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A WITCHCRAFT TRIANGLE

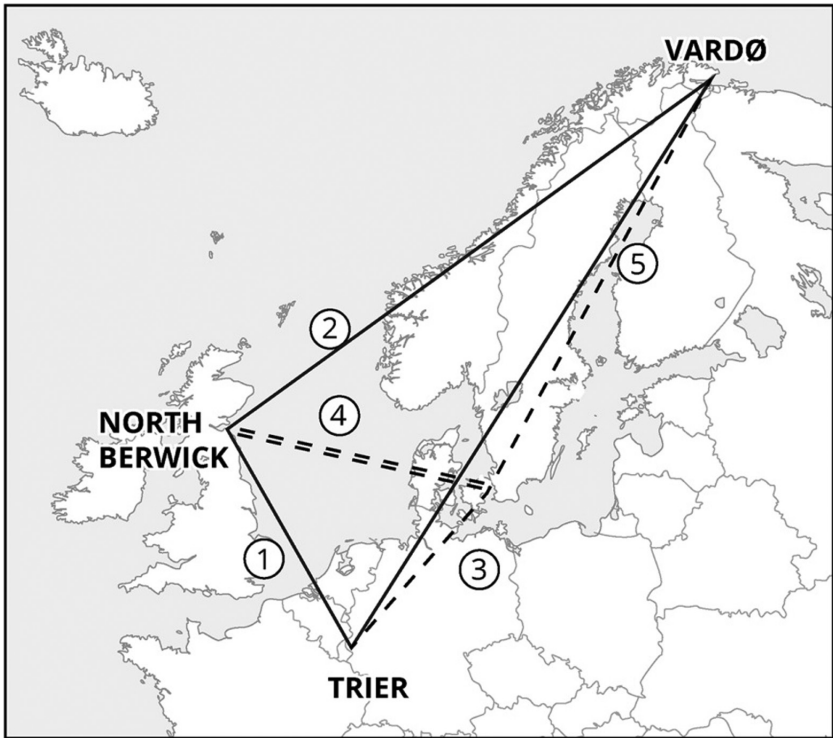
Transmitting witchcraft ideas across early modern Europe

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Introduction

This essay deals with the transmission of ideas about witchcraft within early modern Europe. The research question I pose is how the circulation of specific witchcraft ideas between three places in early modern Europe – the Trier region in Germany,¹ Edinburgh in the East Lothian area of Scotland with the North Berwick trials, and Vardø in the district of Finnmark in Northern Norway – happened. These ideas about witchcraft were related to the learned European doctrine of demonology: the intellectual study of demons and their powers. This doctrine gained a foothold in Europe from the fifteenth until the seventeenth century. My hypothesis is that the first occurrences of demonological witchcraft trials in these three locations were influenced by demonological ideas transmitted from one area to another. Germany, Scotland, and Finnmark turned out to be extreme when it came to the intensity of witchcraft trials, as pointed out by Julian Goodare in his book *The European Witch-Hunt*.² I argue that the transfer of demonological ideas from South-Western Germany to North Europe took place within a triangle constituted by lines drawn between Trier, North Berwick, and Vardø, as shown on the map (see Map 16.1).

On this map, there are continuous lines and dotted lines. The continuous lines mark the direct connection between Trier, Edinburgh with the North Berwick trials, and Vardø: three European places of interest when it comes to the first appearance of demonological ideas in the early modern witch-hunt. A possible route for transmission of witchcraft ideas runs directly from Trier to North Berwick and is marked as number 1 on the map. Another possible route, marked with number 2 on the map, went from Scotland to Vardø directly. However, there are also other possibilities, and this is why the dotted lines are drawn and the numbers 3, 4, and 5 have been inserted. One possible route, marked with



MAP 16.1 Map of a witchcraft triangle, with lines running between Trier in Germany, Copenhagen in Denmark, North Berwick in Scotland, and Vardø in Norway. © Liv Helene Willumsen.

numbers 3 and 4 and the dotted lines connecting these, runs from Trier to Scotland via Copenhagen. Another runs from Trier to Vardø via Copenhagen as well, marked by the number 5 and the dotted line. All these possibilities will be discussed in what follows.

The three places were chosen because, in those three locations with surroundings, the first demonological ideas appear in witchcraft records. In that sense, they were “pristine” areas. Even if demonological witchcraft trials later took place, the aim of this essay is to trace the first occurrence of these ideas in the regions mentioned and examine their spread between the trial locations in question. In the Trier region, including the Prince-Abbey of St Maximin, severe witch-hunts strongly influenced by demonological ideas started around 1586.³ In Scotland, the first demonological ideas appeared in the North Berwick trials of 1590–1591 and in Vardø likewise in 1620–1621. Hence, in three European regions located far from one another, the same demonological ideas appeared within an interval of around 10 years between Trier and North Berwick and an interval of around 30 years between North Berwick and Vardø. The connection

between these three areas is of great interest in understanding how the transmission of witchcraft ideas between these areas might have happened. By bridging South-Western Germany and North Europe, this essay contributes to a novel body of knowledge within the field of cultural exchanges related to demonological ideas about witchcraft, adding to research presented in *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe*.⁴

Methodology

This essay will discuss how the circulation of demonological witchcraft ideas occurred in different levels of society, in written as well as oral form. I employ an interdisciplinary approach, combining transcultural and transnational history with close reading of court records from a linguistic and narratological lens. Macro- and micro-studies complement each other, shedding light on ideas' paths of transference. Transcultural history deals with the transference of ideas, beliefs, and imaginations from one cultural area to another.⁵ This study concentrates on the intellectual production of demonological ideas. It highlights their appearance and route across Europe via printed books, diplomatic correspondence, and travelling individuals.⁶ In addition, demonological ideas related to the prosecution of witches will be studied, with a focus on linguistic findings and narrative discourse.

The essay's objectives are fourfold: first, to explore how demonological ideas about witchcraft were transmitted via printed literature. Second, to examine the royal and diplomatic correspondence between the countries in question related to ideas about witchcraft. Third, to study the activities of travelling individuals who took part in the transmission of demonological ideas. Fourth, to study the first occurrence of demonological ideas in witchcraft trials in Trier, Copenhagen, Edinburgh with the North Berwick trials, and Vardø. The objectives represent a meeting point between an ideological level, a level representing the personal factor, and a level representing primary judiciary sources.

