

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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¹³² Donahue, *Law, Marriage, and Society*, 417–23

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