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**"A Woman Like Any Other": Female Sodomy,
Hermaphroditism and Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century
Bruges**

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3 “A WOMAN LIKE ANY OTHER”
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6 **FEMALE SODOMY, HERMAPHRODITISM AND WITCHCRAFT IN**
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8 **SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY BRUGES**
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11 **Introduction**
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14 At the end of the sixteenth century, early modern Europe became more and more preoccupied
15 with female same-sex acts.ⁱ Previously, this crime that had been somewhat disregarded by the
16 authorities due to the prevailing attitudes towards sexuality, which was comprehended only in
17 terms of actual penetration.ⁱⁱ Consequently, sodomy was considered as a masculine form of
18 transgression and female sodomy attracted little attention in early modern writings.ⁱⁱⁱ Around
19 1600 however, female homoeroticism was increasingly commented in medical treatises. The
20 recent ‘rediscovery’ of the clitoris caused an upsurge in spectacular stories about sudden sex
21 changes and medical studies in which female sodomites were linked to hermaphrodites. In the
22 context of the seventeenth-century witch craze, (female) sodomy was also mentioned in the
23 writings of several demonologists, who wondered if the devil might have a hand in these
24 unnatural desires.
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40 Despite the increase in descriptions and representations of female sodomites during
41 this period, it remains extremely difficult to uncover traces of actual women talking about
42 their own same-sex experiences. A remarkable exception to this rule is the case of Mayken
43 and Magdaleene, who were arrested in Bruges during 1618 because they had engaged in a
44 sexual relationship while wandering through the Low Countries for over a year.^{iv} During their
45 trial, both women were intensely interrogated; occasions on which the aldermen of Bruges
46 were able to elicit many statements from Mayken and Magdaleene on their homoerotic
47 feelings. Although early modern legal records are notoriously challenging to work with and
48 should be dealt with caution,^v the testimonies of these women enable us to move the
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3 discussion on early modern female sodomy beyond the framework of literary representations.
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5 During their trial, Mayken and Magdaleene displayed an exceptional self-awareness regarding
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7 their sexual preferences. This attitude towards their sexual desires may cast a new light on the
8
9 debate between the so-called essentialists and constructionists on the history of sexuality, in
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11 which the first claim that homosexuality is a biological rather than a historical phenomenon
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13 while the latter state that homosexuality is a socially constructed category subject to change
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15 through history.^{vi} While I do not want to portray Mayken and Magdaleene as ‘premodern
16
17 lesbians’, I do want to highlight that there have always been individuals who preferred same-
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19 sex relations over ‘heterosexual’ ones and were very much aware of this even long before “the
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21 homosexual as a species,” to use Michel Foucault’s resonant phrase,^{vii} came into existence.^{viii}
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26 The self-conscious attitude of Mayken and Magdaleene sharply contrasts with that of
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28 the witnesses who testified during the trial. They were deeply puzzled by the women’s
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30 accounts on female-female sexuality; some of them even described Magdaleene as a
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32 hermaphrodite or a sorceress possessed by the devil. The questions and doubts raised by both
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34 the bystanders and the authorities demonstrate the omnipresence of a phallogocentric sexual
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36 discourse and the difficulties early modern society had in perceiving sex between women
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38 without resorting to images of monstrous bodies and demonic witchcraft. After drawing up a
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40 chronology of the trial, I will focus on the divergent responses towards female same-sex
41
42 desire that were expressed during the interrogations. A close reading of the trial records shows
43
44 how medical, theological and demonological discourses on female sodomy entered the social
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46 world of early modern judges and city dwellers alike, albeit with different outcomes.
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48 Particularly striking is the fact that the same-sex acts these women committed were not
49
50 necessarily recognized as such by many of the people involved in the 1618 sodomy trial.
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53 Although Magdaleene provides an exceptional insight into the self-consciousness of early
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55 modern women attracted to women, she was portrayed by the civic community as a
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3 hermaphrodite, or a creature that was both man and women due to the devil, in order to make
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5 sense of her transgressions. As such, the case of Mayken and Magdaleene shows that, in order
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7 to fully understand the perception of female same-sex desire in early modern Europe,
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9 historiography should not only pay attention to scholarly and literary representations of
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11 female sodomy, but should also scrutinize public responses to those representations.
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14 15 **The remarkable romance of Mayken and Magdaleene**

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18 On August 18, 1618, a routine investigation of a horse theft took an unexpected turn when
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20 Maerten van Ghewelde accused his wife of having a relationship with a hermaphrodite. When
21
22 Maerten confessed his trafficking in stolen horses, the authorities sentenced him to the
23
24 gallows.^{ix} Caught in a hopeless situation, Maerten van Ghewelde apparently decided to report
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26 his wife, Mayken de Brauwere, and told the aldermen that Mayken had abandoned him for
27
28 over a year now after she had been seduced by a certain woman named Magdaleene, who was
29
30 said to be a hermaphrodite (“*wesende hermaphrodite*”).^x
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34 Determined to retrieve his missing wife, Maerten had even turned to sorcery. A certain
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36 Pieter Duivele had performed a ritual in which he drew a square on the floor whilst
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38 beseeching the four corners of the world in order to trace Maerten’s wife. Pieter Duivele
39
40 assured Maerten that he would find Mayken in a certain tavern in Oudenaarde, yet by the time
41
42 he got there, Mayken and Magdaleene had already fled. According to the cuckolded husband,
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44 Magdaleene was not a first-time offender since she had deceived several housewives before, a
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46 crime for which she was allegedly banned from Tielt, a small town between Ghent and
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48 Bruges.^{xi}
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53 On the 25th of August, *immediate ante executionem*, Maerten was asked if he wanted
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55 to add anything else to his statement so that he could relieve his conscience. Facing death,
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57 Maerten appeared determined to drag Mayken down with him in his fall, as he revealed a
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3 detailed account of the misdeeds committed by the two women. One day in May the year
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5 before, Maerten heard loud panting in the attic of the estate where both he and his wife
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7 worked as day laborers. Wanting to know what caused this noise, he took a quick peek, only
8
9 to find his wife lying with Magdaleene, who said that they were merely jesting by tickling
10
11 each other. Maerten, suspicious of this explanation, gave his wife a reprimand and warned her
12
13 stay away from “that whore who was banned from Tielt for similar filthy offenses.”