With regard to the first objective: for a reading European audience, laws, sermon books, witchcraft pamphlets, witchcraft narratives in printed books, and witchcraft tracts and broadsheets were available. Pamphlets, tracts, and broadsheets managed to reach many ordinary people who could not read. They were read aloud, and thus spread in places where people gathered. The content of this type of printed material thus entered into a niche of society where further oral transference was easy.

As for transfer of ideas from Trier to Copenhagen, the sources are scarce, while from Copenhagen to Scotland to Vardø, the sources are rich. Royal and diplomatic correspondence, the exchange of letters provides a glimpse of the mindset and ideas and knowledge of officials related to royal and state circles: royals, councillors, diplomats, and envoys. State papers, unprinted material at the time, played a vital role in the transmission of ideas.

Finally, travelling individuals transferred or retold a flow of ideas. The personal factor, or *nexus of articulation*, plays an important role in transference.

Travellers might have been tradesmen, noblemen, other people belonging to the elite, vagabonds, soldiers, or pilgrims.⁷ Among other ways, the transmission of ideas happened with the help of people who moved from one place to another and could introduce ideas orally to the local communities they moved to. This directionality in transnational history is called *histoire croisée*.⁸

The close reading of court records will document the first occurrence of demonological ideas in the selected locations. My methodological approach is based on Gérard Genette's works on narrative discourse,⁹ looking at voices, linguistic details, and the context of the trials.¹⁰

The beginning: Witchcraft trials in Trier

From 1585 until 1596, an intense wave of witchcraft persecution took place in the Trier region and the nearby territory of the Imperial Abbey of St Maximin, in which around 400 people were executed.¹¹ A first trial occurred in St Maximin in 1572, before the massive wave of persecution started well over a decade later. *Das Hexenregister des Claudius Musiel* documents 306 names of executed individuals, of whom 275 hailed from St Maximin.¹²

The confessions, stemming from the witch trials in St Maximin, included central demonological ideas. I have chosen for close reading the trial of Susanna Grethen Sundtgen from Fell because the records are rich and give access to central demonological ideas. In 1588, she was imprisoned for witchcraft.¹³ She initially denied and was handed to the executioner for light torture. Afterwards, she confessed that the devil had come to her in the shape of the man she cohabited with without being married. He differed from her partner in his feet, hands, and *Natur*, and he was wearing black clothes. He promised her money if she would follow him, and since she was a weak woman, she believed in him and renounced God Almighty and God's mother, as the devil had demanded, and then submitted herself to him. Then, the devil with hairy hands scraped the *Krisam*, the baptism mark, off her forehead, and she had sexual intercourse with him. He gave her roses, which turned into dirt, and when she complained, he said that he had fooled many. He said that his name was *Heßlic* [the ugly one], and her name Rose. He came back to have his will with her.

Susanna Grethen allegedly has been taken by the devil in the shape of a billy goat through the air, clinging to his hair, to a dance in Lonquicher Hagen. She sat on the left side of the billy goat and rode in the name of the devil. All those who came, turned to the left in the name of the devil. Many expensively dressed people from Trier had been present. A piper had played on a piece of wood. They had to give the piper a coin, and if they did not have one, they had to blow the piper in his rectum. They ate and drank from a silver cup, and the food was unsalted. The wine had come in a cask, and she did not know who filled it. Finally, they were content to destroy everything: wine, grain, fields, and other things. The richest had started, and the poorer followed, otherwise they would have been beaten. To perform evil deeds, they took the broom, dipped it in a

smearing vessel in the devil's name, and made cold, fog, rain, and weather. The first time the devil met Susanna Grethen, he had given her a black unguent, which she was to use when she wanted to go to a dance or perform witchcraft. She had burned her smearing vessel the day before she got arrested, because she had been warned she would be arrested.

She had ridden on a broom several times to Hetzerauer Heiden and Lonquicher Hagen; she smeared the broom with the black salve and sat on the left side. At the Fronfasten,¹⁴ the participants had to gather at the dancing place, and they were content when they destroyed everything. Sometimes they were successful, other times not. If they could not come to the dancing place, they had to give their consent to all evil deeds which were planned at the witches' meeting. Susanna Grethen had tried her black salve on her cat, which died. The devil had forbidden her to go to church and to confess, and when she did this, he beat her with his hairy hands. She should not receive the Lord's Supper, but if she was forced to do it, she should not eat it, only put it in her smearing vessel. She had done this twice. She also said that when she recited this prayer: "Soul of Christ, hallow me, Body of Christ, salve me", the devil could not come to her for three days, and do nothing with her, and every time she prayed this prayer, she could receive the sacrament; otherwise, she could not.

Once she had been angry with a man and had given him a drink so that he should die; however, she did not succeed because he was blessed. She had given the same drink to her own cow, which died. She had also fulfilled the wish of another woman and created the weather on Marx's Day, when hail stones fell from heaven in the city of Trier. With her were three other women. Susanna Grethen had also given a woman permission to kill a horse; when those who first tried did not manage, they killed a pig instead. Last Lent at the dancing place they had been content to have destroyed wine, grain, and fields; everything that the poor had asked for. At Lörscher Heiden, a woman played for them on a long piece of wood. She had often given a woman permission to perform evil. Four years ago, she had given the same woman permission to create bad weather on St Laurentius Eve.

Susanna Grethen Sundtgen was accused in a witchcraft panic, successive trials during a concentrated period of time. She confessed after "light" torture and denounced 23 accomplices, who had been to witches' dances. Further, she denounced all those from Lonquich and Kirsch who had been executed.¹⁵ Susanna Grethen was sentenced to execution "by fire from life to death". In 1589, there was also a trial in the city of Trier against the former Stadtschultheiß Dr Dietrich Flade, who was executed.¹⁶

This is a St Maximin version of the demonological narrative, which was widespread in Europe and contains central demonological ideas: the devil's pact, witches' sabbath, and collective performance of witchcraft. The narrative is spiced up with fascinating details, facilitating transference, and numerous people were denounced. For example, Maria of Kirsch, who was denounced by Susanna Grethen, denounced 13 people.¹⁷ Georgen Engel of Lörsch denounced

68 people.¹⁸ Torture was considered necessary to force a witchcraft confession, according to the emperor Charles V's law code *Carolina*.¹⁹

