



*A sodomite burnt at the stake (Lille, 1458)*

*Sodomy, mainly understood as referring to sexual acts between men, and above all anal intercourse, was punishable at the stake in most medieval societies. In practice, however, both the definition of sodomy (the ‘unspeakable sin’) and the intensity of persecution varied greatly. The rather limited number of known cases of sodomites sentences to death mainly comes from late medieval and early modern cities; persecution was often linked to severe political conflicts within these communities. Jacques du Clercq (1424–1469) was a chronicler at the court of Philip the Good, the duke of Burgundy; he was a native of Lille, where the story reported below is set.*

*Edition: Jacques du Clercq, Mémoires de 1448 à 1467, in: Choix de chroniques et mémoires sur l’histoire de France V, ed. Jean Alexandre C. Buchon, Paris 1838, 1–308, here at 139.*

*Translation: Christof Rolker.*

*Literature: Helmut Puff, Sodomy in Reformation Germany and Switzerland, 1400–1600, Chicago, Ill. and London 2003.*

Le dix septiesme jour dudict mois de mars, feut ards, en la ville de Lille, ung homme, lequel se disoit estre homme et femme et avoir les deux sexes, mais il n’en estoit riens; et estoit homme, combien qu’il feust habillé en habit de femme. Ainsy s’habilloit pour coucher avec des josnes hommes, avecq lesquels il commectoit le péché de sodomie.

The seventeenth day of the afore-mentioned month of May [1458], a man was burnt in the city of Lille; this man said of himself to be 5 man and woman, and to have both sexes, but this was not the case. Rather, he was a man, although he dressed in women’s clothes. He dressed like this to sleep with young men, with whom he committed the sin of sodomy.