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The Historiography of Witchcraft Research in Norway 1994–2011

The period of witchcraft research in Norway from 1994 till 2011 has been a productive one, characterized by great variety as for approach and geographical distribution. I will structure my presentation by grouping witchcraft research in this way:

I Source editions

II Regional studies

III National studies

IV International studies

V The road ahead

As the Evil One once was supposed to have his home in the North, I will start with this part of the country, and then moving southwards. Another reason for starting in the north is the fact that center of gravity for witchcraft research in Norway during this period in fact is Finnmark, the northernmost district of Norway. For this area we have definitely the best witchcraft sources in Norway, and possibly the best witchcraft sources in Europe. Due to this very rich source material, the Finnmark witchcraft trials have been the object of intensive research during this period. The Regional State Archives of Tromsø has a very good series of court records in the Archives of the Magistrate of Finnmark. This material gives detailed information about severe witchcraft persecution in seventeenth-century Finnmark, when more than 90 persons were executed during the witch-hunt and where the death rate of two-thirds of the total number of accused was as high as in the most intense areas of witch persecution in Europe, for instance Scotland and Central Europe. As the population of Finnmark district was only 3000 at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the demographic consequences of the witch-hunt in this district are obvious.

I Source editions

As the historical sources always lie at the bottom of our research, I start with two sources editions related to witchcraft trials in the north, both of them text-critical editions including historical background, word explanations and notes.

The most recent source editions are *Trolldomsprosessene i Finnmark. Et kildeskrift* [The witchcraft trials in Finnmark. A source-book] and *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark, Northern Norway*, published in 2010 both in Norwegian and in English. It contains all court records from local courts in Finnmark from 1620 onwards, only with a lacuna for the period 1633–1647. Witchcraft trials taking place during the lacuna is documented by source material in the Archives of Finnmark Regional Governor. These court records are so detailed that we can follow an accused person from she or he enters the courtroom until sentence is passed.

They are very valuable historical documents due to continuity and richness of details. The edition is a resource for researchers in Norway and abroad.

The other source book is Hans H. Lilienskiold's manuscript: *Trolldom og ugudelighet i 1600-tallets Finnmark* [Sorcery and Ungodliness in seventeenth century Finnmark], edited by Rune Blix Hagen and Per Einar Sparboe and published in 1998. Lilienskiold was Regional Governor at Vardøhus in late seventeenth century and copied many of the sentences related to witchcraft cases in local courts in Finnmark. Lilienskiold's book is particularly important for the period before 1620, when ordinary court records are lacking.

A third source edition, and this time an electronic devise valid for the whole of Norway, is Norwegian Folklore Archives' [Norsk folkeminnelags] collection of witchcraft trials, which was digitized and published on-line in 2009. This database contains 984 cases, which includes all known witchcraft cases, including slander cases, as well as a few cases related to witchcraft. The database has a size making it international known, and is a valuable contribution to witchcraft research.

A fourth source edition, published in 2011 in connection with the opening of Steilneset Memorial to the victims of the Finnmark witchcraft trials in Vardø, is a book with individual texts, based on court records, for each of the victims of the Finnmark witchcraft trials. The book is published in Norwegian, English, German and Finnish, and a Sami edition is in process.

For all the source editions, it holds true that they are valuable in several respects; they allow researchers to choose their own methodological approach, they are a help to persons who do not read the gothic hand, and they contain a full text-critical apparatus.

II Regional studies

The bulk of witchcraft research which has taken place in Norway during the period in question has been regional studies.

Also here research of the Finnmark witchcraft trials is important. I published myself *Trollkvinne i nord* [Witch in the North] in 1994. The book contains a qualitative as well as a quantitative study of the Finnmark material, and is the first research work pointing to the strong demonological elements during the Finnmark trials and the predominance of Norwegian women, not Sami women, among the accused and sentenced. In addition, the book contains an analysis of the motive of the witch as it appears in fiction.

An article in English about The Finnmark witchcraft trials, "Witches of the High North", written by me, has been published in *Scandinavian Journal of History* in 1997.

Rune Blix Hagen has published a substantial amount of articles on the Finnmark witchcraft trials, among them 'Female Witches and Sami Sorcerers in the Witch Trials of Arctic Norway', in *Arv, Nordic Yearbook of Folklore*, 2006. As the topic of witchcraft trials against Sami men and shamanism has been particularly studied by Hagen, I would like to mention 'Sami Shamanism: The Arctic Dimension', in *Magic, Rituals, and Witches*, 2006. I would also like to mention the book *Samer er trollmenn i norsk historie* [Samis are sorcerers in Norwegian history], published in 2005, also containing a summary in the Sami language.

