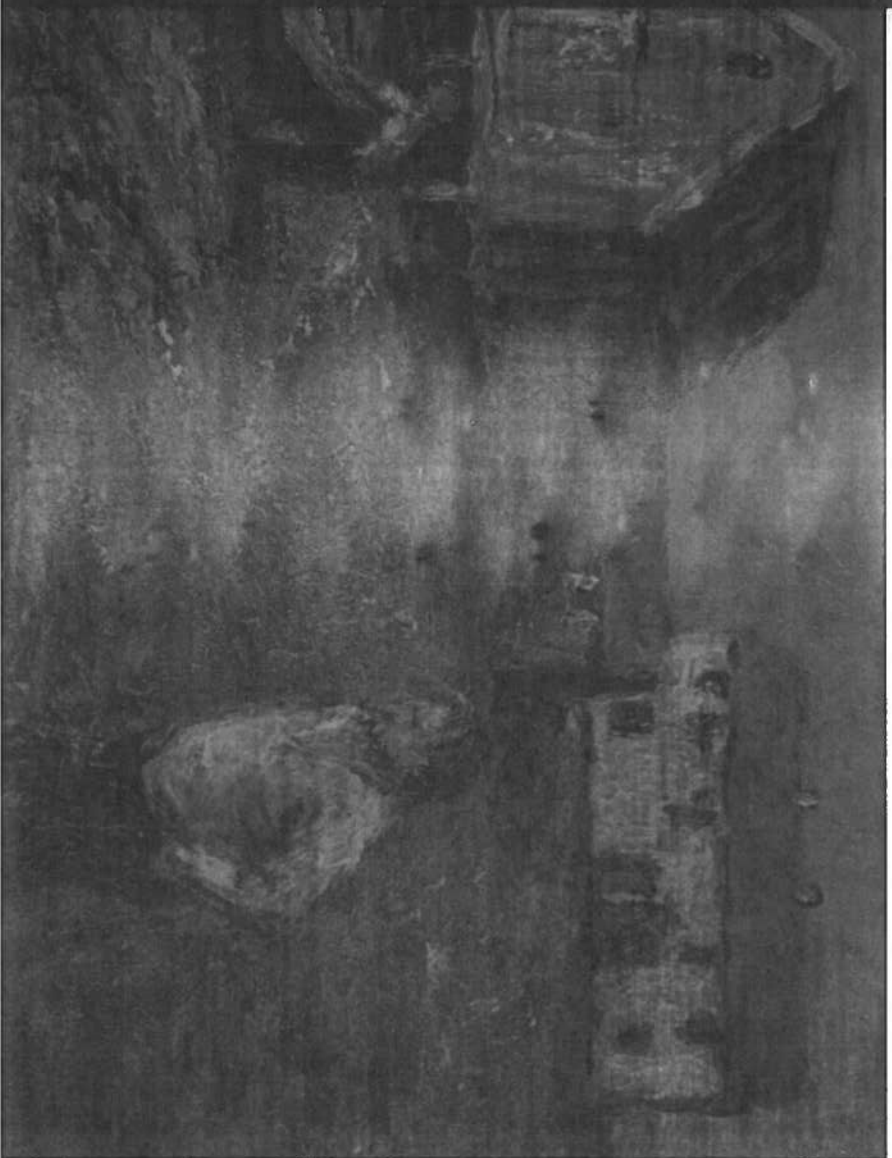


# ISLANDS OF PLACE AND SPACE

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A Festschrift in Honour of  
Arne Kruse

Edited by Christian Coijmans



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Language and Landscape: Focalisation  
and the Arne Kruse Method

Liv Helene Willumsen

Introduction

The title of this chapter reflects Arne Kruse's lifelong scholarly work, from his 1983 master's thesis ('Médnamn frá Smøla') to the present day.<sup>1</sup> I have had the honour of working together with him, writing two articles collaboratively in recent years, and I have learned a great deal from him. This article pays tribute to his qualities as a scholar and researcher.

One of Arne's strongest qualities is his combination between a down-to-earth attitude, a very theoretical interest, and an interdisciplinary approach. This combination is on display throughout his research efforts: on the one hand, he is a practical and pragmatic scholar within the field of place-names, with both feet firmly on the ground, be that the deck of a Norwegian fishing boat or an East Lothian field. On the other hand, he is a very theoretical and intellectual scholar of linguistics, phonetics, grammar, etymology, and history, working on a highly abstract level. I will refer to this as 'the Arne Kruse Method'.

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1. Kruse 1983.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. Initially, I would like to illuminate the journey from Arne's first research work on Norwegian fishing *méd* (1983) to a quest ending in an East Lothian field in 2015 – the Bara Kirk experience. Secondly, I would like to demonstrate Arne's interdisciplinary competence by presenting research findings we have obtained together over the last few years, particularly those related to language.

