controlled system, whereby the High Courts of Liège and Hasselt (for the Duchy of Looz) had full power, did not allow excesses like the neighbouring prince-bishoprics of Trier and Cologne. Besides, the crime of witchcraft fell under the faculty of the civil tribunals. Only a few exceptional cases, in which clergy were concerned, were handled before ecclesiastical courts. A strange combination of an inciting “Mandement” against sorcerers and wanderers by Ernest in 1605 and a decision by the same prince-bishop in 1608 that accusers in witch trials had to pay the financial costs influenced a premature ending of prosecutions.⁷ The fact that his successor, Ferdinand, was not personally involved in the witch-hunts in Liège, contrary to his Electorate of Cologne and the aldermen of Liège – members of the “Chiroux” party were faithful to the prince-bishop – also decelerated the number of witch trials in Liège. A lack of archival material – which was destroyed during the Second World War – makes it difficult to give figures. One can imagine that Liège had some persecutions during the years 1580–1590. According to Seibert, the territory counted at least fifty executions during the period 1620–1635, while the persecutions certainly continued into the second part of the seventeenth century.

The *Principality of Stavelot-Malmedy*, a territory of around 600 square kilometres, led by the prince-abbot of the Abbey of Stavelot and the city of Malmedy, experienced its own witchcraft prosecutions during the early modern period. The most known case was the trial of the monk Jean Del Vaulx de Stavelot (1592–1597), who was eventually decapitated in 1597, which was brought before an ecclesiastical court.⁸ In 1607, six executions followed before the High Court of Liège. Other regions and towns had their own witches burnt at the stake: Chevron, eight between 1604 and 1607; Rahier, forty-four in 1621; Malmedy and Waimes, fifty between 1630 and 1633 – in 1679–1780, Waimes once again experienced a new wave of witchcraft.⁹

Finally, in the autonomous *Duchy of Bouillon*, at least sixteen witches – fifteen of them women – were strangled and burnt at the stake between 1576 and 1685. Sugny was by far the most zealous/intense place, with a lot of investigations and pursuits.¹⁰

Socioeconomic conditions of witch-hunting

Mono-causality has to be avoided in explaining and studying such a complex phenomenon as witchcraft and the history of witch trials, even within a territory. Several elements play a role, and a key element is the socioeconomic situation. As de Waardt has pointed out, in the densely urbanized and highly developed coastal provinces within the Northern and Southern Netherlands, popular fear of witchcraft was largely decided by economic conditions: while war and economic distress attracted it, relative security of subsistence removed much of it.¹¹ It was not a coincidence that with the economic boom of Holland after 1585 – after the economic focus of north-western Europe shifted to Amsterdam – most of the witch trials in the Northern Netherlands disappeared, whereas the waves of witch trials in the Dutch-speaking part of the Southern Netherlands were just getting underway. Recent research by Aerts and Vanysacker on the ratio between the total population of the different regions and the numbers of executed witches within the Southern Netherlands points in the same direction.¹² The figures in Table 8.2 show that one had one chance in 6.250 or 9.375 to be executed as a witch in the Northern Netherlands compared to one chance in 1.354 or 1.843 in the Southern Netherlands. Within the last region, one sees that the chances to be burned as a witch were very high in the French- or German-speaking parts, especially in Luxembourg, even without Voltmer's figures. In their explanatory theory, the authors added to the economic conjuncture the influence of urbanization and the different attitude towards state and Church intervention within witchcraft matters. In that sense, one could argue that more urbanized and jurisdictionally better structured regions, such as the Northern Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of the Southern Netherlands, had fewer witchcraft prosecutions and victims than the more rural French- and German-speaking regions of the Southern Netherlands. Nevertheless, several contradictory examples of extremely heavy “witch years” in Holland, Brabant and Flanders teach historians to be careful in their theories.