Rita Voltmer provides the following factors as possible reasons for the panic in St Maximin: ongoing wars, a crisis scenario, existential distress, the impact of Counter-Reformation, the population's willingness to persecute witches, and demonological ideas about people who had sworn allegiance to the devil.²⁰ Voltmer emphasizes the effect of torture.²¹ In St Maximin, there was also a conflict about immediate superiority²² related to the witch-hunt. Wolfgang Behringer points to dramatic climate change and famine in the 1560s and 1570s, plagues in the 1580s and 1590s, and a huge fear that grabbed hold of the European population.²³

As early as the 1430s, during the Council of Basel, two scripts outlining the demonological witch emerged. One was the tract *Errores gazariorum seu illorum qui scopam vel baculum equitare probantur*, 1435, and the other Johann Nider's work *Formicarius*, written in 1437 and published in Venice in 1475.²⁴ A decade later, Heinrich Institoris's *Malleus Maleficarum*, published in Speyer in 1486, became the demonological treatise par excellence. Voltmer and Behringer discuss the influential tract of Peter Binsfeld – the suffragan bishop of Trier – titled *Tractatus de confessionibus maleficorum et sagarum*, published in Latin in 1589, in two German translations in Trier in 1590, and twice in Munich in 1591/1592.²⁵ Both emphasize the spread of ideas through the media.²⁶ In 1589, the first news about the Trier trials circulated via the Fugger handwritten newsletter and the journal of Austrian Michael Aitzinger in Cologne.²⁷ Johannes Dillinger likewise underlines the effect of tracts and pamphlets. The notorious cases from the city of Trier and the St Maximin district, due to the huge numbers of executed persons, helped to establish a paradigm of a new type of persecution influencing Northern Europe.²⁸ In addition, trials from South-Western Germany, Switzerland and France, had an impact.²⁹ Literature was also important, with *Doctor Faustus* published in 1587.³⁰ The circulating printed material also found its way to Denmark.

From Trier to Copenhagen

I would first like to have a look at the possible route of transference of demonological ideas from Trier directly to Scotland, marked 1 on the map above. Such a route, which might have passed the Low Countries, the Spanish Netherlands, and the Dutch Republic,³¹ is interesting because Jean Bodin's influential demonology *De la démonomanie des sorciers* was published in Antwerp in 1586, after first having been published in Paris in 1580. By 1604, this work had been published ten times. However, demonological ideas never resulted in huge witchcraft panics in the Dutch Republic before 1590: there were three demonological trials in the port of Goedereede in 1585. Torture was used to force confessions.³² Contrary to the Dutch Republic, Flanders and Brabant witnessed a large-scale witch-hunt after 1585.³³ Hans de Waardt states that the persecution was mild in both the Dutch Republic and England. The line that divided intense from milder

witch-hunting was not located in the North Sea but in the Low Countries.³⁴ Therefore, the route marked 1, traversing the Dutch Republic to England and further to Scotland, is less likely.

I find the route marked 2 and 3 on the map above – via Copenhagen – the most likely for the transference of demonological ideas between Trier and Scotland. This route went via Cologne and Antwerp before reaching Copenhagen. Rita Voltmer has several times pointed to a vital link between Trier and Copenhagen, namely a tract printed in Cologne in 1589 and translated from German into Dutch in 1589 (Figure 16.1).³⁵ This tract lifts forth the huge numbers of executed persons in the Trier and St Maximin witchcraft trials, however also trials from other Western German areas are mentioned, although in smaller numbers.³⁶ The content of the tract was known throughout Germany and Holland in 1589, and had probably reached Denmark by this year.³⁷ The tract, *En Forskreckelig Oc sand bescriffuelse om mange Troldfolck*, was published in Copenhagen in 1591.³⁸ Louise Kallestrup has briefly discussed this tract in an article, pointing to its publication in the wake of witchcraft trials in Copenhagen in 1590–1591.³⁹ I would like to advance this discussion by looking more closely at the content of the tract and the ideas about witchcraft that appeared in the 1590 Copenhagen trials.

The main text of the tract consists of 11 printed pages, plus two title pages and one page of illustrations.⁴⁰ It ends with an inscription of “Stumme Peder’s” (Dumb Peder’s) grave. He is known as the werewolf of Bedburg near Cologne. On the very first text page, Trier is mentioned in relation to execution of men and women for witchcraft in 1589 and 1590. On page 3, the confessions of witches are described: they have entered into a devil’s pact and renounced God and his dear son, and all saints in heaven. In a row of *exemplas*, central demonological ideas are presented: the devil’s pact, witches’ sabbath with dance and sexual intercourse with demons, performance of collective witchcraft, destroying grain, wine, fruit, and fields. Objects used for witchcraft are dead (*sic*) bones, snakes, toads, unknown herbs, and witchcraft salve.

Among other localities, both Trier and St Maximin are mentioned, and the number of executed emphasized. The favourable reader is told that, in the *Kørførstedømme*⁴¹ of “Trier and Mosel” (*sic*), 270⁴² of this kind of people were burned. Among them was a doctor and lawyer who had been a wealthy man and one of the councillors of the *Kørførsten* of Trier. His name was Flade. The man had been imprisoned for six months, but when they proved that he was guilty of witchcraft, he excused himself and said that it was just *Magia* (in Danish): a black art that could not be considered witchcraft, thus he could not be punished for what he had used or done because it was natural and not idolatry. Therefore, he desired to be freed. But the judiciary maintained that he was a councillor for other witches, and therefore Flade was sentenced to be executed.

In another village not far from the town of Trier, the document continues, they had burned heaps of such devilish people, both young and old, rich and poor, because they had performed a lot of evil and misery in a monastery called St Maximin on 1 May, so that they certainly destroyed both grain and wine,

