

Witches of the High North

The Finnmark Witchcraft Trials in the Seventeenth Century

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I. Issues and source material

1.1. Issues

The aim of this article is to discuss a few questions related to the witchcraft trials that took place in the 17th century in the area of the North of Norway that is currently called East Finnmark. Men, as well as women, were subjected to persecution during the witchcraft trials in Finnmark. A marked predominance of women distinguishes witchcraft trials in general, and the uttermost border of the European Continent is no exception in this respect. Of the charged persons, 82% were women, 14% were men, leaving 4% whose gender is not known.

The Finnmark witchcraft trials, taking place in an area known at the time as Ultima Thule, form an integral part of a European phenomenon. Nevertheless, Finnmark has distinctive traits as compared to the rest of Europe due to its peripheral location and special ethnic conditions in a population where Sami and non-Sami live side by side. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Samis were reputed throughout Europe to be well versed in the art of magic. As far as the historical witchcraft trials of Finnmark are concerned, 10% of the persons indicted are Sami men, while Sami women amount to 5% of the material. This means that Sami men and women to a certain extent have put their stamp on the historical witchcraft trials in Finnmark. The majority of Sami men accused of witchcraft are found in the former half of the trial period, while the Sami women are scattered evenly throughout the whole trial period. Although Samis are found in a rather modest number in the source material, the Sami reputation for sorcery might have contributed to reinforce trial activity in Finnmark as a whole. The majority of the Samis, and consequently most of the men in the material, are accused in single trials conducted along the lines of the accusatory system, which deal with witchcraft practised on an individual basis and amount to one-quarter of trials involved. Three-quarters of the source material, however, consists of inquisitorial-like chained trials, dealing with witchcraft practised on a collective basis. In this bulk of the material we find the overwhelming number of females, though very few Sami women among them.

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I have chosen to focus on the chained trials in this article, and therefore concentrate on the strong trial activity during the 1650s and the 1660s, and through close reading of the sources covering these two decades try to point out central features characterizing the chains in the Finnmark material. In addition, I present a short survey of the single trials in the source material covering the period 1600–1692. In this way I hope to throw light on the historical witchcraft trials in Finnmark both as a part of the European witch hunts and as a specific phenomenon of the North of Norway.

The main emphasis is put on qualitative aspects of the material, such as specific traits of learned European demonology in the confessions, use of torture during the imprisonment period, including the water ordeal, and the alleged motives for exercising witchcraft.

1.2. Presentation of the sources

The source material on which my research is based dates back to the period 1600–1692. It comprises trial minutes gleaned from court records, the Finnmark District Court (*Lagting*) protocols and archival material from the District Lord of Finnmark, as well as information from the Vardøhus county accounts. The county accounts go back to 1600–1646.¹ The court records cover the period 1620–1692, but there are no protocols from the period 1633–1648 (void). For this period, however, there exists a manuscript from the 1690s, written by Hans Lillienkiöld, district lord of Vardøhus. In this document the main content of the majority of the witchcraft trials in Finnmark 1610–1692 is copied from the court records.² For Norway as a whole, the court protocols in the counties of Finnmark and Rogaland have been kept better than elsewhere.

The court records represent the bulk of the source material, although the length of trial records may vary. However, for a number of trials, biographical data have been entered together with the interrogation, the confession, and the sentence. In addition, we find considerable sociological data concerning the livelihood and living conditions of the common people. The latter, in particular, is of great interest since we are dealing with the 17th century, when the common man and woman had neither face nor colour in historical narratives.

Cases that could not be resolved in the local court were referred to the district court (*Lagting*) which was the highest court. The presiding judge at the district court contributed to the acquittal of a number of women imprisoned in Vardøhus.

The county accounts provide only scant information about trials and confessions, but they do include references to all major trials that conclude with verdicts of “sword, fire or banishment”. The trials are reflected in the accounts as income through fines or payments due for rent, and as expenses for the transportation or

¹ Court records for Finnmark and the Archives of the District Lord are kept in The National Archives of Norway, Tromsø Department (Statsarkivet i Tromsø), Finnmark District Court protocols in The National Archives of Norway, Trondheim Department, and Vardøhus County Account in Rentekammeret, The National Archives of Norway, Oslo.

² Thott 950,2, The Royal Library, Copenhagen.

incarceration of prisoners, and for executions. The county accounts have been duly kept, and are thus a reliable source as a supplement to the court reports.

1.3. Scope of the study

In his thesis *Trolldomsprosessen i Norge på 1500–1600 tallet*, Hans Eyvind Næss bases his analysis on a total of 850 witchcraft trials for Norway as a whole. He points out that the number of trials per capita was considerably higher in Finnmark than elsewhere in the country. According to Næss, Finnmark's 3000 inhabitants comprised 0.8% of the total population. Of all the Norwegian trials, 16% took place in Finnmark together with 31% of all death sentences.³

The sources for the Finnmark witchcraft trials verify that approximately 150 persons were accused of exercising witchcraft and were charged in Finnmark during the period 1600 to 1692.⁴ The periodicity of the trial era 1600–1692 shows that the concentration of trials to certain periods explain why some court protocols chronicle a large number of trials and others none. The stochastic character of the current of trials, involving sharp shifts from very many to very few trials, may be said to characterize trial eras in other countries as well.

The percentage of death sentences in the Finnmark material is 60, of which 81% were women, 12% were men, and for 7% gender is unknown to us.⁵ During the peak periods, the frequency of death sentences by and large parallels the frequency of trials.

1.4. Research on Norwegian witchcraft trials

Until the 1960s, information about Norwegian witchcraft trials on an international level has been strongly misleading. In his book *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*, R. Robbins writes: “Witchcraft in Norway took on the air of myth and legend rather than religious heresy, and sorcery and maleficia rather than pact and sabbath became the bases of the few scattered witchcraft trials. Probably less than two-dozen witchcraft trials took place in Norway”.⁶ In the first place, the extent of the trials is incorrectly cited. Secondly, the affirmation that demonological ideas virtually are absent from the Norwegian material is inaccurate, since pact (diabolism) is a recurring theme in the Finnmark material.

In her book *Heksetro og trolldom* from 1971, Bente Alver presents six Norwegian witchcraft trials from various parts of the country. Later on, several scholars took an interest in the Norwegian witchcraft trials. In 1982, Hans Eyvind Næss published his doctoral thesis about the topic, and some years later a popular version of the same. He highlights the possible connections between witchcraft trials and criminality in general during the period. Næss has furthermore written the

³ Næss (1982), p. 32.

⁴ Ref. L. H. Willumsen, *Trollkvinne i nord* (Tromsø, 1984), pp. 164–166, Thott 950,2, fol. 35a–84b, The Royal Library, Cph.

⁵ Ref. Vardøhus County Account 1600–1646.

⁶ Robbins (1959), p. 161.