In the Netherlands, witchcraft was not by any means an exclusively rural phenomenon. As mentioned, witchcraft started in Arras and spread to many large and small

Table 8.2 Ratio of executed witches and population in several regions (1450–1682)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Executed witches</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
Southern Netherlands	1,150–1.250	1,557,000–2,119,000	1.354/1.246–1.843/1.695
*Brabant	124	300,000–488,000	2.420–3.930
-Dutch speaking	57	265,000–443,000	4.670–7.770
-French speaking	67	35,000–45,000	520–670
*Hainault	200–300	200,000–250,000	670–1.250
*Namur	164	52,000–60,000	320–370
*Luxembourg	358 (Dupont-Bouchat) 2,000–3,000 (Voltmer)	55,000–83,000 55,000–83,000	155–231 (Dupont-Bouchat) 19–41 (Voltmer)
*Flanders	202	650,000–750,000	3.220–3.710
Northern Netherlands	160	1,000,000–1,500,000	6.250–9.375

cities: Bruges, Malines, Ghent, Louvain, Antwerp, Breda, Roermond, Lille, Douai, Valenciennes, Nivelles, Bastogne, Durbuy and Bouillon.

The region that is present-day Belgium and the Netherlands reflected the general result that 80% of the witches executed in Europe during the early modern period were female. In Flanders, exactly 80% (162 of 202) of those executed were women. In the Flemish-speaking part of Brabant, this figure rose to 94%. In Hainault, the executed persons were exclusively female, while in Namur their share reached 92%. Only the regions of Luxembourg (75%) and Cambrai and Artois (64%) show a somewhat different picture, possibly due to a relative scarcity of sources. Only in the eastern provinces of the Northern Netherlands were roughly half of the accused male. Most of them were considered werewolves, the enemy within, but few were executed.

Local communities, the state and the Church, and the concepts of witchcraft in demonology and popular culture in the Low Countries

With the exception of some isolated cases, Monballyu has observed in numerous studies that, within the territory of the Southern Netherlands, trials in which the pact between a “cumulative” witch and the Devil was the focal point were all held before local secular benches of aldermen or feudal courts; they were not held before episcopal courts or central bodies, like the Council of Flanders or the Council of Brabant. Witchcraft trials followed normal criminal procedures, but the judges, influenced by demonology, accepted a combination of facts, especially the “punctum diabolicum” (the Devil’s spot or mark), as indications of guilt. This permitted arrests, torture and even condemnations. Death by fire, the typical punishment for witchcraft, necessarily had to be preceded by the suspect’s voluntary confession, twenty-four hours after his torture.¹³

The same procedure was followed in the Northern Netherlands, with the caveat that, together with economic prosperity, secular authorities broadly shared an Erasmusian tolerance. According to de Waardt, this explains why the judicial search for witches ended much sooner in the Dutch Republic than elsewhere. In Holland and Zeeland, it became virtually impossible to torture people suspected of witchcraft after the High Council overturned a verdict in 1593. Together with the advice of professors of medicine and philosophy from Leiden University and the tract of Johann Weyer (1515/16–1588), *De Praestigis Daemonum* (1563), the High Council spread the new jurisprudence regarding witchcraft over the other provinces of the Northern Netherlands.¹⁴

Recent research has shown that, despite excellent historical research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many false conceptions survived concerning the role of the state and its central administrations within the witch-hunt in the Southern Netherlands. Especially the theory that the central government decrees of July 20, 1592, and November 8, 1595, stimulated the witch-hunt has become out of date. First of all, those decrees did not speak of cumulative witchcraft, and secondly, they reacted against excesses used by local benches of aldermen at witch trials. As in the Northern Netherlands, the recommendations and juridical prescriptions by the central bodies in the Southern Netherlands, like the provincial Councils and the Private Council, strained the witch-hunts rather than initiating them.¹⁵

The impact of the Church(es) on witchcraft prosecutions differed greatly between the Northern and Southern Netherlands. In both regions, it is a very difficult topic to discuss. The Dutch Republic was nominally Reformed, but secular authorities usually declined the Calvinist ministers' appeals to remodel society, by force if necessary. For instance, when Amsterdam's Reformed ministers demanded that the magistrates should suppress heresy and magic in 1597, the latter answered by stating that it had no desire to replace the Spanish Inquisition with Calvinist intolerance.¹⁶ In this context, one can also place the recent theory by Hoorens to consider Weyer's *De praestigis daemonum* as a systematic attack on witch theories and witch trials, not only with the aim to defend the witches but also, and perhaps even more, as an instrument to criticize the Catholic Church.¹⁷

According to Dupont-Bouchat and Thijs, secular and ecclesiastical institutions in the Southern Netherlands had been co-operating to combat witchcraft for centuries. Both authors believe that this fact is an element of a top-down model of social disciplining by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities of the lower class.¹⁸ The implementation of these theories on the field required Roelants and Vanysacker to take a more critical standpoint.¹⁹