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15 Obviously Maerten’s warning did not leave a lasting impression, as shortly afterwards,
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17 Mayken and Magdaleene were seen running around naked through the manor and bathing
18
19 together in the ditch surrounding the estate. A few days later both disappeared without a trace.
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21 Last but not least, Maerten mentioned that Magdaleene had given his wife several potions,
22
23 and he suspected that these concoctions had induced a miscarriage in Mayken.^{xii} In the end,
24
25 Maerten van Ghewelde was executed for his thefts, yet he left his interrogators with a
26
27 compelling confession. Not only did he accuse his wife of sodomy, he also claimed that
28
29 Magdaleene was both a hermaphrodite and a poisoning witch. These were serious allegations,
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31 leaving the authorities no option but to respond. The aldermen took the matter seriously, since
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33 they started gathering testimonies about the two women on the day of Maerten’s execution.
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40 One of these witnesses was parish priest Tobias de Mey, who was sent to a farm in
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42 Pittem -a small village in Bruges’ hinterland- six years earlier because “strange things were
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44 happening there.” He discovered Magdaleene and a certain spinster “lying in bed and
45
46 playing.” Shortly afterwards, Passchyne, wife of Pieter Hoornaert, came to him and confessed
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48 that she and Magdaleene had had carnal conversation on several occasions. During these
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50 moments, Magdaleene “had shown great affection and lust.”^{xiii} Passchyne told in great detail
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52 about her encounters with Magdaleene, whose “*virgula* was as sharp as a needle, with such an
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54 abundance of semen as if it was derived from four male persons, and that this semen was cold
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56 on one occasion.”^{xiv} Although Passchyne showed great remorse and attended Mass on a daily
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3 basis, she became ill and feeble-minded shortly after her confession. Thobias de Mey called in
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5 the help of a specialized priest who initiated an exorcism, yet it was to no avail since
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7 Passchyne died a few days later.
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10 The spectacular charges against Magdaleene now piled up rapidly. Not only was she
11
12 said to be a sodomite, a hermaphrodite and an abortionist, according to Tobias de Mey, she
13
14 was none other than the devil in person. In the early modern period, it was commonly
15
16 believed that coitus with the devil was very painful and that his semen was extremely cold to
17
18 the touch.^{xv} In this stage of the trial, we witness for the first time how people came up with
19
20 divergent explanations to make sense of female same-sex desire. Whereas Maerten attributed
21
22 Magdaleene's sexual misconduct to a physical cause by calling her a hermaphrodite, the local
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24 priest used a diabolical discourse to condemn the whole matter.
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29 Whether or not the authorities also believed that Magdaleene was possessed by “the
30
31 Evil One (*den boosen*),” they started a feverish search for Mayken and Magdaleene, who were
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33 arrested on the 19th of September, one month after their case first came to light. The aldermen
34
35 began the interrogations by drawing up a profile of their main suspect. Magdaleene, widow
36
37 and mother to an adult son, had been using different cover names and was constantly on the
38
39 move because of her lingering bad reputation, the scope of which would gradually become
40
41 clearer during her hearing. The aldermen confronted her with several testimonies claiming
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43 that she had “acted dishonestly” with numerous women and young girls. These statements
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45 made little impression however, as Magdaleene denied everything.^{xvi}
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49 The interrogators then turned to Mayken, who claimed that she had left her husband
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51 because she was tired of being accused of living from the proceeds of his thefts, and because
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53 Maerten had threatened to kill her. Mayken maintained that she was not familiar with the
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55 “evil reputation” of Magdaleene when they left together. At the time of their departure
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3 however, she did know that her companion was a “dishonest woman (*eene oneerlicke*
4 *vrauwe*)” who had committed adultery with Mayken’s own husband; a fact that Maerten van
5 Ghewelde conveniently concealed when he was libeling his wife to the aldermen.
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9 Nevertheless, the women had left the estate where they both worked and set out on journey
10 across the Low Countries. When they arrived in the province of Zeeland, their relationship
11 reached a low-point: encouraged by a man who accused Magdaleene of being a “sorceress
12 (*een tooveresse*),” Mayken decided to move on separately. Their split-up was short lived
13 however, as they met again in a tavern in Vlissingen and travelled to Dunkirk, where they
14 were presumably caught.^{xvii}
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24 When asked about Mayken’s pregnancy, Magdaleene refuted the assertion that she
25 would have helped Mayken to commit abortion, claiming that Mayken had never been with
26 child and that hence, she could not have had a miscarriage. Magdaleene admitted that she had
27 given a potion to Mayken, but this was merely to relieve a fever. This story was confirmed by
28 Mayken, who claimed that she had only been pregnant once in her life but that her child had
29 unfortunately died when it was five or six weeks old.^{xviii} After this confession, the Bruges’
30 aldermen decided to focus on the other transgressions committed by both women.
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40 A week later, they questioned Mayken about her relationship with Magdaleene. She
41 mentioned on-going rumors about Magdaleene being a sorceress “who was both man and
42 woman due to the devil (*duer den duivel man ende vrouwe beede*).” Moreover it was said that
43 Magdaleene had “bewitched” the wife of Pieter Hoornaert.^{xix} Apparently, the rumor that
44 Magdaleene was a hermaphrodite widely circulated. Yet many people interpreted
45 Magdaleene’s purported physical aberration in a religious way by claiming that the devil had
46 something to do with it. In spite of these stories however, Mayken claimed that she never
47 noticed anything peculiar about her co-defendant, who she considered to be “a woman like
48 any other.”^{xx} The image of Magdaleene as an ordinary woman took a severe blow however,
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3 when Mayken started to describe the sexual preferences of Magdaleene, who allegedly had
4 claimed that “she would rather do such things than to have carnal conversation with seven
5 men, and that other women were begging her for it.”^{xxxi} When Mayken sometimes expressed
6 her astonishment about this distinctive desire, Magdaleene replied that “she found
7 contentment in it and that there were more similar women” who experienced the same
8 feelings.^{xxii}

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Mayken claimed that these other women were often “more willing” than herself, as
Magdaleene “desired to use her daily, which she often did not consent to.”^{xxiii} At one point,
“Magdaleene even pitied herself because she had not left with another woman named Lyve,
who was more willing than Mayken.” Despite her reticence however, Mayken was able to tell
her questioners quite a few details about her love life: on several occasions Magdaleene had
“lain on her and had carnal conversation with her as if she was a man.” Magdaleene used
Mayken as a woman “doing her duty with great force.”^{xxiv} Mayken’s questioners must have
asked her more about the manly characteristics of the so-called hermaphrodite Magdaleene,
because later on she “denied ever having felt something that would have been male. She had
indeed occasionally felt some wetness, although not in large quantities. When this arrived
Magdaleene stopped lying on her.” She could not answer the question “whether this wetness
coming from Magdaleene was cold or hot.”^{xxv}