Norwegian contribution to the anthology *Early modern European Witchcraft*, entitled "The criminological context".⁷ Sølvi Sogner has published her address contesting Næss's doctoral thesis⁸ and Anne Llewellyn Barstow has commented upon research on Norwegian material in her study *Witchcraft*.⁹

As far as the Finnmark witchcraft trials in particular are concerned, Kirsten Bergh wrote an article based on primary sources in 1960.¹⁰ Einar Niemi has treated the topic in *Vadsø historie*, published in 1983.¹¹ In 1994 Liv Helene Willumsen published a study of the Finnmark witchcraft trials, and Rune Hagen has recently published several articles about the theme.¹²

2. Chained trials: the 1652–1653 chain

2.1. Introduction

From January 1652 to March 1653, 13 married women from the areas around Vardø and Vadsø are sentenced to be burnt at the stake after having confessed about pacts with the Devil. A total of 14 women are implicated in this chain. Four of them come from further South along the coast. Five are, or have been, menials. All of them are tried for witchcraft. With the exception of the first woman in the chain, all the others are tried after being denounced. There is an intricate web of denunciations in the local societies connected to this chain. Eleven of the women endure lengthy imprisonment and are repeatedly brought before the court.

2.2. Torture

During interrogations, physical torture is applied. So is the use of the water ordeal, where the woman is thrown into the ice cold sea. If she floats, she is proved guilty of being a witch. Birgitte Johannesdatter confesses after being subjected to the water ordeal, and when Bodill Danielsdatter, who has confessed unofficially, refuses to repeat her confession, "an examination by torture is proscribed".¹³ The next time she stands before the court, the records explain, "she willingly acknowledged her earlier confession" (3:65b). Just how willing her acknowledgement actually was must be left to our imagination. The above wording in the court records suggests that the scribe's entries are deliberately inaccurate, given the circumstances. Words such as "willingly" and "freely" employed in a setting involving confessions tend to arouse suspicions. Even if physical torture was not used, the women must have at least been under a terrible emotional strain during their incarceration.

⁷ *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, edited by B. Ankarloo and G. Henningsen (New York, 1990).

⁸ Sogner, "Trolldomsprosessene i Norge på 1500–1600-tallet" in *Norveg*, 25, (1982).

⁹ Barstow, *Witchcraft* (San Francisco, 1994).

¹⁰ K. Bergh: "Til ild og bål" in G. I. Willoch, ed. *Vardøhus festning 650 år* (Oslo, 1960).

¹¹ Niemi, *Vadsø historie*, vol. 1 (Vadsø, 1983).

¹² R. Hagen: "...og svovl paa hendes bryst paa pinebenken". In *Heimen* bd. 32 (1995); "Blant trollkvinner, heksejegere og arkivbrennere" in *Arkivtid* nr. 5 (1995); "Kledd naken, barbert og kastet på sjøen" in *Historie*, nr. 2 (1996).

¹³ Court records for Finnmark (Tingbok Finnmark) no. 3, fol. 65a. Hereafter the references to the Finnmark court records will be given this abbreviation in the text: (3:65a).

2.3. Substance of the confessions

The first in the series is Gundill Amundsatter, who "was taken to the fort for witchcraft (...) and was questioned as to what she knew of such arts and whence she learned them" (3:58a). She denounces Bodill Danielsdatter as her mentor, and all is set for a chain of trials. Gundill admits having cast a spell on Jonn Jonnsønn's "ship from Bergen, which was shipwrecked and salvaged to Kiberg this past autumn, and she admitted that she as well as (...) were together casting spells on the same ship" (3:59ab).

Another instance of collective witchcraft is "the mighty storm that drove Captain Andreas Heef's ship, from Bergen, off-course near Bussesund where it was lost" (3:106a). Yet another storm was caused by four of the women who "this past autumn conjured such a storm that the sea wreaked havoc here in Vardø. They kept the wind in a bag, and when they untied the knot, it started" (3:103b). Birgitte Johannesdatter states that she and her mentor Kirstenn Niels Pedersen could "have what they wanted from whomsoever they wanted" (3:110ab). A somewhat extraordinary confession comes from Anne Pedersdatter who:

...also admitted that she and the other person, together with someone whose name she did not know let a grid block Wardbjerg, but the fish were so plentiful (...) that some slipped through (3:116b).

The aim of such operations is to unleash natural elements, to wreck people's livelihood, to inflict disease or to cause death amongst humans and livestock; all of which are misfortunes that have struck the local community in recent years.

Judging from the records' stereotype character, we may infer that whoever conducted the interrogation needed answers to certain questions before he was satisfied with a confession. In a number of records there are written numbers in the margin of the protocol. These may have been references to special passages in the confession or references to a prepared list of questions, remedies known from European demonology.

2.4. The pact

What enables a woman to exercise her witchcraft is, without exception, a pact with the Devil through which she gains access to forces she would not otherwise command. Sorcery is something she learns; each of the women names another as her mentor and the craft is transmitted through a "a brew she gave her to drink" or a "piece of bread and butter". Thus, there is no question of congenital faculties, but of a substance, preferably food or a beverage which, when taken in, imbues them with magical skills. On the one hand, people partake in the Holy Communion to become children of the Lord; on the other a witches' repast makes a woman the Devil's child.

Two women have gone further afield to learn the craft, to the neighbouring county. Both have been employed as menials here and there along the coast on their way North to Finnmark. Presumably, some of the women actually have practised a manifest rite, which they term "initiation" into the craft. They offer food and drink to other women who subsequently experience a physical reaction,

possibly due to additives in the potion, possibly because they expect to experience a reaction.

Others are, by their own account, diffident about learning the art. Elli Sigurdsdatter declines "a piece of bread and butter" and "some milk to drink" from Oluff Jonnsen's woman Marrj in Eckerøe. Elli does eventually eat the bread, but refuses to drink the milk. Then Marrj tells her that "since you won't drink the milk then drink the Devil into you" (3:108a). Afterwards, Elli goes to Marrj and "asked why she had done this to her and she answered, this is what you get because of Bastianß Marenn, who left me to go to you" (3:108a).

The women confess about strange sensations after the intake of the witches' repast. Some scholars believe hallucinogenic herbs might have been used,¹⁴ not an unlikely conjecture in view of quotations such as "whereupon she immediately became so troubled and crazed that she didn't know where she was" (3:102b). Elli Sigurdsdatter felt "unwell and so strange that she could not do anything" (3:108a), Baarne felt "so strange in her mind and had pains and imagined she flew into the air" (3:67b). Such effects are mentioned only in a context of initiation, not in connection with sabbaths or the practise of witchcraft.