In her history book about Vardø, *Vardø. Grensepost og fiskevær 1850–1950* [Vardø. Border post and fishing village], 1989, Randi Rønning Balsvik has written about the witchcraft trials taking place in Finnmark.

Related to Finnmark, I would also like to mention an article written by Ole Lindhartsen, 'Lensherrer, heksejakt og justismord i Finnmark på 1600-tallet' [District Governors, witch-hunt and legal murder in seventeenth century Finnmark], in G. J. Valen, K. Skavhaug, K. Schanche (eds.), *Flytting og forandring i Finnmarks fortid*, 2002, pointing to the clear increase in number of witchcraft trials related to Vardøhus Castle just after a new District Governor was installed.

For other districts of Norway, Gunnar Knudsen has published a book on witchcraft trials in Østfold in 1998. Rogaland is an area Hans Eyvind Næss has been studying for a long period of time. This area is paid particular attention to in Næss' doctoral thesis about Norwegian witchcraft trials from 1982. Terje Sødal has also studied the witchcraft trials in Agder. Moving further north along the coastline of Norway, mention should be made of Mink Chan's study of witchcraft Trials in Hordaland, published in an article from 2010. Also Ragnhild Botheim has done an important study of the cases in Bergenhus len during the period 1566–1700 in her Master's thesis from 1999. Nils Gilje's book about the famous trial of Anne Absalon Pedersdatter, *Heksen og humanisten: Anne Pedersdatter og Absalon Pederssøn Beyer: en historie om magi og trolldom i Bergen på 1500-tallet*, [The witch and the humanist: Anne Pedersdatter and Absalon Pederssøn Beyer: a story about magic and witchcraft in sixteenth-century Bergen] is a contribution to regional studies, in addition to taking on board general perspectives. Gilje has also written an article titled "Djevelen står alltid bak": Demonisering av folkelig magi på slutten av 1500-tallet" [The Devil is always behind: Demonizing of traditional magic at the end of the sixteenth century], 2002.

In general the regional studies are micro-studies, based on court records and other contemporary sources. They are important contributions when it comes to getting a picture of the witch-hunt in Norway due to solidness.

III National studies

With regard to national studies, I would like to mention Hans Eyvind Næss, *Trolldomsprosessene i Norge på 1500–1600-tallet. En retts- og sosialhistorisk undersøkelse* [Witchcraft trials in Norway during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A legal- and socioeconomical study] from 1982 and also his book from 2005, *Med bål og brann. Trolldomsprosessene i Norge*, which is an updated edition of his doctoral thesis.

Rune Hagen published in 2003 *Hekser. Fra forfølgelse til fortryllelse* [Witches. From persecution to enchantment], a book which takes up general factors related to witchcraft as well as paying particular attention to some specific cases from Finnmark. The book discusses also in an interesting way different modern concepts of witchcraft, and thus brings in popular culture in our time as an aspect related to the historical witchcraft phenomenon.

Ellen Alm' Master thesis from 2000, *Statens rolle i trolldomsprosessene i Danmark og Norge på 1500- og 1600-tallet. En komparativ studie* [The role of the state during the witchcraft trials in Denmark and Norway in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A comparative study] may be seen as a national study within the kingdom of Denmark-Norway, taking a comparative approach to the role of the state and the functioning of the laws during the period of the witch-

hunt. Another Master's thesis to be mentioned is Mink Chan's *Norske trolldomskonflikter i opplysningstiden* [Norwegian witchcraft conflicts in the age of enlightenment] from 2009. Mention should also be made of Lars Petter Martinsen's Master's thesis *Anklagede menn i trolldomsprosessene i Norge* [Accused men in Norwegian witchcraft trials] from 2008.

By contribution by Hans Eyvind Næss and Gunnar Knudsen we see attempts to make a survey of the witch-hunt in Norway. Næss has an article, "Norway: the criminological context" in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft. Centres and Peripheries*, from 1993. In addition, Næss has analysed the witchcraft trials in a broader context of history of law and culture of law in his article "Forbrytelse og straff" [Crime and punishment] in Liv Mathinsen (ed.), *Tingboka som kilde* [Court Records as Sources] from 1991 and also an article about punishment in Eva Østerberg and Sølvi Bauge Sogner (eds.), *People meet the law*, Oslo 2000. Knudsen has an article, 'Norwegian witchcraft trials: a reassessment' in *Continuity and Change*, 2003.