This last remark clearly indicates that the Bruges’ aldermen still considered evil forces
at work in Magdaleene’s deviant sexual behavior. Rumors of witchcraft echoed throughout
the interrogation,^{xxvi} but it seems that at this point, not only the local witnesses, but also the
judicial authorities suspected Magdaleene of consorting with the Evil One, as they started
asking pointed and insinuating questions during the interrogation on the 11th of October. They
wanted to know more details about her “dishonest conversation” with Mayken, Passchyne,
and “many more women and daughters,” but also about the superstitions she would have used

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3 against some people, or the fact that she had allegedly threatened people that she would play
4 tricks on them.^{xxvii} Although Magdaleene claimed “she did not know anything about sorcery,
5 let alone that she would have practiced it,” the aldermen were convinced that she owned
6 several suspicious books. Furthermore, Magdaleene had to answer for some oranges she
7 allegedly had poisoned and distributed, and that she had claimed she could cure cattle. Lastly,
8 she reportedly threatened a whole series of people and predicted their forthcoming death.^{xxviii}
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17 At the same time however, it is notable that the questioners were open to other
18 interpretations of her crimes; they even tried to gain more insight into the origins of
19 Magdaleene’s same-sexual desires. She revealed that she was only nine when she was first
20 confronted with female same-sex acts, when she saw several girls having intercourse in a
21 brewery.^{xxix} Confronted with Mayken, Magdaleene -who had up until now denied every
22 charge- finally admitted that she had had carnal conversation with Mayken on several
23 occasions. When she was drunk, she had “shed her nature on Mayken’s body, but not in her
24 folds as men would communicate with women.”^{xxx} The interrogators also demanded to know
25 whether Magdaleene had used any instruments to have sex with other women and they
26 inquired about the positions in which they had intercourse.^{xxxi} These rather technical questions
27 indicate that the aldermen not only considered the idea of witchcraft but also focused on more
28 earthly motivations behind the sexual ‘excesses’ of Mayken and Magdaleene.
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45 In order to remove any remaining doubts however, the aldermen transferred
46 Magdaleene to the torture-chamber on the 28th of November. Subjected to the screws and the
47 rack, she admitted having slept with Passchyne three times in the absence of Passchyne’s
48 husband. She had “tasted” her on those occasions, but she could not go any further due to
49 Passchyne’s illness. She also confessed that she had taken another woman -who had asked her
50 whether she was male or female- to a field and had carnal conversation with this woman
51 twice, after she was convinced that Magdaleene was indeed female. After being tortured for
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3 an hour, Magdaleene acknowledged her same-sexual activities but persisted into denying any
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5 accusation of witchcraft.^{xxxii}
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8 Her determination must have convinced the aldermen, who concluded the
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10 interrogation after this torture session. On the 14th of December 1618, Mayken was ordered to
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12 pray to God and Justice for forgiveness behind closed doors. Afterwards she was to be banned
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14 from the city of Bruges for ten years under penalty of torture. Magdaleene on the other hand
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16 remained in jail until the 12th of May 1620. The official sentence accused her of several
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18 crimes: first of all, Magdaleene had injured and left her husband. Furthermore, she had
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20 “wandered around the country, seducing several women by pulling them away from their
21
22 husbands. She had taught these women, including some young daughters, nothing but
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24 dishonor by committing various libidinous acts, which lasted many long years.” On top of
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26 that, “several indications of witchcraft were imputed to her, yet admittedly she continued to
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28 deny these indications even under torture on the rack.” Therefore, the aldermen condemned
29
30 her to be banned for life from the county of Flanders. She had to leave the territory within
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32 three days under penalty of the gallows.^{xxxiii} Almost two years after the Bruges’ aldermen had
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34 become aware of the “dishonest actions” of Mayken and Magdaleene, the remarkable trial
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36 against these deviant women came to an end.
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42 **Female sodomy in seventeenth-century Europe**

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45 The trial of Mayken and Magdaleene is one of the few early modern examples that
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47 does not merely come with a sentence, but also offers the rare opportunity to investigate the
48
49 mechanisms behind the persecution of (female) sodomy.^{xxxiv} The difficulties encountered by
50
51 the city council in dealing with this case deserve particular attention. Especially since the
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53 Southern Netherlands took the lead in persecuting female sodomy during the fifteenth and
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55 sixteenth centuries; nearly one out of ten convicted sodomites at the time was a woman. A
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3 situation unparalleled in early modern Europe, where only scattered evidence of isolated trials
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5 against female sodomites has survived. Moreover, female sodomites received the same harsh
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7 punishment as their male counterparts, which was generally death by fire, whereas female
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9 sodomites in other parts of Europe were punished more leniently because their crimes were
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11 considered less harmful than male sodomy. The high prosecution rate was partly the result of
12
13 the broad yet well-defined understanding of female sodomy in the region.^{xxxv}
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17 As the number of female convictions in the region fell sharply at the end of the
18
19 sixteenth century, it looks like this knowledge of sexual possibilities between women was
20
21 gradually lost. For example, it is noteworthy that the term 'sodomy' was never explicitly
22
23 mentioned during the procedure. This was not unusual in similar cases elsewhere in Europe,
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25 since most officials feared that openly naming female sodomy would encourage more women
26
27 to commit the crime against nature themselves. Between 1400 and 1550 however, the urban
28
29 authorities in the Southern Netherlands saw no problem in publicly labelling female same-sex
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31 acts as sodomy. Yet it seems that by 1618, Bruges' aldermen seemed incapable of imagining
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33 what exactly had been going on between the two women. What reasons account for this is not
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35 clear, yet it reminds us that, even within a specific region, attitudes towards deviant sexuality
36
37 were subject to changes through time.
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42 These seventeenth-century aldermen were not the only people in early modern society
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44 who found female sodomy a puzzling concept. In both theological and legal writings female-
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46 female sexuality received far less attention than male sodomy, due to the fact that actual
47
48 penetration was considered an essential element when sexuality was concerned. As a result of
49
50 this omnipresent phallogentric vision on sexuality, contemporary commentators could not
51
52 imagine that two women were able to please each other without relying on artificial
53
54 accessories such as dildos.^{xxxvi} Phallus-shaped objects then played an important role in many
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56 of the recorded cases against early modern female sodomites, like the German Catharina
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3 Linck (1721), who made a dildo of leather complete with two stuffed testicles, which she
4
5 could make stiff or limp.^{xxxvii} Early modern judges probably attached so much importance to
6
7 the potential use of dildos because it allowed them to situate deviant sexual practices among
8
9 women against the comprehensible background of heterosexual activities, which did involve
10
11 penetration.^{xxxviii} Yet by using artificial devices, female sodomites were considered even more
12
13 debauched, as they challenged traditional gender hierarchies in which women were supposed
14
15 to submit passively to an active male penetrator.^{xxxix} In the same respect, female sodomites
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17 who dressed as men to deceive their objects of affection were considered threatening to the
18
19 social order.^{xl}
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24 During the trial of 1618 however, Magdaleene denied ever having used an instrument
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26 to practice her “uselessness.” Furthermore, nothing suggested that she ever disguised herself
27
28 as a man to seduce women, nor did she at any point during the trial express the desire to be a
29
30 man. Yet the court records repeatedly draw attention to her masculine character; she is
31
32 portrayed as a strong personality with a high libido,^{xli} who actively initiated carnal
33
34 conversation with women on a daily basis “as if she was a man,” using “great force” while
35
36 doing so, while Mayken is described as submissive and somewhat naïve. This dichotomy
37
38 between the strong, independent and sexually active woman and her passive counterpart was a
39
40 recurring theme in early modern descriptions of female sodomy. On the one hand, officials
41
42 cast female homoeroticism in male terms as a way of dealing with the matter, on the other
43
44 hand many accused ‘passive’ women applied this discursive strategy to receive a reduced
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46 sentence.^{xlii}
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51 Whether or not Mayken consciously defended herself like this remains to be seen. She
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53 did recall her -unhappy- marriage and her earlier miscarriage to the aldermen through which
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55 she highlighted her ability to engage in heterosexual activities. Furthermore, she limited her
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57 part in the crime as she, in her own words, merely ‘endured’ Magdaleene’s requests for sex
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3 and often did not consent while other women were far more eager to sleep with Magdaleene.
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5 Yet Mayken also categorically denied ever having sensed anything manly about her
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7 companion and claimed that she was a woman like any other. If this had not been the case,
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9 Mayken might have got away with mere adultery. Unlike many contemporary women
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11 claiming they were tricked into marriage without being aware of the actual sex of their
12
13 partner, she never presented herself as a victim, which, consequently, made her an
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15 accomplice.
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18 19 **Female sodomy and hermaphrodites**