After the "unwell" phase and the "soaring" state, things really start happening. Before the woman, a figure appears who is termed "the evil one", "the apostle", "the evil man" or "her god". Unlike the confessions from 1620 to 1621 this apostle bears a name, and is thus not merely an abstract concept of evil. The apostle addresses the woman, asking her to serve him. Birgitte Christophersdatter sees him in "the shape of a man", whereas Elli Sigurdsdatter sees a "small boy with a broad-brimmed hat". The apostle is variously called Dominicus, Zocherias, Aßmudeo, Machome, Abedony, Belsebou, Ma:mno, Angel of Life, Long-Tail and Jermund. Though some of the names, such as Long Tail and Jermund, are of local origin, most are international with reference to, for instance, the Bible, such as Zocherias and Belsebou. Some of the names internationally used for Satan are relevant for the Finnmark material, such as Asmodeus, Beelzebub, and Mammon.¹⁵ In most cases, however, the women will have heard these names from religious preachers, whereas names like Long-Tail derive from visual fantasies.

2.5. Relations between apostle and woman

In her relations with the apostle, woman is subordinate. Elli Sigurdsdatter's apostle "bid her serve him, which she sometimes declined even though he pressed her hard to serve him in every way. Finally, she asked him who he was and what his name was, but he told her to give herself to him" (3:109a). Maritte Andersdatter is an exception, since she has two apostles and uses them in her service: "on the one (...) she rode, and the other she used for evil deeds" (3:102b,103a). Synnøve Oelsdatter has a "god" named Dominicus "who was often with her and whom she had promised to serve (...) and who could give her the shape of a spirit" (3:105a).

To practise their magic the women call for their apostle. Baarne Oelsdatter says:

¹⁴ For instance, E. Niemi in *Vadsø's historie*, vol. 1.

¹⁵ M. Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature* (1973), p. 86.

When she wanted to go somewhere and do evil deeds, she was to go silently out alone to a strange place, then she took on a new likeness, and when she had called for her God she could speed away (3:67b).

In the concept of a Devil's pact reflected by these confessions, we see no implicit promise from Satan that the women will receive food or wealth by serving him. Satan simply turns up as an inevitable consequence of their taking in the witches' meal; he is not described as a lucrative option. True enough, Birgitte Johannesdatter claims that she and her mentor can take from others whatever they wish, "but nothing came of it, because their God Asmudeo immediately took it away from them again" (3:100b). None of the women in this chain confess having been punished by their apostle.

2.6. Trying out the craft

A common feature of the confessions is that as soon as they have learned witchcraft, the women try it out on an animal, usually one from their own livestock. Bodill Danielsdatter tries it on "one of her own sheep, and immediately it burst", Giertrud Tronnsdatter tries it on "a little lamb to which she gave a drink and told it to burst, and shortly afterwards, it died" (3:103a), and Baarne Oelsdatter "tried her craft first on a dog, giving it food in which she had poured something bad, and somewhat later it died" (3:114b).

It seems strange that the women should want to kill their own animals. In all probability, the demise of the animals was a result of natural causes which the women later construed as witchcraft.

2.7. Collective operations and sabbaths

When casting spells on a ship, the women often take the shape of birds or, as in the case of Maritte Andersdatter when she cast a spell on Jonn Jonnsøn's ship, of "a great wave that overturned the ship and wrecked it" (3:103a). In her confession, Lisbet Poulsdatter states that she has taken on the likeness "of a swan, Gurj that of a goose, and Anne that of a falcon" (3:114a). Maritte Andersdatter narrates about the storm they made when they "kept the wind in a bag, then untied the knot and then it started" (3:103b). Maritte explains how she puts a curse on people: She "gave it to her in a brew of beer, asking her God Machome to be in it (...) and he died straight away" (3:103a).

In Baarne's confession we find a reference to sabbaths: "then they all dashed off, gathering on Wardbjerg, each in her own likeness" (3:167b). The social aspect of the sabbath is inconsequential since the objective is to carry out a collective operation.

2.8. Motives for witchcraft

The women are eager to explain why they take part in collective operations. Their motives are related primarily to conditions of life; livelihood, resources, income-relevant antagonism to the establishment, secondary to conflicts between

individuals. Income-related conflicts play a striking role. The Vadsø merchant Lauridz Brass has provoked several of the women. Birgitte Christophersdatter reports she took part in casting an evil spell on Jonn Jonnsøns ship "because of Lauridz Brass, who was on that very ship, and who had refused to provide supplies and give credit that autumn before he sailed" (3:109a).

To explain her participation, Elli Sigurdsdatter says: "Her reason had been that Lauridz Brass had that year refused to supply and give credit to her brother in law, Anders Jonsen who lives in the country" (3:108b). Birgitte Johannesdatter states that her reason for casting the evil spell was that Bodill was furious at Lauridz Brass, and she had participated out of solidarity. Baarne, too, took part "because of Lauridz Brass". Synnøve Oelsdatter conjured the storm with the others "because of Anders Christenßen who now supplies and gives credit to her son" (3:105b), and she took part in casting an evil spell on Anders Hess's ship "because Mogenß Jacobsen who was first mate on that ship sold her an eighth of a kilo's worth of pepper for 40 pounds of fish" (3:105a). In the last case we are dealing with a private motive, but it is clearly rooted in a division of power that allows one party to exploit the other. When the women seek to harm people who hold power, they are giving vent to the typical frustrations and resentment generated by such a power structure.

Brigitte Edisdatter's confessions contain references to the high prices for necessary commodities. She reports that the "first mate and the boatswain sold them dearly if they sold them" (3:106a). As for Gundill Amundsatter, she took part in casting the evil spell on Andreas Hess's ship "because they brought high prices to the country" (3:59b).

Maritte Andersdatter's confession refers to fodder for the animals. She reports having conjured a storm

because of the honourable junker's (the district lord) barn, which he bought from Anders Nilssen, and in which hay and fodder for the sheep were stacked, for which reason the peasants had not been allowed to cut as much hay as they needed this past summer (3:106b).

The women's reprisals are on behalf of their husbands as much as for their own sakes. Gundill Amundsatter has conjured disease on Oluff Nordmann "which she did because of a barren ewe which he took from her husband" (3:59b). Baarne Oelsdatter has cast an evil spell on the district lord's bailiff. When he went on legal business "she grew angry with him for the sake of her husband, with whom he had quarrelled" (3:114b). Bodill Danielsdatter states as her reason for participating in the collective operation that she is angry with merchant Lauridz Brass because "he was forever swearing and scolding her and her husband" (3:66a).

The women are actually talking about circumstances that underlie some of the difficulties they face in life. The fact that the authorities and wealthy persons should play such a prominent part in this picture must be seen against a backdrop of the supplier-system by which fishermen in Finnmark were kept in absolute dependence of the merchants and Bergen traders.

2.9. The sentences

Six out of the 13 women in this chain lived in the countryside prior to imprisonment.

However, it is not surprising that no less than 10 sentences are pronounced at Vardøhus; the fort plays an important part in the trials. The district governor, Jørgen Friis, is present at all the trials and takes an active part in interrogations. Officially, the trials are conducted by the bailiff of East Finnmark, Hans Jensen Ørbech, or the deputy bailiff in Vardø, Knud Jensen. The typical sentence might have the following wording:

Since the said Brigitte Edisdatter upon questioning and according to her answers did willingly confess and admit that she the year before last, on 5 January, disavowed God and attached herself to the Devil to serve him and through his art and company undertake numerous evil actions against the Lord and people, she was sentenced, after her recorded confession, to a punishment of her body by fire and flames (3:107a).

