a second marriage alliance in private locations. Even though the church prohibited this private exchange of marital promises in a *loco prophano*, the alliance was still valid. This could help couples who wanted to make promises quickly to make sure former alliances would be dissolved.

Conclusion

Historians should make a less sharp distinction than in the past between ecclesiastical and secular courts on abduction and marriage cases. This chapter has shown that ecclesiastical judges also punished individuals for disregarding the will of their families, while bailiff's accounts and pardon letters frequently cited the abductee's consent as an extenuating circumstance. The evidence supports the view that secular courts considered abduction a serious crime, but in practice, the harsh penalties ordered by law were rarely applied. This is not unique to abduction since historians of criminal justice have found this pattern for many crimes in late medieval Europe. Because maintaining social peace was a key concern for lawmakers and rulers, out-of-court settlements were common.

Neither secular nor ecclesiastical courts adopted uniform policies over the fifteenth century. The secular records show waves of intense prosecution rather than steady numbers, some courts and even some judges' verdicts were more tolerant than others, and, most importantly, different legal outcomes were often the result of case-specific contextual factors that today can no longer be identified. The reason for this variety is that the legislators (consciously or not) had created some leeway in the laws, which allowed judges space for interpretation and led to different judicial outcomes for individual cases. Whereas a few abductors were executed, most had to make one or more pilgrimages or managed to get the bailiff to agree on a composition. However, judges were not the only ones with space to interpret the law; the people judged by them also possessed options. Abductors petitioning for pardon pointed out the abductee's consent, while the abductor's relatives begged the bailiff not to take the case to court. The cases discussed in this chapter clearly show that abductors, abductees, and their families were aware of this legal space and tried to use it to their advantage.

Even though attorneys were no doubt responsible for many strategic legal decisions, people also talked to each other about their legal experiences. Several elements in the consistory court records, such as contracting a second marriage to negate previous alliances and doing so in a private home or another diocese, show people's knowledge of legal and jurisdictional matters,

even without the involvement of legal counsellors. It was quite a job for the ecclesiastical officials, especially in Brussels where they were so much more concerned about these practices, to cope with the ways people creatively manipulated the law to their advantage. However, officials often had no other choice, beyond charging fines, than to follow canon law and ratify people's machinations to win validation or absolution of a marriage. The reaction of Brussels judges to abduction and marriages without the approval of relatives certainly seems more rigorous than that of their counterparts in other consistory courts. However, it is also possible, as Donahue has suggested, that abductions and clandestine marriages simply were more frequent in the upper Flemish-speaking part of the diocese of Cambrai under the jurisdiction of the Brussels court than in the French-speaking part under the jurisdiction of the Cambrai court.[132] Perhaps stories about the encounters of citizens with canon law and potentially successful strategies circulated more intensely in large cities such as Antwerp and Brussels, at least among some social groups. This topic certainly deserves to be investigated further, but for now, it is clear that the legal experiences of abductors, abductees, their relatives, and possible other alleged husbands and wives were diverse and context specific.

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