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22 Although Mayken herself never doubted that she was dealing with an actual woman,
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24 the authorities and witnesses were less convinced about Magdaleene's anatomy; some of them
25
26 even suspected her of being a hermaphrodite, or "both man and woman at the same time."
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28 The fact that the sexual identity of female sodomites was often disputed in the early modern
29
30 period once again illustrates the prevailing uncertainties surrounding female-female sexuality.
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32 Given the fact that satisfying intercourse between women was considered impossible at the
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34 time, it should come as no surprise that women who did engage in same-sexual activities were
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36 often suspected of not being full-fledged women at all. Following the sixteenth-century
37
38 'rediscovery' of the clitoris for instance, female sodomites were often called 'tribades', or
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40 women with enlarged genitals that enabled them to have penetrative intercourse with other
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42 women.^{xliii} Gradually, the figure of the 'tribade' or 'fricatrice' started to show more and more
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44 similarities with another subject widely discussed in early modern medical, literary and erotic
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46 contexts, namely that of the hermaphrodite.^{xliv} Andreas Vesalius (1514-1564), the Southern-
47
48 Netherlandish physician and acclaimed founder of modern human anatomy, even described
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50 the clitoris as a malformation only present in female hermaphrodites.^{xlv} Just as sodomites,
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52 hermaphrodites embodied social disorder and gender inversion.^{xlvi} Because of this alignment
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3 between two concepts of sexual deviance, “women who desired women could be explained
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5 away as that half-mythical anomaly, a hermaphrodite.”^{xlvii}
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8 Physical examinations were therefore becoming a more or less standard element in
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10 sodomy trials involving women. Some of these examinations were described in detail by
11
12 distinguished physicians, like Hendrikje van der Schuur who was called a tribade in the
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14 writings of Nicolaes Tulp, the Amsterdam physician and mayor immortalized by
15
16 Rembrandt.^{xlviii} This was also the case with Marie/Marin le Marcis, who was examined in
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18 1601 by Jacques Duval, a well-educated surgeon working in Rouen and Paris. Le Marcis was
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20 already examined by several medical commissions who declared she was a woman, and
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22 therefore guilty of sodomy, by the time Duval subjected her to a more thorough investigation.
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24 After inserting a finger into her vagina, Duval allegedly discovered a hidden penis and
25
26 concluded that Marie/Marin had substantial masculine features, which saved le Marcis from
27
28 the stake.^{xlix} This experience would inspire Duval to write his famous *Traité des*
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30 *Hermaphrodits* (1612).^l
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36 Although hermaphrodites could count on a lot of medical and literary interest from the
37
38 sixteenth century onwards,^{li} there was no consensus whatsoever regarding their biological
39
40 origins. Some authors favored the Galenic teaching, which claimed that female genitals were
41
42 nothing but inverted male genitals,^{lii} and that the sex of a fetus depended on the dominant
43
44 position taken during intercourse by either the male or the female semen.^{liii} Consequently, a
45
46 number of combinations could occur, ranging from perfect men and women to effeminate
47
48 men and masculine women. In the unlikely event that the male and female seed were in
49
50 balance, even hermaphrodites could arise, subdivided in predominantly male or female, and
51
52 perfect hermaphrodites,^{liv} a theory endorsed by the influential French court physician
53
54 Ambroise Paré, whose collected works –including the treatise *Des monstres et prodiges*
55
56 (1573) discussing hermaphrodites- were published in Dutch shortly after his death.^{lv}
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1
2
3 Not everyone acknowledged the Galenic one-sex model and its hermaphroditic
4
5 consequences however.^{lvi} Followers of Aristotelian thought did not present male and female
6
7 as points on a spectrum, but rather as “polar opposites admitting no meaningful mediation.”^{lvii}
8
9 They believed that hermaphrodites originated in the excess of matter produced by a woman
10
11 during intercourse, which would normally lead to twins, yet in some cases resulted in a
12
13 hermaphrodite.^{lviii} Aristotelians therefore did not believe in the existence of a so-called
14
15 ‘perfect hermaphrodite’ with two working sets of genitals, but rather looked upon them as
16
17 monsters with a redundant set of genitals resembling a tumor.^{lix} Jean Riolan (1539-1605),
18
19 professor at Sorbonne’s medical faculty, even described hermaphrodites as lustful women that
20
21 could be healed “par l’amputation des parties superflues.”^{lx} This early modern tendency to
22
23 equalize female sodomites, or tribades, and hermaphrodites is yet another demonstration of
24
25 the phallogocentric view on sexuality and the instability of gender identities prevalent at the
26
27 time.
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32 **Sodomy and witchcraft**