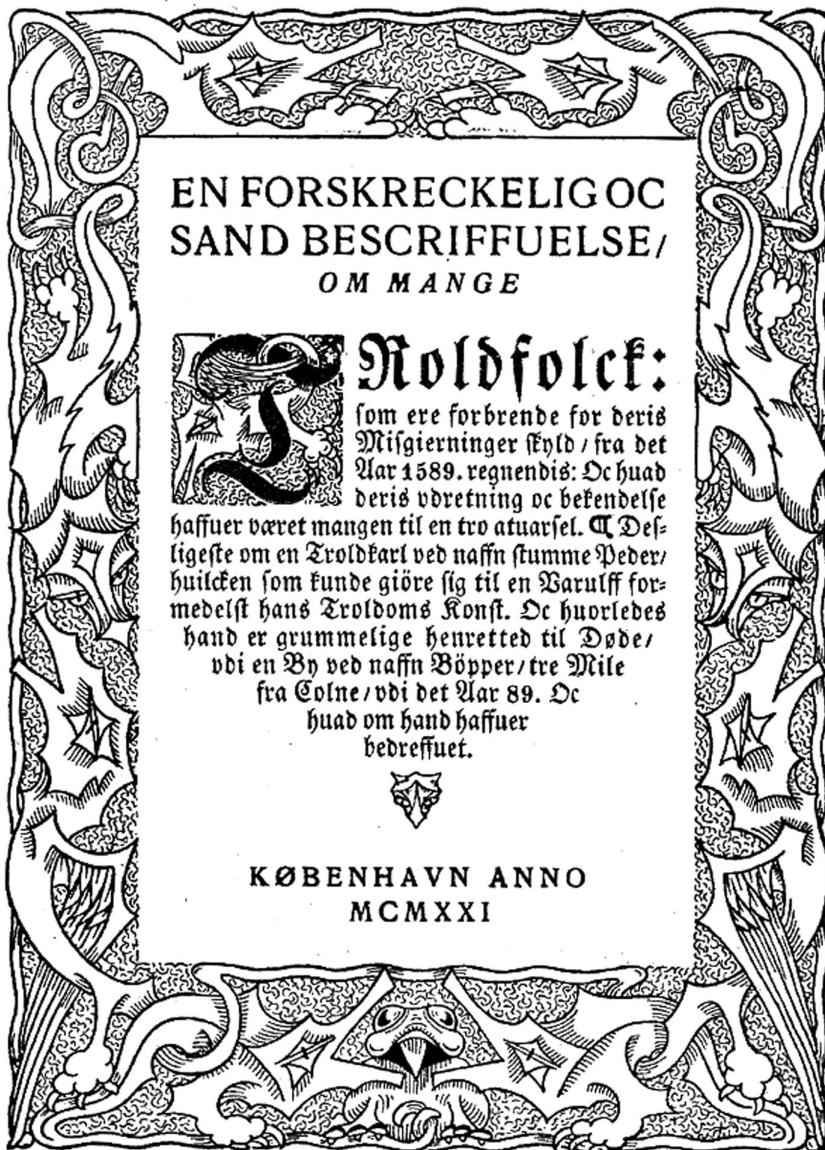


FIGURE 16.1 Title page of the tract *Trolldfolck*, published in Copenhagen 1591 © The Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen. Hielmst. 4153.4° (LN 40).

which God would not allow, so he revealed it. An old woman, who picked and plucked all leaves that she could get, was found in a vineyard. She was arrested and asked why she did this, and she freely confessed that if she had succeeded, she would have made many a man sorry. She was sentenced and burned like the others.

The narrator of the tract stresses that it is time to pray to God Almighty both day and night, and that he would give the authorities the heart, courage, and mind to persecute, destroy, and kill such devilish persons, because it would be a pity if hell's Satan could not be countered. And still, his evil company should not sadden pious people any more.

Towards the end of the tract, the narrator mentions that a small script was sent out, in which the devil complains that hell will be too small for him, and therefore he has sent out messengers to get hold of workers to make it bigger. The narrator believes without doubt that he has shown that in the year 1589, and the following years, many witch devils and witches would come. It is wished that God makes it so that the Evil Spirit shall have no place among the people on earth, but is placed in hell's abyss, where a place is prepared for him and all his companions from the beginning of the world. Amen, the tract ends.

The narrator of the tract comes to the fore as an "I" who approaches the reader directly and believes that the devil is no longer in hell but runs around in the world, causing harm. The *exemplas* are told in the third person and have clear narrative structures. Voice is delegated to the participants. A timeline is established, textual speed and frequency are exploited. Additive sentence structures predominate, and details – like dates and quarter days – are inserted. The narrator reveals a distinct attitude towards what is told. Core demonological ideas are similar to what we heard in the confession of Susanna Grethen Sundtgen.

The tract appeared in a tense period. For instance, in Schleswig-Holstein, the persecution of witches notably increased from 1580 onwards. Rolf Schulte has called this a Europe-wide pressure to persecute.⁴³ Behringer mentions the "*großen Angst*" haunting the European people.⁴⁴ Because of the failure of the Danish king's fleet to take Princess Anne to her groom in Scotland, the atmosphere in Denmark was heated in autumn 1589. When witchcraft trials began in Copenhagen in 1590, rumours about witchcraft had existed for half a year, which can be seen in diplomatic correspondence in which evil omens are mentioned time and again.⁴⁵ In my opinion, the printing in Cologne in 1589 of the pamphlet containing news about the Trier, St Maximin and Western German witchcraft trials, fuelled the Copenhagen 1590 trials.

We also find Danish printed material about witchcraft intended for learned persons, namely Niels Hemmingsen's *Formaning om at sky Trolddomskunsten*, published in Latin and Danish in 1575/1576 and in German ten years later.⁴⁶ According to Hemmingsen's teaching, witches were real, could cause rain and storms, and had a negative influence on male potency. He saw these evildoings as a result of an individual devil's pact: a witch could not develop her own magical power but received it from the devil and was the devil's servant. A person could not be a child of both God and the devil.⁴⁷ Further, he believed that Satan could perform his deeds on earth through witches, and that women, due to their lesser ability to believe in God, were easily tempted by the devil. There is no doubt that Hemmingsen's doctrine was founded on demonological grounds. However, he denied the witches' sabbath as well as witches' ability to fly, thus following

Luther. In his interpretation, there was no hidden army of the devil's accomplices on earth. Hemmingsen advocated for the death sentence for all witches, using the Old Testament citation – a witch should not be allowed to live.⁴⁸ The treatise was influential for decades, as Hemmingsen was Professor of Theology at the University of Copenhagen from 1553 until 1579, when he was dismissed due to diverging theological views, among others on the Lord's Supper.

The many paths of ideas are summarized by Rita Voltmer:

Sermons, catechisms, chronicles, travelogues, private and official letters, missionary reports, and many kinds of scientific and literary texts contributed to the circulation of knowledge. Finally, learned, popular, and mixed concepts about the witches' crimes were transmitted through spoken word, personal contexts, and travelers.⁴⁹

An interesting example of oral spread is Jens Chr. V. Johansen's study on the motif of beating a glass drum with two fox tails, originally confessed to in Ribe witchcraft trials. The motif travelled from Barntrup in Germany to Ribe in Denmark, no less than 468 kilometres.⁵⁰ Several possible transmitters are suggested: merchants, soldiers, oxen drovers, and children.