This expression of scholarly attitude to witchcraft is in complete accordance with demonological prescriptions. Moreover, the wording is highly reminiscent of the statute on witchcraft that was issued in Denmark-Norway in 1617, where "real" witches are defined as people who have "attached" themselves to the Devil.¹⁶

The formula in the sentence is pure and convincing documentation of the prevailing outlook among scholars, and it reflects their fear of witchcraft. The phrase "upon questioning and according to her answers" is virtually farcical, since there is never any question of "answers" on the part of the women once their confessions have been obtained; the women's fates are sealed at that point; they have no chance to sway the outcome of the trial.

3. The 1654-1655 chain

3.1. Introduction

The chain involves five women and lasts for more than a year, from February 1654 until March 1655. The confessions are very similar. Four death sentences are passed, two of them from the village of Kiberg. Two of the sentences emphasize that the accused renounced God and turned to the Devil. Women in this chain are menials who come from areas south of Finnmark, and three of the women confess to having learned witchcraft in areas south of Finnmark. In the records of Sirj's trial it is described how she came thus far north. "Shortly after, in the spring, she came to these parts on Christen Hansen's ship, which sailed to the island, and found a post (...)" (5:12b). The trade on Bergen and demographic ordinances explain to some extent why so many girls travelled to the high North to find work. Alien women had no relatives in the community, so they were presumably more vulnerable than others when suspected of witchcraft.

¹⁶ Decree of 1617, About sorcerers and those privy to sorcery.

3.2. Pacts and the Devil

In this chain, many women who “worked for a living together” confess to having learned witchcraft from one another or from their mistresses. There are a number of references to card games with the Devil; the loser must seal a pact with him, which may signify that the pact was not always advantageous from the woman’s point of view. Karen Jonsdatter describes how she rode with her step-mother to

Dovre mountain, where her mother called to the Devil for a long time before he consented to come; then they played cards with him, and her aforementioned mother won, but if she lost she had to promise to serve him (3:133ab).

Sirri and Marj once met the evil one “in a peat bog” where they had gone “to cut peat together”. Marj learned about witchcraft from Sirri by eating a piece of bread, whereupon Satan appears, “and straight away he presented a card so that they both had to play, and they lost, meaning they had to stay in his service” (5:13b). The evil one “bore the shape of a strange, black man with claws”.

3.3. The profit motive

Karen Jonsdatter is an enterprising lady who attracts considerable attention by admitting to a long list of transgressions and by profiting from her witchcraft. She has shrewdly reached the conclusion that if sorcery can be used to command the forces of nature for evil purposes, it can also be of use to people, for a fee. The sources tell us that she has won quite a name for herself and a large clientele. She sells a brew “that was made of sea water, a magic potion, acid, water and pepper”, so that “they would not be lost at sea” (3:134b). She also sells small magical objects that are supposed to calm the seas. She gives Peder Henningsen’s boathand, Søffren Søffrensen,

a piece of mushroom kindling with a stone and a bit of thread attached to it, which he was to have with him at sea, so that when the seas grew rough he should throw it ahead of the prow, thrice repeating her name, and then the seas would calm down, and this he showed his master (3:134a).

The magic which Karen sells is attached to a very specific object: She specializes in threads. The boathand Peder explains that “the said Karen had given them all a piece of linen thread and a woollen one, and a piece of fish to put on the table, for then they would catch plenty of fish” (3:136a).

One day Karen and Marit are “in the mountains together, taking two garters with them; from the one they could get a strong brew, and from the other they got beer”. Karen also confesses to having cast an evil spell on a ship so that people were lost at sea. All in all, her exploits qualify her for the stake.

The remuneration Karen receives for her magical services indicate that her requirements are rudimentary, to say the least. “The farmhand gave her an old shirt which she was wearing, and Oluff’s wife gave her an old bonnet” (3:134b). Oluff Oluffsen says he has “promised her a piece of stock-fish for the magic brew” (3:135b).

3.4. Motives for casting evil spells

The only person in the material to state a sexually related motive for casting an evil spell is Karen Jonsdatter. Together with Marit, she has cast an evil spell on a ship “because Sørenn Jønsen from Kiberg, who was on that very same ship, had slept with and had intercourse with her” (3:135a). However, she withdraws her statement at the following court hearing, affirming that she has lied about him. We frequently meet female dyads that carry out projects because one of the two has been offended. Marj, for instance, accompanies Sirri because the latter “came to her and asked her to cast an evil spell on her husband with her” (5:13b).

All the women implicated in this chain confess to having cast evil spells on ships with the result that people are lost at sea, and they all specify personal quarrels as their motives. Karen and her stepmother have cast evil spells on two boats off Andenes “because her mother was angry with some of them” (3:133b). Together with Karen and Mette, Sirri has cast an evil spell on “Lauridz Oelsen’s boat, the reason for which she was with them, because Peter, who also was lost at sea, hadn’t wanted to play with her the other day in late Scabby-Karen’s hut, which was why she was angry” (5:13a).

Operations are not all successful. When the person on whom the evil spell is aimed is sustained by sufficient faith in the Lord, the magic will fail: “they were powerless, because the people there served the Lord so fervently” (3:135a). Such beliefs clearly relate to principles of religious doctrine after the reformation. Justice depends on a personal relationship with God and on faith. Only great faith can withstand the machinations of Satan.

3.5. Transmutation, sabbaths and pacts

All the women confess to having been transformed into a seal, or a whale, a raven, seagull or cat. Karen, Marit and Sirri have attended sabbaths. Marit and Sirri

were to ride their dog to Heckell Mountain, but she could not bear heights in such weather because of her head, so she fell off at Daafur Mountain and stayed there till Sigrie returned (4:3b).

When sabbaths are referred to in Nordic material, certain mountains are often named. In the North of Norway such mountains are Domen near Vardø, the plateau mountain Tromma, on Kvaløy near Tromsø. To this very day, it is said that witches used to dance on Tromma, Domen and Bloksberg.

In her relations with the Devil, woman always plays the subordinate part. Marit Rasmusdatter has sealed a pact with an apostle named Leur who invariably trails after her in the shape of a dog and orders her about. Sirri’s apostle, Jacob, “bid her promise to serve him”. The evil one comes to Sirri and Marj as they are working in the peat bog, and “asked them to enter into his service”, insisting that the woman “give him her hand”, after which he unfailingly trails after Marit to make sure she works evil deeds.

3.6. The exercise of witchcraft

In this chain we find a number of examples of how witchcraft is carried out in

practice. I have already mentioned Karen Jonsdatter's varied use of magical threads and other tangible objects employed for her purposes. The record of Marit Rasmusdatter's trial quotes her magic formula: "her incantation was considered very powerful. It was *pretrum pratum Nestrum Nostrum*" (4:15b). Marit says that

Sigrie showed her how to cast a spell on ocean-going boats. She had put two eggshells in a tub of water and asked her to go out and see if they had capsized or not, which they had not, they were merely lopsided. Soon after she went out herself and reported that it would soon happen. Once more she ordered her out and then the eggshells were overturned and full of water, so then the boat was lost (4:3b).