### The Bara Kirk experience

This chapter takes an expedition to the kirk of Bara as its starting point, representing a journey I made together with Arne in 2015. I am a historian and a witchcraft scholar, with a master's thesis<sup>2</sup> on the Finnmark witchcraft trials in Northern Norway, and a PhD in history on both Scottish and Finnmark witchcraft trials.<sup>3</sup>

In 2015, I was on one of my research trips to Edinburgh, working on the North Berwick witchcraft trials, which took place in 1590–91.<sup>4</sup> These trials were the first ones of their kind in Scotland for which learned European demonological ideas are documented, including the ideas of a woman or man entering into a pact with the devil and participation at witchcraft gatherings.<sup>5</sup> The trials were held in Edinburgh but are named after an alleged witchcraft convention in North Berwick. They are famous because of their scale – resulting from a witchcraft panic with many people accused – but also because of their demonological content, and because King James VI took part in the interrogation of the accused persons at Holyrood Palace.

2. Willumsen 1984.

3. Willumsen 2008.

4. Normand and Roberts 2000.

5. Willumsen 2020.

One of the first people accused, imprisoned, and interrogated during the North Berwick trials was Agnes Sampson from Nether Keith. She was interrogated by King James VI on 4–5 December 1590, and confessed to participation at the North Berwick convention, as well as participation at other witches' gatherings: 'She confesses that she was at the convention of Bara where Meg Steel, Kate Gray, and Janet Campbell was with her, and another who is dead sensine [since], being altogether five in number. They convened by east the kirk [east of the kirk] at the burn side'.<sup>6</sup> Here, the convention at Bara is mentioned, as well as the location of the convention, by the kirk.

As part of my research, in order to get closer to an understanding of the sources, I wanted to visit all the places of witches' conventions in East Lothian mentioned in the confession of Agnes Sampson. Among others, Bara Kirk was on my agenda. I asked Arne to go with me on this trip, due to his considerable knowledge of place-names. He answered in the affirmative, and planning commenced.

Straight away, Arne's focus on landscape came to the fore when we started planning the trip. Beforehand, I had found a description of Bara Kirk and sent it to Arne. The building is situated in Haddington, in the county of East Lothian.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, I found another description of Bara Kirk from 1627, part of a report on parishes in Scotland sent to the authorities, and forwarded this to Arne as well.<sup>8</sup> He answered:

*Takk for skildringa av Barakyrkja. Eg kan visualisere kor ho ligg ut ifrå det du skriv. Det at ho ligg så høgt i landskapet blir reflektert i namnet som betyr på gælisk, 'høgde, spiss'.*

6. Normand and Roberts 2000: 146.

7. Martine 1883.

8. Reports on Parishes in Scotland 1627.

Thanks for the description of the Bara Kirk. I can visualise where it lies from what you are writing. The fact that it is situated that high in the landscape is reflected in the name, which in Gaelic means 'height, edge'.

Thus, Arne's first thought when he saw the name was to connect it to Gaelic, and to interpret the place-name in relation to its position in the landscape.

Then came the importance of the map. As part of the planning, Arne sent me two maps: one of Haddingtonshire and one of Bara Kirk's location.<sup>9</sup> In addition, he planned for a comfortable outing: *Eg skal ta med kart og kamera og kaffe* ('I will bring along a map, a camera, and coffee').

When examining the map and the description in the court records before we started the trip, Arne was sceptical with regard to the possibilities to find water near Bara Kirk:



Figure 1: Location of Bara Kirk. © OpenStreetMap.