The witchcraft trials in Copenhagen started in April 1590 with Ane Koldings. Eight women were denounced in confessions. The court records or content of the confessions of five trials are preserved.⁵¹ Because the court records were archived in the wrong place, they have not been accessible for some time, but I rediscovered them in 2016.⁵² The accused confess to gathering on Michaelmas in 1589, raising a storm against the Danish royal fleet in the North Sea to prevent Princess Anne from reaching Scotland, and use of personal demons, Apostles, who were sent out to the ships in beer barrels.⁵³ Maren Mads Bryggers confessed to having conferred with the other women "in counsel and deed" at Karen Vævers's house. Asked what art they intended to perform with the aid of some clay vessels, she responded that she believed they were to bewitch the ships to make sure they would never reach Scotland. As torture was possibly used, Maren confessed that Anne Jespers, Kirsten Søndags, Ane Koldings, Karen Vævers, and herself had gathered in Karen Vævers's house. There were clay vessels on the table, and they did not want the ships to reach Scotland on the first attempt. She swore to this on her soul and salvation.

Several demonological ideas present themselves in the Copenhagen trials: demonic helpers, witches' gatherings, and collective witchcraft. The demonic helpers, also known from other countries,⁵⁴ were given to the woman who entered into the devil's pact, so they are a sign of such a pact. Witches' gatherings and the performance of collective witchcraft are ideas that were also heard in the confession of Susanna Grethen Sundtgen. The emphasis on the demonic in Copenhagen trials is distinct, but influenced by the Danish context. I argue that the witchcraft trials in the city of Trier and in the district of St Maximin in the late 1580s impacted the Copenhagen trials, not only because demonological

ideas were activated, but also because of the intensity of the Trier trials, which was influential around 1590.

From Copenhagen to North Berwick

The transference of demonological ideas from Denmark to Scotland is represented by line 4 on the map above. Two calamities were used as evidence that witchcraft was performed in a joint project of witches in Denmark and Scotland: a ferry accident in Scotland and the failure of the Danish fleet. Between autumn 1589 and summer 1590, royal and diplomatic correspondence between Denmark, Scotland, and England repeatedly mentioned witchcraft. There was a feeling of fear and anxiety that something evil was at work. Moreover, a number of travelling messengers helped transmit these ideas.⁵⁵

One important person who was also a traveller, was King James VI. After a wedding ceremony in Oslo in November 1589, he stayed in Denmark for the winter, leaving for Scotland in April 1590 with knowledge about the ongoing Copenhagen trials. In Denmark, he had met Niels Hemmingsen and the astronomist Tycho Brahe. Hemmingsen's book on witchcraft had impressed James when he was a boy.⁵⁶ However, the only topic known from their conversation was the doctrine of predestination.⁵⁷ The king was very impressed by Tycho Brahe and wrote a poem of praise for him.⁵⁸

Historians of Scottish witchcraft have studied printed literature on demonology in Scotland before 1590. Christina Lerner (née Ross) addresses the theological background in her PhD thesis.⁵⁹ She mentions awareness of demonological ideas in the early 1500s: John Major being conscious of demonological beliefs in 1521, Boece's history book with a translation by John Bellenden in 1527/1536, appendices to Pinkerton's *History of Scotland* dated 1540, and a catechism by John Hamilton, Archbishop of St Andrews, in 1552.⁶⁰ Julian Goodare argues that John Knox, the leader of the Reformation in Scotland 1560, was aware of the demonic pact.⁶¹ Goodare also states that in Aberdeen in the 1530s, William Hay provided a generally competent overview of demonological witchcraft, probably drawing on either *Malleus Maleficarum* or other *Malleus*-influenced works.⁶² A few years after the North Berwick trials, the Preface to James VI's *Daemonologie* from 1597 mentions demonologists like Jean Bodin, Hyperius, and Niels Hemmingsen, but also sceptics like Cornelius Agrippa and Wierus.⁶³ Scotland was well aware of Continental ideas.

The North Berwick trials, named after an alleged witches' convention, was held in Edinburgh in 1590–1591, starting with the pre-trial interrogations of Agnes Sampson and Geillis Duncan. These records show that the first question they were asked was about the cooperation between Danish and Scottish witches “in the middle of the firth.”⁶⁴ This is a continuation of the narrative that emerged in the confessions of Danish witches during the Copenhagen trials in summer 1590, with the addition that Scottish witches participated. King James VI, who knew the Danish trials, was an interrogator during the North Berwick trials, and

weather magic is initially emphasized. Thus, the king himself was an important travelling individual bringing demonological ideas from Denmark to Scotland.

With regard to the court records of the North Berwick trials, the confessions display a Scottish version of the demonological narrative. After torture, Agnes Sampson confesses to renouncing her baptism, entering into the devil's pact, dancing in the graveyard, digging up bones from the graveyard, and attending a gathering inside the North Berwick kirk with the devil on the pulpit.⁶⁵ These ideas had never been heard in Scottish witchcraft trials before. During the trial of Agnes Sampson, "the Wise Wife of Keith" was turned into an evil witch, with the monarch of Scotland interrogating her and inserting leading questions. Demonological ideas flourished and got a new wrapping. The Scottish confessions contained numerous details describing the Evil One and his power, the ritual of entering the devil's pact – including the Scottish devilish promise "You shall never want" – sexual intercourse with the devil, and several witches' gatherings with collective evil deeds performed. The mentioning of Michaelmas and quarter days strengthens the narrative's connection not only to the Danish fleet crossing the North Sea, but also to Trier. Furthermore, political implications were part of these trials and were interwoven with ideas from demonology, traditional witchcraft, and healing, forming a complex discourse.

News of the North Berwick trials quickly spread. The pamphlet *Newes from Scotland*, with information about the North Berwick trials, was published in London in 1591. In the surroundings of North Berwick, people learned about dark happenings in their neighbourhood through oral transference. In the rest of Scotland, people learned about the danger of the devil's snares. However, cultural exchanges also took place outside Scotland's borders.

From Scotland to Finnmark

The personal factor is of utmost importance when it comes to the transference of demonological ideas from Scotland to Vardø in Finnmark, marked with 2 on the map. Together with Arne Kruse, I have studied this transference through a close reading of Scottish and Finnmark court records.⁶⁶ The ideas travelled with a Scottish person.