This method of working magic is frequently referred to in later folk traditions and was presumably also used prior to the 17th century, just as knots were used to conjure up gales.

4. The 1662–1663 chain

4.1. Introduction

The 1662–1663 chain involves 31 persons, all women; 6 of them are little girls, and one has not even turned one year. Seventeen of the women are married, 5 are still, or have been, menials and 2 are born south of Finnmark. A Sami woman introduces the chain, as was the case in 1620–1621. In this chain three of the women are said to be mentors for other women.

A common denominator with previous chains is that the implicated women live in Varanger villages, with the exception of 9 from Vadsø and 6 from Vardø. Nevertheless, most of the trials are held in Vardøhus. Two persons are killed as a result of torture, and the death rate in the chain as a whole is 71%. This chain is outstanding in the Finnmark material because of the unlimited use of torture and the imprisonment of children.

All sentences convicting a person to be burnt at the stake are passed by one or more of the triumvir: the district governor Christopher Orning, the bailiff of East Finnmark, Nils Sørensen Fiil, and the deputy bailiff, Abraham Lockert. That their outlook is fanatical should be evident when the bailiff proposes that the children, too, should be burnt "so that they stray no further into the Devil's snares, and so that other children should not be beguiled through them by the Devil's machinations" (5:257b).

As a rule, the sentences have a simpler wording than those of the 1652–1653 chain. A commonly recurring phrase is that they "indeed, due to their own committed evil deeds have forfeited their lives to fire and flames".

Concepts from the intricate science of European demonology even percolate to the women's own confessions. Such ideas include maternal child-sacrifice to the Devil, the Devil's mark, and the idea that sexual intercourse with the Devil is implicit in the pact.

Two learned persons from the South of Norway played a peculiar role in this chain, namely Anna Fridrichsdatter Rhodius and her husband Ambrosius Rhodius. They came from Akershus to Vardøhus as prisoners in February 1662. Anna

Rhodius plays a prominent part in prison life and has considerable sway on the confessions made by the suspected women and children. True enough, she is a prisoner herself, but she colludes with the wardens and prison authorities. Judging from court records, she has evidently connived to make both women and children confess about pacts with the Devil.

Ragnhild Endresdatter confesses before the district court

that if she has said such a thing, it would have been said from fear, for the magister Ane Rodi has told her that if you fail to confess what you can, then the executioner will torment you first in the water and then on the rack and with red hot tongs.¹⁷

4.2. Children in the material

There are six children amongst those accused of witchcraft. The only one whose age has been specified is Karen Iffuersdatter who is "about 8 years old". Maren Oelsdatter confesses she has learned witchcraft from "her father's sister, Maritte Michels (...) who, due to the evil deeds she has committed, has already been executed" (5:245a). The other girls confess they have learned the craft from their mothers. Demonologists stress how difficult it is to get rid of the evil one, once he has found a foothold in a family. The notion that children are sacrificed to the Devil by their mothers is found, i.a., in Ingeborg Iffuersdatter's trial:

...since the evil spirit always was with them in the past, and they still could not get rid of him. No matter how diligently the pastors had admonished them, trying to convert them to the ways of our lord Jesus Christ, he [the Devil] will not let go of them, since they have been sacrificed to him by their mother (5:257b).

Worse, even, than sacrificing their children, is the notion introduced by Anna Rhodius in a conversation with Ragnilde Endresdatter. Ragnilde must have been pregnant and given birth to a child in prison. First, Anna Rhodius will have threatened Ragnilde, evoking every conceivable form of torture. Ragnilde is said to have answered "then I must lie about myself so that my life will end when I give birth to my child. Then the answer she got from Ane M. Rodi was / your are carrying not a child but a Devil" (FL 1647–1668: 155). This is the only instance where the Finnmark material gives evidence to the notion that the Devil has fathered a woman's child. The fact that such an allegation stems from a woman who has frequented learned circles is not surprising.

The children's confessions are taken extremely seriously. Their denunciations lead to imprisonment and executions. Anna Rhodius manipulates the children by tempting and threatening them. The children's cases are tried before the district court where they confess that Anna Rhodius has persuaded them to lie about their mothers and to confess about pacts with the Devil.

¹⁷ Finnmark District Court protocols (Finnmark Lagting) 1647–1668, fol. 155. From now on the reference will be taken into the text following this notation: (FL 1647–1668: 155).

In other respects the children's confessions are quite fanciful. This is how Maren Oelsdatter describes a visit to hell:

...and says that it was quite far, and when she got there she came to a very large lake where a fire was burning, and the water was boiling and lots of people were in the water flat on their faces being boiled in the water. Whereupon the Devil blew fire out of an iron pipe he had with him, saying she would enjoy the same fate. The Devil also had a leg of ham which he dipped into the said lake so that it was cooked when he withdrew it (5:245b).

Such notions of hell coincide with ideas that are common to this very day. Descriptions such as these may have seeped into popular beliefs through religious doctrine.

A touching expression of social distinctions is presented by the little eight-year-old, Karen Iffuersdatter. I am tempted to believe she is describing what she has seen through a window when wealthy people are having a party:

The day after his honour and his young lady came to Vadsø (...) had been outside the door in the likeness of crows, trying to get into the house in order to harm their honourable highnesses, but since there were so many wondrous and beautiful people therein, dressed in white linen, their evil deeds were not accomplished (5:253a).

4.3. Torture

In this chain we find clear evidence that torture was applied. In the 1662–1663 chain, Dorette Pouelsdatter and Peder Krog's woman Ingeborg from Makkaur are tortured to death before sentence is passed. Both cases are brought before the district court where the common people are asked what has happened. It is then stated about Dorette that "on 20 March before midday, Dorte Poffuellsdatter was led to the fort, and the following morning it was rumoured that she had died" (FL 1647–1668: 166). On a direct question about how she lost her life the bailiff Niels Søffrensen answered in court that "she had been on the torture rack without a trial" (FL 1647–1668: 165). As for Peder Krog's Ingeborg "the answer was the same as for the other, without a trial, except that she was in the fort for a few weeks" (FL 1647–1668: 167). Dorette is brought out and burnt together with other convicted witches, three or four days after her death. Ingeborg is "dragged out and laid down on the island near the gallows".

In a letter to the district governor, Fr. Skiort, signed by six people in Vardø on 30 January, 1667, the public complains about various abuses.¹⁸ Apart from Dorette and Ingeborg, the letter mentions Sigrí Jonsdatter and Gunhild Oelsdatter, who withdrew their confessions and were tortured to confess again. They have been executed without having admitted their guilt and without receiving the final sacrament. Sigrí cries out that she is innocent when they throw her into the flames, and Gunhild exclaims "Lord have mercy on my soul" as she expires. The fact that the common people should feel so strongly about these two, can only indicate that the other women who do confess are regarded as guilty of witchcraft.