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It is a fact that as soon as a person accused of being a witch was discovered by the ecclesiastical court, he or she was transmitted to a secular judge. Moreover, these transmissions did not just supplement ecclesiastical judicial activities. There was in fact an explicit demand for co-operation. Bishop Sonnius of Antwerp stated explicitly that the extirpation of the evil within the whole territory was a task of the state. In 1576, he urged the magistrates "ut hoc malum e tota republica extirpant". At the third provincial council, Archbishop Matthias Hovius (1542–1620) stressed the necessity of co-operation between the two orders in order to combat against magicians and medicine-men. In return, in August 1608, Albert and Isabel promulgated a decree that supported and legitimated the execution of the statutes of this council. This co-operation also proceeded at a lower level (i.e. the level of the provincial secular institutions and their episcopal counterparts). After an administrative re-division in 1559, the bishoprics were part of the same territory. The ecclesiastical authorities also had a consulting function for the secular institutions.

Illustrative of the fact that the secular and ecclesiastical courts approached the witch problem in the same way were several trials of monastic sisters in or around the territory of the Southern Netherlands during the years 1608–1619 (the Abbey of the Brigidines at Lille; the South Brabantine Abbey of Cistercian sisters at Valduc; the Abbey of Cistercian sisters at Beaupré in Grimminge, near to Grammont; the Cistercian Abbey Notre-Dame-du-Verger in Oisy-le-Verger). This does not, however, mean that co-operation between the secular and the ecclesiastical courts was excellent.

Several letters from Bishop Laevinus Torrentius (1525–1594) of Antwerp reveal an obvious mistrust about the secular approach of the crime of witchcraft. Although Torrentius considered "magica vanitas et perfidia" as the highest possible insult to the divine majesty, the bishop wanted the alleged witches to have a fair trial. In a letter to his friend, Frans van Thienen, who had informed him about a witch trial in Breda, he advised him to attend the hearing. He feared that the secular authority would act too severely under the imitation of theologians, jurists and even of the suffragan bishop of Trier, Peter Binsfeld. According to Torrentius, a fair trial consisted of the following elements. First of all, it was up to the competent episcopal judge to

decide whether or not the defendant was actually guilty of witchcraft, and to arrive at this decision he relied on a confession that was obtained “libere et sine tormentis”. Only then was the witch handed over to the secular magistrates. He also warned Van Thienen to pay attention to whether or not the judges were competent, unbiased or even unscrupulous and devoid of all speculation. Their judgement needed to be a “sanum iudicium”, and their punishment should be unexaggerated. In January 1590, Torrentius advised the priest of the Saint-Gommarus parish in Lier to attend the trial of an alleged witch. One month later, he asked the same clergyman to be merciful on behalf of a very young girl that had been accused of such a despicable crime. An example could have been made of her as a warning to other women who conspired with the devil. This shows that the bishop believed in the reality of witchcraft, but at the same time he remained sceptical. The unexplainable deeds of magicians and potion minglers were simply explained as allowed by God. The bishop read several demonological works and was thus aware of the developments in literature, but he maintained his sceptical attitude. He even corresponded with Del Rio, but it is not known whether they exchanged ideas about witchcraft. Torrentius’ attitude was obviously inspired by the Augustinian tradition. He went to university and was a well-educated man, a humanist poet and in correspondence with the great minds of his time, such as Justus Lipsius (1547–1606). This more critical attitude also characterizes Lindanus. It is striking that both bishops had good contacts with Rome, where the Vatican had a moderate attitude towards witchcraft and magic, having resided there for a few years.

In general, the higher a clergyman climbed the ecclesiastical ladder, the more down-to-earth his views on magic and superstition became. However, this does not mean that they denied the existence of witches. Their belief in these malicious (wo)men as accomplices of the Devil were not a matter of conviction: Satan and his henchmen were as much a part of the Catholic doctrine as were Jesus and his apostles. Whoever denied the existence of witches, denied the existence of the Devil. This was pure heresy. Satan’s existence was only exceptionally denied, by Cornelius Loos (c.1540/46–1596) for instance. Furthermore, even the greatest critics at the time of the European witch craze confirmed in their views that witches were a reality. Loos was therefore severely sanctioned by the ecclesiastical authorities for denying the existence of witches, even though his point of view was only marginal in comparison to other views that opposed the witch craze. The opposition of the witch craze in itself was a marginal phenomenon.