John Cunningham from Crail in Fife, not far from North Berwick, must have heard about these trials as a young man. Born c. 1575, he was 15 years old when the North Berwick trials started.⁶⁷ The young Cunningham knew King James VI, who wrote a letter of recommendation for him when he entered into the service of Danish-Norwegian king Christian IV in 1603. He was employed as a naval captain and captained one of the Danish ships on an expedition to Greenland in 1605. Cunningham was installed as district governor in Finnmark, Vardøhus district, in 1619.⁶⁸ The following year, demonological ideas were heard in a Finnmark witchcraft panic for the first time. Individual witchcraft trials had already started. The period of witch-hunt in Finnmark was 1600–1692, and 91 persons were executed, whereof 84 per cent were women.⁶⁹ Demonological ideas

were incorporated in the legal definition of witches by a royal decree issued in 1617, wherein the “true” witches were defined as those who had attached themselves to the devil or who consorted with him.⁷⁰ This might have influenced the Finnmark trials. However, demonological ideas had not been activated in Finnmark trials prior to Cunningham entering office. He took part in the interrogation of suspected witches, and the first woman sentenced to death was Karen Edisdatter in 1620. She was the first accused in a panic that lasted from 1620 to 1621, in which 12 women received death sentences.⁷¹ Karen denounced several other women. Demonological ideas appeared in the High North of Europe, echoing the confessions of Susanna Grethen Sundtgen and Agnes Sampson: renouncing the baptism, the devil’s pact, the devil’s mark, witches’ gatherings, and collective witchcraft, including the raising of storms and casting spells on humans and animals. The ideas of shape-shifting, witches’ flight, and a personal demon are found in the Finnmark confessions. Not present, however, is the idea of sexual intercourse with the devil.

Cunningham knew about demonological ideas from Scotland. He also knew the Scottish as well as the Danish language. His role in the transference of ideas can be linked to the translation of particular words and expressions during courtroom interrogation, linguistic markers that can be associated with the ideology of the demonologists. Cognate words found in the source material on both sides of the North Sea offer direct evidence for the transmission of certain ideas linked to them. Direct oral transmission traces back to two people, namely the king of Scotland and the “king” of Vardøhus. John Cunningham’s Scandinavianized name rendered in the sources is a play on the word “king”: “Hans König, Hans Kønigh, and Hans Køning”.⁷² The accusations during the 1620–1621 panic had to do with a storm on Christmas Eve in 1617, when 10 boats were shipwrecked and 40 men from the local villages drowned. The demonological ideas, shared by both “kings,” provided a new and learned explanation for the shipwreck tragedy.

Two linguistic findings link the North Berwick and Finnmark trials. One is the naval term “*admerall and maister man*” in the Scottish sources, and “*mester och Admiral*” in the Finnmark sources.⁷³ The same phrase is applied in the same legal context: the nouns are utilized in a very similar set phrase where only the word order differs, and in both cases the phrase is employed as a metaphor about a woman in charge of a group of witches casting storm over ships at sea.⁷⁴

The other term is “*Ballvollen*,” which means a place where ballgames were played. This word is found in court records linked to witches’ gatherings in both Finnmark and Scotland. In the Finnmark sources, *Ballvollen* refers to a field near Vardø. In Scotland, the word “*Ball-Ley*” is documented in the trial of Barbara Bowndie, and refers to witches meeting at a field where ball was played.⁷⁵ It is likely that Cunningham, who knew the word from his Scottish background, introduced “*Ballvollen*” to the Finnmark courtroom during the interrogation of Kirsten Sørensdatter, 1621, who confessed to the devil’s pact and witches’ gathering after having been threatened with torture and also having undergone

the water ordeal. Cunningham asked Kirsten Sørensdatter whether she had met other women at “*Ballvollen*,” translating a word he was acquainted with. For the district governor of Vardøhus, it would have been natural to use his knowledge about where a meeting between witches could take place.

The examples point to the importance of mental baggage for both “kings” who interrogated suspects during witchcraft trials in Scotland and Finnmark. Due to this baggage, a region far away from the Continent and the British Isles may contribute to the understanding of early modern European cultural transference.

Conclusion

This essay has followed the route of the transference of demonological ideas from South-Western Germany via Denmark and Scotland to Vardø in Finnmark. I argue that information about the intense witchcraft trials taking place in the region of Trier and St Maximin in the last half of the 1580s and demonological ideas in these trials rapidly spread to Northern Europe and created an atmosphere conducive to initiating and intensifying witchcraft trials. Demonological ideas from South-Western Germany are echoed in witchcraft trials from Copenhagen, Edinburgh, and Vardø in Finnmark.

The essay has shown that demonological ideas travel in various ways: by printed material, travelling people, diplomatic and royal correspondence, and ideas appearing in witchcraft trials. Through a methodological focus on transcultural history and a close reading of court records, this essay has given evidence for the speedy transference of demonological ideas from country to country. The essay has also pointed to linguistic elements in court records that support the transference of ideas.

The essay has shown German, Danish, Scottish, and Finnmark versions of the demonological narrative. On the one hand, the essay promotes a strong argument for the role played by individuals when it comes to cultural transference within transcultural history. The study of the transmission process between countries shows that travellers carry ideas that play an important role in their activities when they enter a new place. When a man in a position of power enters a new office, his ideas have great impact, as we have seen in the case of John Cunningham. When a man with power introduces demonology in witchcraft trials and brings in leading questions during interrogation, this has an impact. On the other hand, cultural exchange happens in multiple other ways, written and oral, and we hear them in the confessions, told and retold in local communities. Trials are started and ideas are introduced by individuals within the judiciary. These ideas must be repeated in the local community’s oral realm in order to be retold as enforced narratives in confessions in new witchcraft trials.

The path of demonological ideas, from South-Western Germany via Copenhagen and Scotland to Finnmark, is amazing because it shows how quickly ideas can travel far and wide. They are spread by people who travel with

ideas as part of their personal baggage. They are spread by books and letters. And they are spread by uncountable retellings, crossing cultural and national boundaries.