Taking a more general approach to witchcraft research, Margit Løyland has written an article about witchcraft during the period of pietism in *Heimen*, 2010.

Of important contributions from other researchers than historians, I would like to mention Bente Gullveig Alver's book *Mellom mennesker og magter. Magi i hekseforfølgelsesnes tid* [Between human beings and forces. Magic in the time of witchcraft trials], 2008. As a folklorist working with witchcraft during her entire career, Alver's analyses are mostly centered round magic and sorcery related to tradition and brings to the fore interesting perspectives, among other discussing the role of the local ministers in witchcraft cases. Another contribution by a folklorist worth mentioning is Ørnulf Hodne's *Trolldom i Norge. Hekser og trollmenn i folketro og lokaltradisjon* [Sorcery in Norway. Witches and sorcerers in folk belief and local tradition] from 2008.

IV International studies

Of research published in Norway with an international approach, I would like to mention Rune Blix Hagen's book *Dei europeiske hekseprosessane* [The European witchcraft trials] from 2007. This book gives a good historiographical survey of research on witchcraft trials in Europe, in addition to tables with facts about trials in most European countries. There is a separate chapter on Norwegian witchcraft historiography, as well as a chapter on learned and traditional witchcraft belief and a chapter discussing the global perspective.

Gunnar Knudsen has written an article with a comparative perspective, "The End of the Witch Hunts in Scandinavia" in *Arv*, 2006,

Comparison between Scotland and Finnmark is the aim of my PhD thesis from Edinburgh 2008, *Seventeenth-century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Norway*. New findings, based on quantitative as well as qualitative analyses, are: very strong correlation between demonological elements, local courts, linked trials, predominance of women, use of torture and high execution rate. As for methodology, the combination of quantitative and qualitative studies fruitful; the narratological approach in close-reading of original court records fruitful, groundbreaking because this methodology is used for the first time related to historical documents in this study.

Also with a comparative aspect, I have written an article based on close-reading of one case in Scotland and one case from Norway, published in 2007: "Witches in Scotland and Northern Norway. Two case studies" i Peter Graves and Arne Kruse (red.): *Images and Imaginations. Perspectives on Britain and Scandinavia*.

Birger Andreas Marthinsen has in 2010 written a Master' thesis on seventeenth-century witchcraft cases where men were involved, *Trollmenn & galdramenn* [Sorcerers and men casting spells], comparing Norwegian and Icelandic sources.

Another contribution to witchcraft research in the Nordic countries, focusing on the Middle Ages, is Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, published in 2011.

V The road ahead

a) Comparative studies

From a methodological point of view, comparative studies are fruitful with regard to finding similar patterns in certain areas and likewise finding differences between areas. Comparisons including areas in Eastern as well as Western Europe, will be an important field of research the years to come.

Comparison of witchcraft trials in a Nordic context will certainly be actualized in the years to come, as an increasing amount of national witchcraft studies in the Nordic countries see the light of day.

Coming from my hand: Comparison Trier – Norway – Scotland: a triangular model, bringing in German sources, of interest for quantitative analyses related to demonology, linked trials, gender distribution and execution rate. As for qualitative analyses of separate witchcraft court records, I will continue with close-readings, particularly discourse analyses from a narratological perspective.

b) Regional studies

As for regional studies, much research has been going on over the last years. Still, some districts still have to be studied in detail. As complete seventeenth-century court records in Norway are preserved only for the districts of Finnmark and Rogaland, other sources have to be scrutinized in order to get a more complete picture of the whole country than we have today. Particularly in the district of Trøndelag much remains to be done. The importance of studies based on primary sources to get hold of new information and the importance of close-reading of historical sources, which claims knowledge also within the field of linguistics.

c) National studies

For Norway as a whole, studies based on various thematic approaches would be interesting, for instance studies related to judicial practice in local courts and in the Court of Appeal, gender studies, mentality studies and studies related to folkloric beliefs.

d) Challenges

One of the challenges for the years to come is going into the eighteenth century plowing new fields. A second challenge has to do with missing sources, and for quantitative analyses, exploring new methods for stipulation of, for instance, execution rates. In this respect different methods of extrapolation should be tested out. A third challenge is getting an overview transcending district and national borders to try to see patterns of development of witchcraft trials over larger areas. For the northern part of Scandinavia, Fennoscandia, the ethnic element is important to study. The study of the meeting between the Sami people and

their fellow-inhabitants in the various Nordic countries might give valuable information about traditional folk belief meeting new ideas. Such studies might also throw light on the difficult and much discussed topic of shamanism, a topic of great interest among witchcraft researchers.

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