¹⁸ A. B. Wessel, *Old Letters as Documents of Finnmark's History* (1980), p. 19.

Listed instruments of torture include the rack, red-hot tongs and "sulphur on her breasts when she lay on the torture rack". Moreover the women are periodically strapped down during their incarceration. It is recorded that Ingeborg "wore the iron collar and arm chains" (FL 1647–1668:167). Margerette Jonsdatter too, "wore the prison on her body" (FL 1647–1668:161). The executioner is responsible for implementing torture, but Anna Rhodius also makes use of his methods to intimidate the women. There is no evidence of torture in connection with the children. In records of their cases the importance of letting parsons admonish them, is stressed.

Six water ordeals are recorded for this chain, all of them in cases where the women initially deny being guilty. Having undergone the water ordeal the women all confess.

4.4. The Devil's mark

The concept of a Devil's mark is familiar to us from demonological manuals. The Devil marks those who seal a pact with him. In this chain, 11 persons confess having such marks; some of them even exhibit their marks in court. Magdalena Jacobsdatter confesses: "Finally, he bit her, leaving his mark on her right hand so that it swelled, which upon inspection appeared to be the case" (5:271). Usually the evil one uses his claws to mark people. Presumably, such marks are birth marks or pigment spots. On the continent, the Devil's mark was ostensibly an insensitive spot which could be exposed in connection with trials if the woman failed to react to pin-pricks. I have found no instances of needle trials in the Finnmark material.

Anna Rhodius appears to have impressed upon the children that they bear a mark and that they have a god with his own name. The district court records state that she

took little Kirsten (...) upon her lap and asked her whether the Devil was not with her, to which Kirsten replied no. Then Ane Rodi asked Little Kirsten what was Sigrid's god's name, to which the child replied Isach, and then she again questioned little Kirsten, asking what mark was Sigrí bearing, and little Kirsten said she knew not where her mark was, but her own mark was on her right arm. Yes, said Ane Rodi to Sigrí, confess what you may, for then you will become a child of God, and my child as well. You shall be my little girl" (FL 1647–1668:163).

4.5. Sealing a pact and trying out the craft

Three of the women involved in this chain have learned their witchcraft further South, while the others have learned it in the community. Magic prayers, in particular, seem to have derived from vagrants.

This chain has left records that are particularly detailed with respect to pacts and the appearance of the Devil. The women are asked point-blank questions. From the trial of Karen Andersdatter we read: "She was asked what shape he had" (5:256b). The record of Dorette Lauridsdatter's trial refers to "their itemized confession" (5:231a).

As in previous chained trials we find that the craft is usually transferred by way of a magic potion or food. Karen Andersdatter, however, tells us of a somewhat unusual initiation:

Dorette Lauridzdatter (...) is said to have offered her, during her confinement after childbirth two years ago, a meal porridge prepared with milk and butter, and when she had consumed it she grew very unwell and remained so for a fortnight (...) It was a thin porridge and she saw something black in it, the size of a grain of barley, but what it was she knew not, and three weeks after she had risen from confinement, the wicked Satan came to her in the shape of a cat and examined her body from her feet and unto her very mouth where he counted her teeth, and then the wicked Satan insisted that she serve him for then she would have good fortune with her sheep and cattle" (5:256b).

Here the woman is the subordinate part in her relations with the evil one. Magdalena Jacobsdatter "promised him one year's servitude" (5:271b). The Devil makes promises to women in 11 trials; abundance of sheep, money, food or, less specifically, "you shall have what your heart desires" (5:271a), whereupon the woman enters into the service of the evil one and is branded with his mark or, as in the case of Karen Andersdatter, gives "him one of her fingers as a pledge" (5:526b).

The women usually report having seen the Devil when they sealed the pact; less often do they report seeing him at sabbaths. Generally, he initially appears in the likeness of an animal; a black dog, a small bird, a black cat, or a crow. After a few days, he will reappear as a man dressed in black.

As in the 1652–1653 chain, the names of the evil one may be either biblical or of a more local nature. Sammuël, Zacharias, Isach, and Jacob are all typical biblical names, whereas local names include Peder, Christen, Old-Erich, Erich, Christopher and Mortten. Some of the local names may refer to persons the women actually know in their local environment. Old-Erik is a popular name for Satan to this very day.

In some of the confessions the women state that they had to forswear the baptismal covenant when they sealed the pact. In seven of the trials the Devil bids the woman "forswear her Lord in Heaven, together with her baptism and Christianity" (5:276a). Thus the pact entails nullification of the Christian baptism – a negation of baptism, as it were. As the similarities between the witches' repast and the Christian Holy Communion show, Christian rites are used in the pact rites with the Devil, though the content is their antithesis.

In this chain, 15 women claim to have tried out their craft on one of their own animals. Ragnilde Endresdatter says that she "had tried her craft on one of her little lambs, giving it a little fish-broth saying as she did so, drink till you burst, which was what happened, it burst" (5: 261b–262a). Four women confess to having learned to draw milk from distant cattle.

4.6. Collective witchcraft operations and motives for participation

The principal collective operations confessed by the witches in 1662–1663 are driving away fish from the coast, evil spells cast on Jens Ottesen's and Marcus

Erichsen's ships, and a conspiracy against the "district lord". In most cases when women confess to having tried to harm ships by raising storms, they have done so while transformed into animals or birds.

Jens Ottensen's ship was destroyed by 11 women sitting out at sea on an overturned barrel. Some have had personal motives for this act, whereas Karen Oelsdatter for instance, is there more or less by coincidence "for the other witches would have her with them since they were wrathful against the captain" (5:276b).

Eight women confess to having caused "bad weather against Captain Marcus Erichsen and his ship (...) for the reason that (...) the said Barbra had not been paid in full for her trouble and for the rent" (5:273b). In other words, the other women display solidarity with Barbra and join her because she feels she has been wronged. However, the women are unsuccessful with their spell upon the boat, "for God was stronger than Satan" (5:268a).

A lesser project undertaken by Margrette Jonsdatter, Solve Nielsdatter and Preste Anders's Marie is an evil spell on the previous district governor Jørgen Friis's, sleigh "which had been dispatched to collect wood along the Russian coast" (5:260a). The motive for this evil spell is an ex-suitor who is on this sleigh. "Niels from the south had wooed her but not kept his word" (5:260a). This project, too, failed, because the people "were in constant fear of God, but the sleigh was overturned" (5:260a).