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35 In spite of the multitude of opinions on the origins of hermaphroditism, physicians
36
37 rarely considered witchcraft as a potential cause. Even Caspar Bauhin, a Swiss professor of
38
39 anatomy and botany, who addressed issues such as demonic causes of monstrous births at
40
41 length in his treatise *De Hermaphroditorum* (1600), acknowledged that hermaphrodites were
42
43 an unusual yet natural phenomenon.^{lxi} But while the possibility of demonic intervention was
44
45 out of the question for most physicians discussing hermaphroditism, the general public was
46
47 strongly convinced that the devil had the power to change the gender of an individual.
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50
51 Marvelous stories about sudden sex changes flourished during this period,^{lxii} including in the
52
53 Southern Netherlands where an anonymous seventeenth-century jurist from Arras produced a
54
55 whole litany of examples “fabuleuse mais veritable” from abroad.^{lxiii} It was popularly
56
57 believed that if sex changes could occur spontaneously, it was a small step for the devil to
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1
2
3 interfere with this natural process. According to François Soyer, a great deal of urban society
4 was “prepared to believe that an individual could make a pact with the Devil in order to alter
5 his or her gender.”^{lxiv}
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10
11 Consequently, a number of early modern hermaphrodites were actually accused of
12 witchcraft. Elena de Céspedes for instance, was condemned by the Spanish Inquisition in
13 1588. Several physical examinations notwithstanding, the doctors could not come to a
14 consensus regarding Elena’s actual sex. As a result, the Inquisitors accused her of having used
15 witchcraft to create confusion about her genitals, for which she was ridiculed during a public
16 auto-da-fê while receiving two hundred lashes.^{lxv} In 1741, novice Maria Duran was arrested
17 by the Portuguese Inquisition. She was suspected of having made a pact with the devil that
18 granted her a secret penis she used to have sexual relations with several nuns. Some critical
19 inquisitors wanted to absolve Maria, because they believed that the devil was not able to grant
20 a penis to a woman. These doubts did not weigh sufficiently on the debates however.
21
22 Ultimately, Maria Duran was sentenced to a public flogging and an auto-da-fê in the streets of
23 Lisbon.^{lxvi} Apparently the accusation of hermaphroditism regularly coincided with that of
24 witchcraft on the Iberian Peninsula. In Northern Europe however, the story of Magdaleene
25 seems unique.
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43 The exceptionality of Magdaleene’s case lies in the fact that the trial unites some
44 contradictory contemporary notions. According to some witnesses, Magdaleene had been able
45 to alter her gender with the help of a demonic benefactor. Others even suggested that she was
46 the devil in disguise. Yet ultimately, she was convicted for a crime that was said to be
47 despised by the very same devil. The question of whether or not the devil actually stimulated
48 same-sex activities was indeed much debated among early modern demonologists. Italian
49 philosopher Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola argued in his treatise *Strix* (1523) that the
50 devil did engage in sodomy with humans in order to bring about the destruction of
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3 mankind.^{lxxvii} His theory was supported by Pierre de Lancre -a French magistrate under Henry
4
5 IV- who published a tract *Tableau de l'inconstance des mauvais anges et démons* (1612), in
6
7 which he provided one of the most encompassing portrayals of the witches' Sabbath during
8
9 the seventeenth century. Describing the devil's sexual preferences, de Lancre stated that "one
10
11 should not doubt that he takes more pleasure in receiving sexual relations from the back than
12
13 from the front [...] he also takes more pleasure in sodomy than in most regulated and the most
14
15 natural voluptuousness."^{lxxviii} In this way, sodomy was a "medieval catch-all" used to describe
16
17 many forms of deviant sexual acts that took place during the witches' Sabbath.^{lxxix} Yet other
18
19 demonologists assumed that demons, although known for their unrestrained lust, were
20
21 disgusted by same-sex acts.^{lxxx} Heinrich Kramer -author of the most influential early modern
22
23 treatise on the persecution of witches, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486)- wrote that all
24
25 demons of any rank considered it shameful.^{lxxxi} While it was popularly believed in
26
27 seventeenth-century England that the offspring of a witch and the devil would automatically
28
29 be a sodomite, it was also thought that the devil would flee his own child abhorrently.^{lxxxii}
30
31 Throughout early modern Europe, the idea that the devil was horrified by sodomy was
32
33 visually supported by images of sodomites who were cruelly punished by demons because of
34
35 their sins against nature.^{lxxxiii}