Notes

- 1 The witchcraft persecution in the Trier region as used in this article comprise witchcraft trials in the Electorate of Trier and the Prince-Abbey of St Maximin. In the latter area, at least 400 persons were executed in a panic between 1586 and 1596. Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London: Routledge, 2016), 181; Walter Rummel and Rita Voltmer, *Hexen und Hexenverfolgung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 50, 63, 76, 77.
- 2 Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London: Routledge, 2016), 28, 177.
- 3 These trials are influenced by demonological ideas stemming from the Lorraine area in France, which experienced intense witch-hunts between 1570 and 1630. Nicolas Rémy was the key figure in this persecution. Rita Voltmer and Maryse Simon, 'Judge and Demonologist: Revisiting the impact of Nicolas Rémy on the Lorraine witch trials', in Julian Goodare, Rita Voltmer and Liv Helene Willumsen (eds.), *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2020), 189, 192; Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell), 19–50.
- 4 Julian Goodare, Rita Voltmer, and Liv Helene Willumsen (eds.), *Demonology and Witch-Hunting in Early Modern Europe* (Abingdon, England: Routledge, 2020).
- 5 Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Comparative and Transnational History. Central European Approaches and New Perspectives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009); Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, "AHR Conversation: On Transnational History," *American Historical Review* 5 (2006): 30–50; Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, "'Localism,' Global History and Transnational History," *Svensk Historisk Tidsskrift* 4 (2007): 657–76.
- 6 Ida Bull, *Project Beyond Borders. Transnational Movements through History* (Trondheim: Department of History and Classical Disciplines, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 2010–2012).
- 7 Bénédicte Zimmermann and Michael Werner, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45 (February 2006): 30–50.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (published in 1972 as *Discours du récit* by Éditions du Seuil; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (published in 1983 as *Nouveau discours du récit* by Éditions du Seuil; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988); Gérard Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, trans. Catherine Porter (published in 1991 as *Fiction et diction* by Éditions du Seuil; Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
- 10 Genette, *Fiction and Diction*, 55–6, 57; Liv Helene Willumsen, *Witches of the North* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 29–37.
- 11 Rita Voltmer, "Einleitung," in Rita Voltmer and Karl Weisenstein, (eds.), *Das Hexenregister des Claudius Musiel* (Trier: Spee Buchverlag, 1996), 31; Rita Voltmer, 'St. Maximin, Prince-Abbey of', in Richard M. Golden, *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* (ABC CLIO: Santa Barbara, 2006), 1082–1083; 'Trier, Electorate of', in Golden, *Encyclopedia*, 1136; Johannes Dillinger, 'Flade, Dietrich (1534–1589)', in Golden, *Encyclopedia*, 389.
- 12 Voltmer and Weisenstein, *Das Hexenregister des Claudius Musiel*, 111–288; Voltmer, "Einleitung," 15, note 19.

- 13 Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Bestand 211, no. 2222, Kriminalischer proceß Grethen Sundtgen zu Fell, fos. 1–18.
- 14 Also called Quatemberfasten, three days of fasting repeated four times on a yearly basis.
- 15 Orig. ‘und alle, so hingericht von Lonquich und Kirsch’. Ref. Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Bestand 211, no. 2222, Kriminalischer proceß Gretchen Sundtgen zu Fell, fo. 16.
- 16 Johannes Dillinger, “Böse Leute”: *Hexenverfolgungen in Schwäbisch-Österreich und Kurtrier in Vergleich* (Trier, 1999), 113–17, 219–26, 261–64.
- 17 Landeshauptarchiv Koblenz, Bestand 211, no. 2223, pp. 1–51, at pp. 48–49.
- 18 Stadtarchive Trier, no. 1533/170, fos. 243–61, at fos. 255v–260v.
- 19 Voltmer, “Einleitung,” 23.
- 20 Ibid., 21.
- 21 Rita Voltmer, “The Witch in the Courtroom: Torture and the Representations of Emotions”, in Laura Kounine and Michael Östling (eds.), *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 99–102.
- 22 Orig. *Reichsunmittelbarkeit*. Voltmer, “Einleitung,” 27.
- 23 Wolfgang Behringer, *Hexen und Hexenprozesse in Deutschland* (first published 1988; München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010), 180; Wolfgang Behringer, *Witches and Witch-Hunts. A Global History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).
- 24 Walter Rummel und Rita Voltmer, *Hexen und Hexenverfolgung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 27–9; Rita Voltmer, “Hexenverfolgungen im Maas-Rhein-Mosel-Raum. Ergebnisse und Perspektiven,” in Franz Irsigler, (ed.), *Zwischen Maas und Rhein. Beziehungen, Begegnungen und Konflikte in einem europäischen Kernraum von der Spätantike bis zum 19. Jahrhundert* (Trier: Kliomedia, 2006), 153–87.
- 25 Rita Voltmer, “Debating the Devil’s Clergy. Demonology and the Media in Dialogue with Trials (14th to 17th century),” *Religions* 10, no. 12 (2019): 648, 15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10120648>; ‘Demonology and anti-demonology. Binsfeld’s *De confessionibus* and Loos’s *De vera et falsa magia*’, in Jan Machielsen (ed.), *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil* (London: Routledge, 2020), 149–164; Behringer, *Hexen*, 181–82.
- 26 Behringer, *Hexen*, 180–84; Voltmer, “Debating the Devil’s Clergy,” 15.
- 27 Voltmer, “Debating the Devil’s Clergy,” 15.
- 28 Dillinger, *Böse Leute*, 359.
- 29 There were trials in Lothringen, Luxemburg, Alsace, and Osnabrück. Rummel and Voltmer, *Hexen*, 96.
- 30 Behringer, *Hexen*, 183.
- 31 Also called the Republic of the United Provinces. Hans de Waardt, “Netherlands, Northern,” in Richard M. Golden (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, vol. III (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 810.
- 32 Hans de Waardt, “Prosecution or Defense: Procedural Possibilities following a Witchcraft Accusation in the Province of Holland before 1800,” in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Willem Frijhoff (eds.), *Witchcraft in the Netherlands from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Rotterdam: Universitaire Pers Rotterdam, 1991), 80.
- 33 Dries Vansacker, “Netherlands, Southern,” in Richard M. Golden, (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft*, vol. III (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 815, Table 1; Hans de Waardt, “The North Sea as a Crossroads of Witchcraft Beliefs: The Limited Importance of Political Boundaries,” in Jonathan Barry, Owen Davies, and Cornelia Osborne, (eds.), *Cultures of Witchcraft in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 134–5.
- 34 De Waardt, “North Sea as a Crossroads,” 136.
- 35 Rita Voltmer, ‘Wissen, Media und die Wahrheit’, in Heinz Sieburg, Rita Voltmer, and Britta Weimann (eds.), *Hexenwissen: Zum Transfer von Magie- und Zauberei-Imaginationen in interdisziplinärer Perspektive* (Trier: Paulinus Verlag, 2017), 17; Rummel and Voltmer, *Hexen*, 53.