9. On one of the map images, the name Bara is interchanged with 'Baro'.

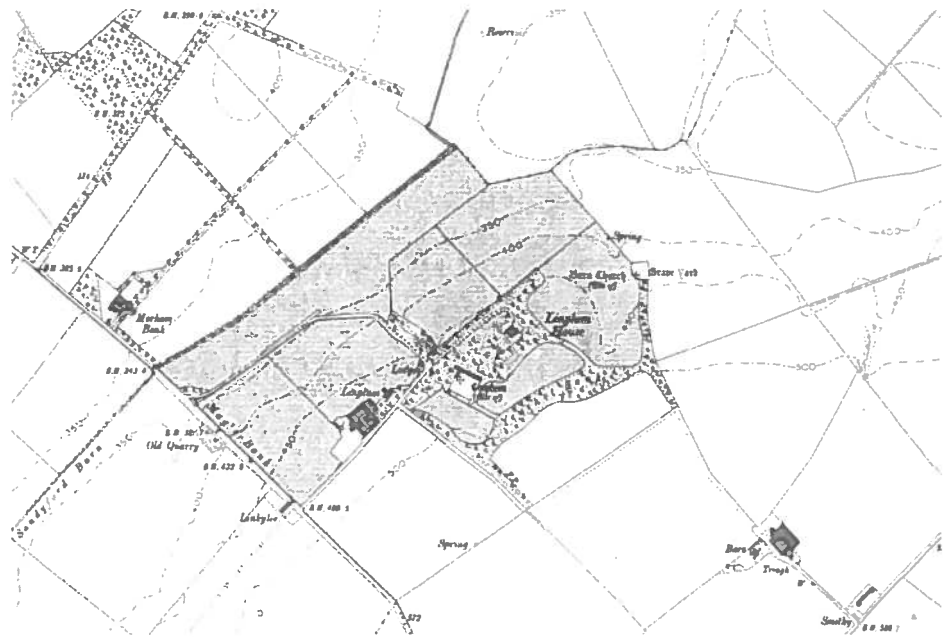


Figure 2: Bara as featured on the 1908 edition of the Ordnance Survey Map ('Haddingtonshire Sheet X. SE'). Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland.

*Her er eit par kart som fortel kvar kyrkja låg. Det er snakk om eit høgdedrag og langt frå vatn. Det nærmaste vatnet er temmeleg langt i sør, som du ser av øvste kartet. Det er markert 'spring' like ved kyrkja, men er det nok?*

Here are a couple of maps that report where the kirk was placed. We are talking about a 'height' or 'ridge', far from water. The nearest water is rather far to the south, as you can see on the map at the top. There is a site marked 'spring' next to the kirk, but is that enough?

We set out for the adventure, arrived at Bara, and approached 'by east the kirk at the burn side', following the accurate description from the court records of the North Berwick trials. Standing at the east corner of the kirk, we looked down and saw the embankment and a field next to it. At that moment, both of us knew that this might have been the place for the alleged witches' convention described in the confession of



Agnes Sampson. Whilst I am usually a very grounded person, I remarked: 'I got a scary feeling – do you feel anything?' Arne answered: 'No, I do not feel anything'.

So here, a difference in temperament between us was revealed. I was carried away by the sight of the embankment and the field next to it, struck by the amazement that the mystery of a 400-year-old description was still valid. Arne found it natural that such an accurate description of a place could be conveyed over the centuries. In fact, he trusted the historical source – and what the language can convey – more than me. We were both standing at the same corner of the kirk and saw the same landscape.

### Arne Kruse's first scholarly work

In order to understand Arne's particular method of looking at the landscape and to incorporate this observation into his interpretation, I would like to go back to his first research work: his master's thesis. This work deals with *médnamn* – names of good fishing places triangulated using multiple surrounding landscape features when at sea. When the direct lines towards two landmarks would cross one another, a good fishing place was marked. A fisherman knew how to use these *méd* in order to find the best fishing places.

At the very beginning of Arne Kruse's master's thesis, the map below (Figure 3) is shown. His study deals with the island of Smøla, on the west coast of Norway, and its surroundings, including inlets, straits, and smaller islands. The map provides the framework for the study, which explores the fisherman's view from various positions at sea towards the landscape of Smøla and its surroundings. Likewise, when Arne sent me the map of Bara before our trip started, it was a signal that

we needed a similar framework, and that framework was the information about the landscape as could be discerned from a map. For him, starting with a map was a given in both 1983 and 2015 – a basic requirement.

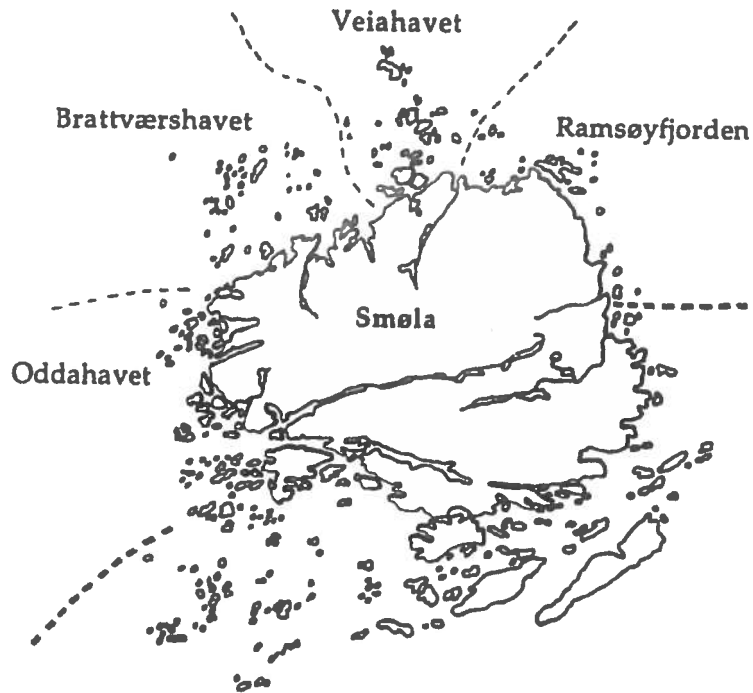


Figure 3: Map of Smøla (after Kruse 1983: 5).