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41 In the Low Countries too, the devil was supposedly repelled by sodomy in all its
42
43 forms. Fourteenth-century surgeon Jan de Weert from Ypres, already remarked that the devil
44
45 was ashamed by the "peccatum contra naturam" and did not want to see it.^{lxxxiv} Dirc van Delf,
46
47 a fourteenth-century Dominican wrote that no devil wanted to tempt men in committing this
48
49 sin because of the great unnaturalness of it.^{lxxxv} In his Catechism *Den Catholycken pedagoge*
50
51 (1685), Petrus Vanden Bossche -prior of the Dominicans in Mechelen- reaffirmed this opinion
52
53 by telling the story of a woman who got an unexpected visit from the devil while she was
54
55 masturbating. The devil told her that he was despised by such filth and that "she soon would
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1
2
3 have to pay the price for her foolish lust.^{lxxvi} A century before, the famous physician and
4
5 demonologist Johann Weyer discussed the link between female sodomy and diabolic
6
7 devotion. In his *De praestigiis daemonum* (1583), he mentions tribades who pretended they
8
9 were the devil by altering their voice, in order to gain sexual access to women. These
10
11 deceived women were under the impression that they obeyed this demon by sleeping with
12
13 him, yet they actually were having same-sex relations; a practice the devil had nothing to do
14
15 with, according to Weyer.^{lxxvii} Then again, a seventeenth-century songbook from Antwerp
16
17 endorses the idea that the devil stimulated sodomy. The songbook contains a text in which the
18
19 devil supposedly sums up his many crimes, among them that he had instigated the inhabitants
20
21 of Sodom to commit the sin against nature.^{lxxviii}
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27 Despite these conflicting views, witchcraft played a role in several early modern
28
29 sodomy trials.^{lxxix} Some women were accused of using sorcery to seduce other women.^{lxxx}
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31 Other indicted sodomites claimed to be cursed, which made them commit sodomy against
32
33 their free will. This was also the case in 1530 when Hans Fritschi and Hans Räs were brought
34
35 to court in Switzerland. Fritschi declared he had received a magical pair of pants from Räs,
36
37 through which Räs held power over him and was able to persuade him to commit such
38
39 depraved behavior. Agatha Dietschi, who was tried in Freiburg during 1547 for marrying a
40
41 woman while posing as a man, claimed that another woman had put a spell on her. As a
42
43 consequence, she could no longer live as a woman or love a man.^{lxxxii} In 1596, Franciscus
44
45 Rouiere defended himself by saying that he was possessed by the “Evil Enemy” who had
46
47 urged him to act against nature.^{lxxxii} The link between sexual and spiritual deviance is also
48
49 clearly present in the story of Benedetta Carlini, one of the most well-known early modern
50
51 female sodomites. Benedetta was a seventeenth-century Italian nun who claimed to have
52
53 mystical visions upon which she was elected abbess of her convent. As her authority grew
54
55 rapidly within the community of Pescia, an ecclesiastical tribunal was summoned in 1619 to
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1
2
3 verify whether Benedetta spoke the truth. During this interrogation it turned out that
4
5 Benedetta pretended to be possessed by an angelic spirit named Splenditello, who supposedly
6
7 used her body to have sexual relations with Bartolomea Crivelli, a younger nun. As a result,
8
9 Benedetta Carlini was condemned to life imprisonment.^{lxxxiii}
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11
12 In the Southern Netherlands too, witchcraft and sodomy sometimes coincided. Recent
13
14 estimations show that between 1450 and 1685 at least 2800 and maybe even 3900 witches
15
16 were tried throughout the region, including 140 in Bruges.^{lxxxiv} A great many of these witches
17
18 were accused of demonic intercourse.^{lxxxv} While only some of them explicitly claimed to be
19
20 sodomized by the devil, the majority confirmed that having sex with the devil was painful due
21
22 to his deformed penis and cold sperm. Yet except the unfortunate Passchyne Hoornaert, none
23
24 of them ever claimed that the devil came to them as a hermaphrodite, complete with a needle-
25
26 sharp “virgula.”
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31 As we have already seen, witchcraft played an important role in the trial against
32
33 Mayken and Magdaleene from the very beginning. Yet it is notable how the witnesses
34
35 mentioned Magdaleene’s dealings with the devil early on in the hearings, while the authorities
36
37 did not find it necessary to call Magdaleene to account about this in the initial stage of their
38
39 investigation. The 1618 case thus illustrates how accusations of witchcraft were not simply
40
41 imposed from above, but in many instances stemmed from a concerned community.^{lxxxvi} This
42
43 does not mean that the authorities did not suspect Magdaleene of any witchcraft whatsoever.
44
45 One of the first questions she had to answer concerned Mayken’s self-induced miscarriage.
46
47 Abortion was a rare phenomenon in early modern judicial sources since most cases were only
48
49 admitted in the sacred space of the confessional.^{lxxxvii} Nevertheless, the crime was widely
50
51 discussed among jurists as well as theologians, who were particularly concerned with the
52
53 timing of the so-called animation of the unborn fetus.^{lxxxviii} Following the ‘Constitutio
54
55 Criminalis Carolina’ or Imperial Law Code proclaimed by Charles V in 1532, the official
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3 punishment for abortion was the same throughout the Habsburg territories, including the
4
5 Southern Netherlands. Women who caused abortion with potions were put to death when the
6
7 child was viable and banned if the child was not. Early modern society linked abortion to
8
9 poison, witchcraft and magic, yet the interrogators did not give the matter of Magdaleene's
10
11 abortive potions much thought as they quickly moved on to her sexual activities. Only at the
12
13 end of the interrogations did the aldermen return to the issue of witchcraft by confronting
14
15 Magdaleene with accusations of poisoned oranges, suspicious books and fortune telling;
16
17 charges that were dropped when even torture could not make her confess.
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19

20
21 At the same time, the authorities did record the assertion that Magdaleene released as
22
23 much sperm as four men, and wanted to know if Mayken could confirm this claim. Although
24
25 it was widely believed that women released seed during sexual intercourse,^{lxxxix} the effusion
26
27 of body fluids was represented as an assertive male act during the early modern period.^{xc}
28
29 Given the relative importance that the aldermen attached to this aspect of Magdaleene's
30
31 corporeality, it appears that they did consider the possibility that Magdaleene was an actual
32
33 hermaphrodite. Although Magdaleene's anatomy was probably scrutinized while she was laid
34
35 naked on the rack, no record mentions a physical examination, which was more or less a
36
37 standard practice when hermaphrodites appeared in court.^{xcii} Moreover, the cuckolded Maerten
38
39 was the only person to actually mention the medical term "hermaphrodite" during the
40
41 hearings. Since other witnesses endorsed his claim without using this specific word, but using
42
43 a religious discourse instead, we must assume that the word hermaphrodite did not come out
44
45 the pen of a scribe, and that Maerten indeed was familiar with it. It would be fascinating to
46
47 find out how a simple horse thief was the only one in his neighborhood to become acquainted
48
49 with such terminology. Although we have no information about the literature Maerten might
50
51 have read -or indeed if he could read at all- it seems that the term hermaphrodite was also
52
53 known outside the world of scholarly debate. For instance, the word "*hermaphrodit*" is
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2
3 mentioned in a popular seventeenth-century tune from Brussels which describes a topsy-turvy
4
5 marriage in which a woman aggressively gains the upper hand and is called a
6
7 hermaphrodite.^{xcii} Apparently, scholarly discussions about hermaphrodites gradually
8
9 infiltrated the world of the general public, although this process took place at different speeds.
10

11
12 Even Bruges' civic authorities, which included many protagonists of the humanistic
13
14 movement in the Southern Netherlands,^{xciii} were in doubt about Magdaleene's case. Mayken
15
16 was asked about any masculine features present in Magdaleene, yet Magdaleene herself never
17
18 had to answer specific questions about her genitalia. Questions about the use of a dildo by
19
20 contrast were explicitly raised. If the authorities genuinely believed Magdaleene was a
21
22 hermaphrodite with a full-grown penis, they would not suspect her of using an artificial
23
24 substitute. So it seems that the presumption of Magdaleene being a hermaphrodite was mainly
25
26 accepted among the heard witnesses, without ever really catching on among the city council
27
28 who indeed saw her, at least physically, as a woman like any other. While there may not have
29
30 been a "gulf in attitudes" between the elite and the populace over their response to deviant
31
32 sexuality and ambiguous gender,^{xciv} each party concerned eventually came to a different
33
34 conclusion about the nature of Mayken and Magdaleene's crimes.
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40 **Conclusion**