- 36 Among the trials mentioned in the tract are thirteen from Ellwangen, one from Morgenthal, nearly 300 from 'Trier and Mosel', in addition to Trierer Dr. Flade, 'an unmentionable crowd' from St Maximin, and one from Bedburg.
- 37 Printed in Cologne in 1589 by Nicolaus Schreiber; in Copenhagen in 1591 by Laurentz Benedicht; Voltmer, "Debating the Devil's Clergy," 15.
- 38 A copy of the original tract is kept in The Royal Library, Copenhagen.
- 39 Louise Kallestrup, "'Kind in Words and Deeds, But False in Their Hearts': Fear of Evil Conspiracy in Late-Sixteenth-Century Denmark," in Jonathan Barry, Owen Davies, and Cornelie Usborne (eds.), *Cultures of Witchcraft in Europe from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2018), 139–42.
- 40 In a new edition from 1921, there are seven pages of background written by Emil Selmar. The title page is an image of a witch being burned in fire at the stake, while two horned devils are attending to the fire.
- 41 Kurfyrste, *princeps elector imperii*.
- 42 Orig. 'tho hundrede oc halfftrediesinds tiue'; halvtredvesinds = 50.
- 43 Orig. 'Europaweite Verfolgungsdruck'. Rolf Schulte, *Hexenverfolgung in Schleswig-Holstein 16.–18. Jahrhundert* (Heide: Boyens, 2001), 68.
- 44 Behringer, *Hexen*, 180.
- 45 Liv Helene Willumsen, 'Trolldom mot kongens skip 1589 og transnasjonal overføring av idéer', *Historisk Tidsskrift* (Denmark), 119, no. 2 (2019), 309–44; Liv Helene Willumsen, "Witchcraft against Royal Danish Ships in 1589 and Transnational Transfer of Ideas," *International Review of Scottish Studies* (2020), 54–99.
- 46 *Admonitio de superstitionibus magicis vitandis*.
- 47 Louise Kallestrup, *I Pagt med Djævelen* (Copenhagen: Forlaget Anis, 2009), 85.
- 48 Schulte, *Hexenverfolgung in Schleswig-Holstein*, 23.
- 49 Rita Voltmer, "Demonology and the Relevance of the Witches' Confessions," in Goodare, Voltmer, and Willumsen, *Demonology*, 36.
- 50 Jens Christian V. Johansen, "To Beat a Glass Drum: The Transmission of Popular Notions of Demonology in Denmark and Germany," in Goodare, Voltmer, and Willumsen, *Demonology*, 237; Jens Christian V. Johansen, *Da Djævelen var ude ... trolldom i det 17. århundredets Danmark* (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1991).
- 51 Ane Koldings, Karen Vævers, Maren Mads Bryggers, Maren Mogens, Kirsten Søntags, Anne Jespers, Margrete Jacob Skriver, and a farmer's wife. Court records are preserved for Karen Vævers, Maren Mads Bryggers, Maren Mogens, Margrete Jacob Skriver. Content of confession is known for Ane Koldings. National Archives of Denmark, A232, Danske Kancelli 1572–1660, Sjællandske Tegnelse 1588–1590.
- 52 I at once informed my Danish colleague Louise Kallestrup, who had been unable to locate these documents.
- 53 Ane Kolding's Apostle was called *Smuck*, and Maren Mogens' Apostle was called *Pilhestskou*.
- 54 Known in e.g., Germany as *idol*, trial of Anneke Rickers, Landesarchiv Schleswig-Holstein, Abt. 7, no. 1758¹, Anneke Rickers, fos. 6r–16v; Liv Helene Willumsen, *Witches of the North* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 254.
- 55 Willumsen, "Witchcraft against."
- 56 Jane Ridder-Patrick, "Astrology in Early Modern Scotland, ca. 1543–1726" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh PhD, 2012), 151.
- 57 David Stevenson, *Scotland's Last Royal Wedding* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publ., 1997), 49.
- 58 Ridder-Patrick, "Astrology," 153.
- 59 Christina Larner (née Ross), "Scottish Demonology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and Its Theological Background" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1962).
- 60 Larner, "Scottish Demonology," 43–5, 52–3.
- 61 Julian Goodare, "John Knox on Demonology and Witchcraft," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 96 (2005): 221–45.

- 62 Julian Goodare, "Witches' Flight in Scottish Demonology," in Goodare, Voltmer, and Willumsen, *Demonology*, 148.
- 63 King James VI, *Daemonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue* (Edinburgh, 1597), xv; Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland* (Exeter: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 356.
- 64 Normand and Roberts, *Witchcraft*, 136.
- 65 National Records of Scotland, JC2/2, fos. 201r–207r, at fo. 206r.
- 66 Arne Kruse and Liv Helene Willumsen, "Ordet Ballvollen knytt til transnasjonal overføring av idéar," *Historisk tidsskrift* 93 (2014): 407–32; Arne Kruse and Liv Helene Willumsen, "Magic Language: The Transmission of an Idea over Geographic Distance and Linguistic Barriers," *Magic, Ritual and Witchcraft* (Spring 2020): 1–32.
- 67 Liv Helene Willumsen, "Exporting the Devil across the North Sea: John Cunningham and the Finnmark Witch-Hunt," in Julian Goodare (ed.), *Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters* (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 49.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 50–1.
- 69 Liv Helene Willumsen, *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark, Northern Norway* (Bergen: Skald, 2010), 13.
- 70 Willumsen, *Witches of the North*, 234.
- 71 Willumsen, *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark*, 22–26.
- 72 Kruse and Willumsen, "Magic Language," 6, 8.
- 73 The trial of Euphame MacCalzean 1591, National Record Office, Circuit Court Books, JC2/2, fo. 224r; the trial of Kirsten Sørensdatter, Regional State Archives of Tromsø, The Archives of Finnmark District Magistrate, no. 6, fo. 27r.
- 74 Kruse and Willumsen, "Magic Language," 24.
- 75 Orkney Library and Archive, Orkney Presbytery Records, CH2/1082/1, p. 255.