A collective operation which should be viewed in the light of the previous year's poor fishing, is the witches' undertaking to "drive the fish away from the coast, last Easter" (5:260a). Seven of the women confess to having participated in this operation which allegedly is carried out in the manner described by Margerette Jonsdatter:

And then she denounced in detail before the court Søren Christensen's wife Giertrud, summoned from Krogen, stating that she had been there at that very time, albeit in her own real likeness, wearing clothes, to wit a black blouse, a red skirt and a red cap with gold lace, and a white scarf around her neck, and she sat on the water with seaweed in her hands and around her body. Margaret says she herself was in the shape of a seagull, Gundle in that of a seal, Waarø Hans's wife Dorette in that of a porpoise, and Sigri Jonsdatter was in the likeness of a sturgeon. All of them held stalks of seaweed in their hands, with which to drive the fish away from land and from all the islands by craft (5:260ab).

From Margerette's description a yearning for beauty in everyday-life is wafted to us. Giertrud has turned into a beautifully garbed queen on a throne surrounded by her subjects. Clothes such as the ones described were presumably out of reach for these women. Yet, they serve to paint a detailed picture of the ideal. The reason to participate in this operation was, for Karen Oelsdatter that "it annoyed them that some people should have and catch more fish than others" (5:276a) and for Birgitte Olluffsdatter that "she was angry with her master, for he from whom everybody ordered their wares sold them dear, and kept the highest prices" (5:275a).

The last witchcraft operation in this chain is an attempt to cast an evil spell on the district governor and his young lady "because he had treated them so harshly" (5:250b), as Solve put it.

The tale, which has been corroborated by three of the children, is indeed an odd one. Ellen Gundersdatter explains that the district governor was visiting in Vadsø, where he passed the night in the deputy bailiff's house. While he "was in the sitting room in bed with his beloved young lady", the witches would

blow on him in the name of the evil Satan. But since our good Lord Jesus and his holy angels were with and betwixt them, they were obstructed, so that their evil intention could not come to pass as they had planned (5:255ab).

Other implicated persons claim they "had wanted to kill the district governor with pins". Maren Oelsdatter explains that "they were obstructed because the district governor was for ever reading, praying for God's mercy" (5:246b). The same Maren claims that Solve and Sigri and Margerette are to blame for the pain in the district governor's leg and arm. Solve has even brought with her "a piece of linen and some black woollen thread folded in it imbued with witchcraft (...) with which she is alleged to have wanted to cast an evil spell on the district governor" (5:147a). Hearing about this, the district governor demands to have Solve cuffed and chained and bolted, with an iron collar, in prison (5:247a). Solve is said to have cast away the magic linen, but it is found and exhibited in court as evidence to prove the veracity of the little girl Maren's words.

Although we might be tempted to smile at this story, it seems clear that the district governor, who at that time is still referred to as the district lord by the women, is so upset by what the women might be able to accomplish, that Solve is chained, and the children's evidence is heeded. The little girls have comprehended, as is evident from their confessions, that whoever believes in God is protected against evil spells.

What we might not consider a witchcraft operation, though it is a reunion with a common purpose, is a riotously gay party in Anders Pedersen's cellar on Christmas Eve itself. This event, probably the merriest ever experienced by these ladies, is referred to by several women in the chain. They drink beer from a ladle and "the wicked Satan was with them and had a candle in his behind with which to give them light" (5:240b).

This must have been a very merry party, indeed. Ingeborg narrates that Solve and Sigri argued

and the argument was such that they fought each other in the cellar, so that Sigri knocked Solve to the ground, and from all that Solve had had to drink, she fell twice or thrice on the way back from whence the evil one had led them (5:244b).

Perhaps the revelling was for real. On the other hand, perhaps the women's description merely expresses their longing to let themselves go, like men, carousing and brawling all night.

4.7. The process of working magic

The witchcraft, as such, is carried out by reciting magic formulas, particularly formulas containing the Devil's name, by offering magic brews containing visible grains to humans or animals, or by employing objects with magical powers, such as

the woollen threads used by Solve. In order to be able, in future, to draw milk from a distant cow, a horn is once held under her belly. Three of the trials have references to an "Envy Prayer": It is recited over the animal so that "others may do no harm and work no evil magic on it" (5:248a). Gurren from Eckeroe knows such a prayer. Sigri Oelsdatter knows a "Blessing and Envy Prayer" which she has learnt "from a half-mad student (...) when he was travelling through the country" (5:238a). Ellen Gundersdatter knows two magical prayers which she learned on the West Coast. The one she recites over cows who refuse to yield milk, and this text is reminiscent of Catholic worship of the Virgin Mary. The other she uses to cast spells on sheep. In order to conjure up storms the women each undo a knot, a method we recognize from, amongst others, Olaus Magnus.¹⁹

4.8. Denunciations and threats

The denunciations in this chain are as ramified as those of the 1653–1654 chain. The women know that public denunciations may have serious repercussions. Yet, they denounce other women. Moreover, they bear witness against each other, and the most articulate women certainly take no pains to mute their statements. This is how Solve Nielsdatter bears witness against Sigri Oelsdatter: "You neither will nor can get out of this, for the wicked Satan is so deeply rooted in you that we cannot find the end of him with a ten yard pole" (5:241b).

We may well wonder why the women have so little mercy on each other. Is this just another illustration of the saying that "women are women's worst enemies"? Most probably, prison conditions played an important part in forming the psychological mechanisms that are at play here. Twenty-five of the women are imprisoned for various lengths of time; old and young women, and children too, are kept together, all of them terrified of being sentenced to the stake. We are tempted to interpret Solve's statement as an expression of spite: if she must inevitably end her life at the stake why should others go free? Old grudges might well be involved as well, and these could spawn accusations and denunciations, but the women's grim situation in the prison is definitely a cardinal factor. No wonder unattractive and primitive personality traits come to the fore in such a situation.

"The Witches' Hole" at Vardøhus is spoken of in the community. Margerette Jonsdatter explains why Sigri wants her in on the witchcraft operation: "it was because of Olluf Jensen and his wife Dorette, whom he supplies and gives credit, because they had threatened Sigri, saying they wanted to have her locked up in the Witches' Hole" (5:260b).

4.9. Pacts with the Devil and sexual services

Some of the women believe that a pact with the Devil includes sexual services. Magdalena Jacobsdatter is visited by a man who

wore black clothes, just as any other Christian man, and who requested her services, but she refused him then, since she had a husband so it could not be (5:271a).

¹⁹ O. Magnus, *Historia des gentibus septentrionalibus* (Roma, 1555).

Solve Nielsdatter confesses that “she from time to time went with the evil one up into the mountains and consorted with him in wicked ways” (5:249b). As I see it, these statements do not imply that the women undertook sexual activities with strange men, but that notions of pacts with the Devil altered character with the passing of time. Compared with material from the continent, the Finnmark material gives little substance to notions of sexual aberrations and cannibalism at sabbaths.

4.10. Retraction of confessions

On first reading, the confessions chronicled in the court records appear to form an uninterrupted string. However, this is not the case, particularly not in the 1662–1663 chain. Only 11 of the 31 persons involved in the chain confess straight away that they have formed a pact with the Devil and maintain their confession later. In some cases, we have to scrutinize the records in order to discover that the woman initially refuses to confess. The wording may run as follows: “then, upon prolonged examination, she finally chose to confess truthfully” (5:275b).

