

## **Vandalism in a church: suspended two-year prison term**

HRWF (01.12.2017) – On 24 November, a court in Carcassonne announced that it had sentenced a Muslim woman, only known by her first name "Kenza", for vandalizing and desecrating the altar of the Ste Marie Madeleine Church in Rennes-le-Château. She was sentenced to a suspended two-year prison term and fined an amount of 17,718 EUR to repair the damaged statue. Additionally, she was prohibited from appearing in Rennes-le-Château in the future.

### ***The facts***

At 9:00am on 23 April 2017, a young woman wearing a black coat went to the tourism office of Rennes-le-Château to ask when the church would be open. Two hours later, she was seen near the church wearing a white cape, a veil on her head and a Venetian mask on her face. She first went to the so-called 'Virgin's cave' nearby. She then proceeded to go into the church with an axe and started hitting the stoup, she then decapitated the famous red devil of the Bible Asmodea attached to it, cut off his arm, put a Kur'an on it and lacerated the bas-relief of the altar. She also damaged the statue of Maria Magdalena. Tourists immediately called the mayor and the gendarmerie arrested her.

When asked why she had committed such a misdeed, she answered calmly: "Today is election day here but in Syria the West is bombing and killing children. You are all kafirs! My husband is over there." (\*)

### ***Judicial proceedings***

After her arrest, Kenza was placed in police custody and then referred to the Office of the Public Prosecutor in Carcassonne.

On 13 May, she was declared accountable for her acts after being examined by psychiatrists. Her trial was fixed on 8 September. In the meantime she was put under court supervision and was not allowed to go to the town in which she committed her misdeed.

Her trial was postponed several times until 27 October. Kenza, 37, who was working in a law firm, recused her lawyer and defended herself. She admitted that her act had been premeditated and was meant to have a symbolic effect. "Today," she said, "I officially want to reject my French citizenship and to opt for the Palestinian citizenship". Concerning the damage caused in the church, she said : " I will not even pay a symbolic EUR for that statue". The prosecutor demanded a six-month suspended sentence.

(\*) The French word is « mécréant ». Kafir is a derogatory term used for "unbeliever".

Source: La Dépêche, 25 November 2017, <http://bit.ly/2j7rBQ7>