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43 The questions raised during the trial of 1618 reveal much about the attitudes towards
44
45 female sodomy in seventeenth-century society. At the time, sodomy was perceived as a
46
47 predominantly male concept. Since penetration was a sine qua non in early modern definitions
48
49 of sexuality, satisfactory sex between women seemed impossible to most lawmakers and
50
51 theologians at the time. Therefore, women were hardly ever tried for same-sex acts in early
52
53 modern Europe. While the Southern Netherlands were among Europe's core regions when it
54
55 came to the repression of female sodomy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the trial
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2
3 against Mayken and Magdaleene is until further notice the sole surviving seventeenth-century
4
5 case from this region. When the Bruges' aldermen were confronted with Mayken and
6
7 Magdaleene, it took them a while to fully grasp the meaning of their confessions.
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10 This was even more the case for the bystanders involved. Shortly after the arrest of
11
12 Mayken and Magdaleene, allegations of sorcery on their part followed. In the stratified social
13
14 world of early modern priests and horse thieves, day laborers and pub-goers, female same-sex
15
16 acts only made sense when embedded within diabolic discourses. According to several
17
18 witnesses, Magdaleene was both man and woman. Women who engaged in sexual
19
20 relationships with each other were often perceived as an anomaly that could only be explained
21
22 through a corporeal deviation. In the case of Magdaleene, her alleged abnormal physical state
23
24 was given meaning through the pact she supposedly made with the devil, others even alluded
25
26 that she was the devil in person, disguised as a woman.
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31 The origin of these ideas remains uncertain. Although many physicians disagreed
32
33 about the causes of hermaphroditism, in their opinion witchcraft was not regarded as a valid
34
35 option. It is not entirely clear why the interrogated witnesses by contrast did assume that the
36
37 devil deceived women by posing as a woman, or incited women to commit sins against
38
39 nature. Many early modern demonologists stressed how demons loathed same-sex acts as
40
41 much as everyone else. This scholarly vision is not mirrored in daily practices however. The
42
43 reasoning apparent in the interrogation records clearly shows that the much studied early
44
45 modern demonological texts did not necessarily infiltrate the hearts and minds of urban
46
47 society. Accordingly, it was possible for the witnesses in the 1618 trial to come up with an
48
49 explanation of their own for the inconceivable conduct of Mayken and Magdaleene. While
50
51 sexuality and corporeality was a much discussed topic among early modern scholars,
52
53 historians have to take a closer look at the urban discourse in order to fully comprehend the
54
55 ways in which deviant sexuality and deviating bodies were construed in early modern society.
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1
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3 Yet, what makes the case of Mayken and Magdaleene truly exceptional is the fact that
4
5 it can also teach us a great deal about how early modern women attracted to other women
6
7 regarded themselves. Although caution is required when working with early modern trial
8
9 records, the confessions of Mayken and Magdaleene contain much information about their
10
11 feelings towards each other. Magdaleene was particularly conscious of her sexual preference
12
13 for women. Although she had been married in the past, she now deliberately engaged in
14
15 sexual relations with other women as she preferred having sex with women over men.
16
17 Moreover, she was aware of the existence of other women with similar feelings. While the
18
19 evidence provided by Magdaleene's statements is insufficient to settle the debate about the
20
21 social construction of (homo)sexuality, her testimony does indicate that certain individuals
22
23 were aware of their sexual preferences before modern construction of such mental
24
25 frameworks. The surprising self-awareness of both convicted female sodomites makes them
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27 anything but women like any other.
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33 ⁱ Susan Lanser, *The Sexuality of History. Modernity and the Sapphic, 1565-1830* (Chicago:
34
35 The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 39.

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37 ⁱⁱ Judith Brown, "Lesbian Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Europe," in *Hidden from*
38
39 *History: Reclaiming the gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and
40
41 George Chauncey (New York: New American Library, 1989), 67; Edith Benkov, "The Erased
42
43 Lesbian: Sodomy and the Legal Tradition in Medieval Europe," in *Same Sex Love and Desire*
44
45 *among Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Francesca Sautman and Pamela Sheingorn (New York:
46
47 Palgrave, 2001), 102.

48
49 ⁱⁱⁱ Valerie Traub, "The (In)Significance of 'Lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England," in
50
51 *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994),
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56 79.
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^{iv} The trial was previously mentioned, albeit fragmentarily, in several studies focusing on local history: Germain Vandepitte, “Van Heksen en de Boze Vijand. Sappho in 1618: Mayken de Brauwere en Magdaleene van Steene,” *Rond de poldertorens* 4 (1982): 127-37; George Debeuckelaere, “Mayken en Leene. Een lesbische geschiedenis in Brugge uit 1618,” *De Homokrant* 9, no. 5 (1983): 3-5; Heidi Deneweth, “Hekserij of travestie? Nee, homofilie!” *Spiegel Historiae* 21, no. 12 (1986): 533-37.

^v Julie Carlier, ““De wil tot weten” en de “list van de leugen.” Methodologische suggesties voor de historische kritiek van gerechtelijke bronnen met het oog op de studie van seksualiteitsbeleving from below,” *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis* 38, no. 3-4 (2008): 302.

^{vi} For a nuanced critique of this debate: David Halperin, *How to do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

^{vii} Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité. La volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 59.

^{viii} See also Emma-Donnoghue, *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668-1801* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996).

^{ix} Brussels, National Archives of Belgium (NAB), Chambers of Account, no. 13790, non-foliated; Bruges, City Archive (CAB), Series 192, no. 3 (Verluydboek 1611-1676), fol. 51r-v.

^x Bruges, State Archives in Bruges (SAB), TBO 119 (Collections of the City of Bruges), no. 622 (Book of Criminal Examinations 1617-1626), fol. 18r.

^{xi} “Zeght dat de voorschreven hermaphrodite verleet heeft zyn huysvrauwe zoo zy ghedaen heeft diversche andere, zynde ter dier oirsaecke te Thielt vuyt ghezeyt.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fols. 18r-19v.

^{xii} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 20r-v.

^{xiii} “Hoe dat sy tot diversche stonden met de voornoemde vrouwe gebouleert ende vleeschelic geconverseert hadde, ende dat met groote affectie ende begeerte van de voornoemde

Magdaleene.” Bruges, SAB, TBO 119, no. 664 (Register of Criminal Information of the City of Bruges, 1617-1626), fols. 27v-28r.