The lower the clergymen were on the ecclesiastical ladder, the more likely they were to be involved in the popular belief system. It seems likely that the possibility of uniting these seemingly opposite spheres – superstition and Catholicism – in the mind of one man is related to one’s level of literacy. Most bishops and popes (the high clergymen) belonged to more wealthy classes and were educated at universities. The lower clergymen, on the contrary, had to be associated with the common people and were very close to being illiterate themselves. The rites and sacraments of the Church were as incomprehensible and supernatural as the arts of a magician or fortune-teller for both the priest and his parishioners. Moreover, the local clergy acted in a way that fuelled popular belief. Parish priests, nuns and monks disenchanting animals and humans, pointed out witches, testified during trials and occasionally ended up at the stake themselves. Of course, there were exceptions: those who were clearly opposed

to superstition. The Council of Trent understood that the lack of intellectual education and the spread of superstition were linked. The ecclesiastical pyramid consisted of a series of chains: the bishops between the highest and the lower clergy, and the parish clergy between the bishops and the parishioners. If the popes intended to teach their parishioners the true Catholic faith, their priests themselves needed to be educated so they could properly catechize the faithful. This Counter-Reformatory shift from repression to education manifested during the 1640s. Briggs remarks that, starting from this period, a much more strict and consistent style of belief and conduct will dominate.

Both secular and ecclesiastical authorities fought against practices of magic, but there were significant differences in their approaches. Religious courts prosecuted superstition and heresy, while their secular pendants prosecuted witchcraft. Both authorities relied on different literature to justify their decisions. Aldermen and feudal lords relied on demonological books. These manuals were not appropriate for the type of magical practices that were tried before episcopal judges. From this demonological point of view, secular courts usually operated in a severe and cruel fashion. Their intent was to punish or even exterminate socially deviant behaviour. The ecclesiastical authorities, on the other hand, aimed to convert their followers and even tried to do so until the convicted person's last day in prison. The Church tried to correct religiously deviant behaviour. The policy followed by the episcopal courts was generally a generous one. They were not very interested in crimes related to superstition. Apparently, they were aware of the popular worldview, and they tried to discourage these kinds of practices; but this was not a priority. However, when evaluating the activities of episcopal courts, one has to remember that the principle ecclesia "abhorret a sanguine" meant that episcopal judges were not competent for conflicts concerning witches. Therefore, one cannot easily conclude that ecclesiastical courts had a moderate approach towards witchcraft. Although, this is very likely if one considers the opinions in the Counter-Reformatory episcopal circles and the ecclesiastical-judicial policy on superstition. Within the Southern Netherlands, and certainly north of the linguistic frontier, there were no such 'witch-bishops' like those who reigned in some of the German electorates or bishoprics.

In historiography, the impact of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) in the territory of present-day Belgium and the Netherlands on the prosecuting authorities also has been wrongly stressed. It was rather the *Disquisitiones Magicae libri sex* (1599–1600) of the Jesuit Martín Delrio that made the theories of the *Malleus* known a century later. A striking example of its influence was found by Monballyu in a letter from the educated aldermen of Bruges, dated 1596, to their "ignorant" colleagues at Courtrai.²⁰ As this letter states, the aldermen of Bruges – often humanists, as Vanysacker has pointed out – were acquainted not only with the *Malleus* or with the 'primitive' demonology of their fellow townsman Joos de Damhouder (1507–1581), but also with the later demonological tracts of Paolo Grillando, Jean Bodin, Nicolas Rémy and Del Rio. The presence of a learned witchcraft concept in Bruges can also be derived from the questions asked by the aldermen during torture sessions, and from the formulations of verdicts by the magistrates.²¹ Together with sermons (e.g. by the Jesuit Jan David, 1546–1613) and printed folios in the vernacular, these verdicts, read out publicly in the city before an execution, spread some concepts of the learned demonology to all levels of populace.²²

Notes

- 1 Dries Vanysacker, "Netherlands, Southern," in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft. The Western Tradition*, ed. Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 813–817; Idem, "Het aandeel van de Zuidelijke Nederlanden in de Europese heksenvervolging (1450–1685). Een status quaestionis," *Trajecta* 9 (2000): 329–349.
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