In the 1662–1663 chain, five persons initially confess before the court that they have sealed a pact with Devil, only to retract their confessions later. This is the case for three of the children and Ragnilde Endresdatter and Magdalena Jacobsdatter. The common denominator for all five is that their cases are brought before the district court. It is evident that given a chance, the women retract their confessions. This reinforces the impression that physical and psychological pressure plays an instrumental or even a decisive part in the extraction of a confession.

Eight persons initially deny and later confess that they have formed pacts with the Devil. All of these make their confessions having been subjected to the water ordeal, torture or “industrious examination”.

Three persons confess matters other than Devil’s pacts. Incest is punished as rigorously as witchcraft. Dorette Poulsdatter does not confess to witchcraft, but admits having received “momgot” (a potion). She is tortured to death. Sigri Oelsdatter, who has learned an Envy Prayer, is sentenced to banishment from the country.

5. Single trials

The three chains mentioned above serve to exemplify the chained trials of the material as a whole. In the source material the chains comprise three-quarters of the number of persons supposed to have been practising witchcraft. However, one quarter of the material represents single trials against persons who have practised witchcraft on an individual basis.

The material comprises a total of 38 single trials, most of which have been conducted according to the lines of the accusatory system. These trials are distributed throughout the period, though the density is somewhat higher in the first four decades of the century than later on. The records of the single trials, however, differ in several ways from those of the chained trials. As a rule, single trials and trial records are shorter, and less attention is paid to biographical data than is the case in chained trials. The persons involved in single trials come from a

wider geographical area than those indicted in the chained trials. Only a few of the accused are imprisoned for any length of time, and little use is made of torture in single trials.

The sentences indicate that single cases are treated differently in the beginning compared with the end of the process period. The early material tells about severe legal reactions, including 10 death sentences before 1640, whereas the material from the end of the period shows that these cases are considered fairly innocuous, especially notably by the frequent use of fines, acquittals and suspensions. This movement clearly reflects diminishing fear of the strength of sorcery throughout the 17th century.

There is a heavy representation of Samis in the single trials, although Samis are found also in chained trials. There are relatively few Samis in the material as a whole, 15% of the total number of persons indicted. Still, we do find that two thirds of the Sami men in the sources are involved in single trials. The number of Sami men involved in these trials is far higher than that of Sami women, and this element is highest towards the beginning and the end of the period. In my view the material indicates that less attention is paid to traditional magic during the years when chains are prominent. In calm periods, traditional sorcerers are again subjected to accusations.

5.1. Ethnicity

Taking into consideration the special ethnic conditions in Finnmark, it is interesting to pose the question: What is it that characterizes the Sami strain in the material? Casting spells and lifting spells, blessing and magic tricks (“kogleri”), using “gand” and runes are what Sami women and men are tried for. The Samis represent an old form of sorcery, while the trials for diabolism are restricted to a limited time-span. Like an undertow, Sami beliefs are there throughout the entire period and after the worst “attacks” are over, Sami beliefs *still* lead to trials where *spells* and not diabolism are at the heart of the matter.

Sixty-eight percent of the total of men in the material – single processes and chained processes – are Sami. The equivalent for Sami women is much lower, only 6% of the total number of women in the sources. Thus the material indicates that being a Sami man involves a greater risk of being charged with sorcery than being a Sami woman. This may be because the “noaides” traditionally were men.

The part of the Sami women in the material as a whole is striking. They seem to be considered less threatening than their ethnic brothers and consequently less exposed to legal persecution. Sami women are not always tried, even though their names crop up in court. When non-Sami women are referred to as mentors, they are always said to have been burnt. This is not the case for Sami women who obviously play a prominent part in local circles practising witchcraft. They are central figures, but still in one way or another protected against reprisals. Most charges against Sami women persecuted involve evil spells that have led to illness or death.

Sami men are obviously more visible in the field of sorcery – both in the historical material from Finnmark and in the contemporary general view of sorcery in the North. They sell favourable winds, wield Sami magic, and use the rune

drum. Whoever commands the craft of making "gand" may exercise both white and black magic, and may alter the progress of illness. However, this is not the case when elements of nature are involved – even the sorcerer must resign to forces beyond his range. If a sorcerer has sold too favourable a wind, he cannot check a gale even when he sees he has unleashed stronger elements than he had intended. The concept of "favourable winds" is mainly referred to in the early trials.

A number of local Samis exercise blessings and cast spells on a more or less professional basis, for a fee. Men's confessions differ widely from those of women. Unrealistic elements, such as transmutations and sabbaths are virtually absent from men's confessions. When men are tried the trials take no unexpected turns, whereas both indictments and confessions tend to undergo changes during women's trials. Sami men exercise their sorcery on an individual basis and confess neither to having entered into pacts with the Devil nor to attending sabbaths. Their trials do not evolve into large chains.

6. Conclusion

By focusing on the chained witchcraft trials in Finnmark in the 1650s and the 1660s I have shown clearly that there has been severe witchcraft mania in Finnmark during the 17th century. Furthermore, the Finnmark material shows clear parallels to continental and Scottish witchcraft trials. The chained trials for the Finnmark material as a whole each have their special distinctions which may, for instance, derive from the various interrogators who naturally emphasize different aspects, or from the fact that local attitudes to witchcraft have changed in the course of the time span covered by the material. I find that both of these factors are cardinal. Just as demonological approaches become more complex, provincial concepts evolve as time goes by. Subordination to the Devil on the basis of a pact, witches' marks, denunciations, sabbaths, collective operations and transmutation – all vary slightly from chain to chain. A number of women confess to having attended collective operations related to local accidents at sea or to a decline in basic resources that leads to crop or yield failure. The women from the 1650s are allegedly motivated to exercise witchcraft by a system of social differences and by their economic dependence on suppliers and the powers that be. In the 1660s, motives of a more private nature seem to be involved.

However, the chains alone do not give a complete picture of the Finnmark witchcraft trials, where we find the imprint of the specific ethnic conditions in Finnmark, namely Sami men and women using "gand" as their means of exercising sorcery. What definitely distinguishes the Finnmark material from all other European sources is the link between spells and Sami magic, "gand". Trials of this kind are not unlike trials in other Scandinavian areas with respect to the substance of the witchcraft: spells on humans or animals leading to disease or death. What distinguishes the Finnmark variety is the method used, since "gand" is incorporated as a potent element. In this sense, it would be more appropriate to speak of "witch people" rather than of "witches" in Finnmark. The Finnmark witches share many features with colleagues elsewhere in Europe. But if the "witch people" in Finnmark are regarded as an entity, they are distinctive in a European context because of the element of Sami magic.

In short, the distinctive stamp of the witchcraft phenomenon of Finnmark is the convergence of several lines. A meeting-place between forces from inside and outside the Northern area, between the local and the European, the regional and the continental. Eventually, a meeting-place between mythological and intellectual cultural currents affecting human life – subordinated to dimensions of history and eternity in the mythical high North.