^{xiv} “Weesende haerer virgula scherp als een spelle, ende met sulcke overvloedigen van saede al haddet van vier manspersoonen geweest, dan tselve ontfangen hebbende was teenenmael cout.” Bruges, SAB, no. 664, fols. 27v-28r.

^{xv} Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers. Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) 19; Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 9.

^{xvi} “Ontkendt met eenighe jonghe meyskens ghebouleert thebben.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 21r-v.

^{xvii} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 21r-v.

^{xviii} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 22v.

^{xix} “Kent gehoort thebben te Pittem [...] dat Magdaleene duer den duivel man ende vrouwe beede was, ende Pieter Hoornaerts vrouwe daerdeure betoovert heeft.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 23r.

^{xx} “Dat sy es een vrouwe gelyc een ander.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 23r.

^{xxi} “Segt dat sy seide sulx liever te doen dan met seven mans te converseren, ende dat andere haer daerom waren biddende.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 24 r.

^{xxii} “Zecht haer somwylen ghezeyt thebben dat zy verwondert was dat zy Magdaleene haer met zulcx moijde ende dat zy daer up antwoorde dat zy daerinne haer contentement hadde ende datter noch meer dierghelycke waeren.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 25r.

^{xxiii} “Sulx sy daegelicx an haer begeerde, hoe wel sy deposante tselve an haer telckerwars niet en heeft gheconsenteert.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 24r.

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4 ^{xxiv} “Willende up haer liggen ende converseren als een man [...] Seght dat Magdaleene up
5
6 haer liggende haer devoir dede, met fortse vanden lichaeme.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 23r-
7
8 v.

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10 ^{xxv} “Ontkent yet an Magdeleene gevoelt thebben dat mannelic soude wesen, ofte yet daervan
11
12 gewaere gheworden thebben, seght somwylen wel wat natticheit gevoelt thebben, maer niet in
13
14 eenige abundantie, ende dat sy Magdeleene dan uphielt, liggende somwylen up haer tot dat sy
15
16 nat weesende. Seght niet te connen weten of seggen of de natticheit die van haer quam cout
17
18 ofte eet was.” Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 23v.

19
20 ^{xxvi} On the importance of gossip during early modern witch trials: Elizabeth Horodowich,
21
22 “Witchcraft and Rumour in Renaissance Venice’, in *Fama and her Sisters: Gossip and*
23
24 *Rumour in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Heather Kerr and Claire Walker (Turnhout: Brepols:
25
26 2015), 65-83.

27
28 ^{xxvii} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 24v.

29
30 ^{xxviii} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 26r-v.

31
32 ^{xxix} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 25v.

33
34 ^{xxx} “Daermede kendt dat zy haer nature mach gestort hebben op het lichaem van het zelve
35
36 Mayken, dan niet inder voughen zo den man de zyne communicuert aenden vrouwe.”
37
38 Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 25v.

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40 ^{xxxi} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 25r-v.

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42 ^{xxxii} Bruges, SAB, no. 622, fol. 29r.

43
44 ^{xxxiii} Bruges, CAB, Series 192, no. 3, fol. 62v.

45
46 ^{xxxiv} On the exceptionality of such cases: Theo van der Meer, “Tribades on Trial: Female
47
48 Same-Sex Offenders in Late Eighteenth-Century Amsterdam,” *Journal of the History of*
49
50 *Sexuality* 1, no. 3 (1990): 430.

^{xxxv} Jonas Roelens, "Visible Women. Female Sodomy in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Southern Netherlands (1400-1550)," *BMGN/Low Countries Historical Review* 130, no. 3 (2015): 9.

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8^{xci} Of course, it is equally possible that such an investigation was indeed conducted but that
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3 First of all, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions, which have, in my
4 opinion, contributed to a more consistent article.

- 5
6 - I have rewritten the introduction in order to set my article in its wider context. Before I
7 actually describe the case under scrutiny, I begin with a short explanation of the
8 historiography on female sodomy, which emphasizes the importance of the testimonies of
9 both convicted female sodomites. This new introduction more clearly explains the purpose of
10 this article.
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12 Comments made by reviewer #1:

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14 - I have shortened the account of the investigation by replacing some commentaries (e.g. the
15 question of abortion) to the analysis later in the article.
16 - Grammar: I do not longer use "this article" but use "I" instead, as this is grammatically more
17 appropriate.
18 - Lost knowledge: I elaborate a bit more about the fact that early modern attitudes towards
19 deviant sexuality evolved through time, even within a specific region.
20 - Hermaphrodite/cross-dressing: I explicate that Magdaleene never expressed the desire to be
21 a man, in contrast to other cases mentioned in this article.
22 - Sexual preference: the question about the sexual preference of both women is raised,
23 although I make clear that I do not want to portray Mayken and Magdaleene as 'premodern
24 lesbians'.
25 - Conclusion: I have rewritten the conclusion in order to emphasize the self-awareness about
26 the sexual desire more clearly.
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30 Comments made by reviewer #2:

- 31
32 - Broader importance of this article: In the introduction and conclusion, I elaborate more on
33 the dual objective of this article. First, we cannot dismiss the fact that some early modern
34 women attracted to other women were very much aware of their sexual preferences. This
35 might shed a new light on the, often politicized, debate between social-constructionists and
36 essentialists on the history of sexuality. Second, I emphasize the role played by the urban
37 community in early modern sodomy trials. While some publications focus solely on literary
38 representations of (female) sodomites and bodily deviations, it is important to look at how
39 these scholarly discussions were actually perceived in society.
40 - Literature: I did not include all of the suggested literature, because –although a
41 groundbreaking study on early modern sodomy- the work of Michael only discusses male
42 sodomy and highlights how these sexual acts were part and parcel of masculine identity in
43 fifteenth-century Florence. The suggested study by Valeria Finucci, however, was very
44 interesting as it discusses early modern visions on female corporeality and the release of
45 semen during intercourse.
46 - Terms from the original language: I have brought several terms from the footnotes up into
47 the body of the text. I want to make clear that the original word for hermaphrodite used in
48 the trial documents was actually "hermaphrodite" or "hermaphrodit". As such, the use of
49 the word hermaphrodite is not my own reading open to interpretation. I do point out,
50 however, that only one witness uses this word, but that his statement is endorsed by other
51 witnesses who describe Magdaleene as being both man and woman, without using the
52 medical term hermaphrodite. Other words such as devil, and sorceress are translated directly
53 in the text. Each key term is furthermore explained in the footnotes.
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I look forward to your reactions

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For Review Only