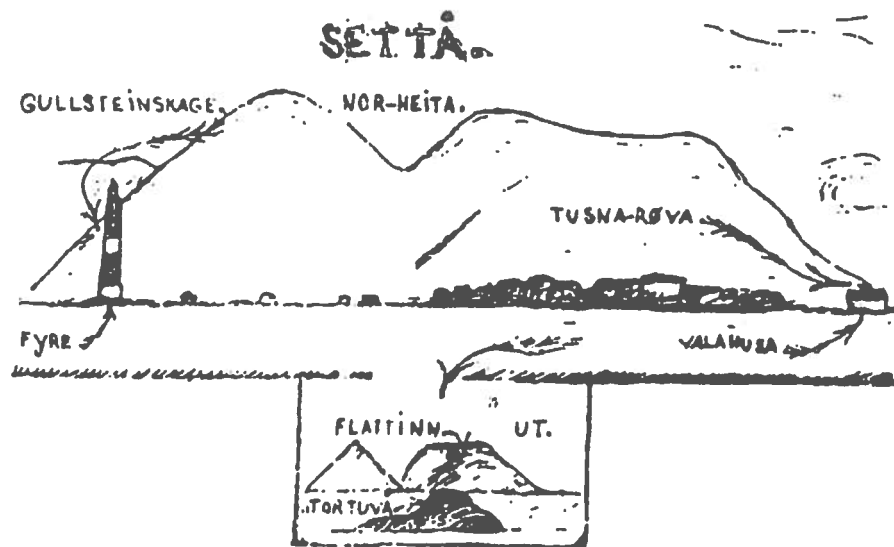


Figure 4: The *médnamn* Settå. Drawing by Ole Jakobsen Oterholm (from Kruse 1983: 207).

Figure 4 provides an illustration of how a *méd* is found. The fisherman looks towards land to find orientation points in various directions. For Settå, a lighthouse (*fyre*) is also used as a marking point. Thus, profiles of the landscape, mountains, and inlets make it possible to draw lines in several directions, and in their convergence, the favourable fishing place is found. Arne's analyses of *médnamn* include diligent work on phonetics, paying attention to the range of pronunciations present in his source material, with most of his informants providing oral interviews. His research into landscape is characterised by examining every single word, before combining this with the map, the landscape, and other textual sources. It is a detailed and elaborate approach, wherein considerable interests in both landscape and language are merged.

Returning to the Bara experience, a parallel to finding *méd* may be found in the lines drawn from the textual directions (i.e. east side of the kirk) and the burn. Like a fisherman looking at the landscape in order to find the location of a *méd*, the place we were after – i.e. the location of the witches' convention – was spotted when a 'crossroads' was established.

Thus, using a moving focal point in the landscape – the visual impression taken in by a person when changing positions – has been part of the Arne Kruse Method for decades. In combining what we can factually see in the landscape with information from other sources, locating a certain place is possible, whether at sea or on land. In Arne's research from Smøla, the information from landscape formation and other visual markers was exploited to draw lines and, in the crossing of these lines, find fishing places. In the Bara experience, the information that enabled us to draw lines through the landscape was obtained from written sources, but permitted a similar technique to spot a location – the crossing of the lines. In both cases, physically standing in the landscape was key to

finding the crossroads in question. 'Focalisation', from the point where one is observing, is decisive to find this intersection. It is a term previously employed by Gérard Genette in his work on narratology, a methodological approach for analyses of texts with a narrative structure, such as historical sources like court records.<sup>10</sup> In Smøla, obtaining the required information depended on a fisherman who could move the focal point – his field of vision – and take measurements in order for several directional lines to meet. In Bara, it was necessary to stand at one definite point to be able to find the field. 'Focalisation' is thus an important concept to denote the Arne Kruse Method.

Interdisciplinary approaches are another characteristic of Arne's work, identifiable from his master's thesis to the research he carried out thirty years later. His thesis demonstrates a diligent researcher, who, through his analyses of phonetical and grammatical elements of *médnamn*, worked in a clearly interdisciplinary fashion. The same interdisciplinary approach is seen in the Bara experience through his interest in language: close reading and interpretation of a historical source, as well as the etymological interpretation of the name Bara.

Place-names are of particular interest to Arne. This was where he started, using place-names to denote fishing places, and this is a constant path he has continually travelled along in his later studies. There are more elements to his scholarly work, however. The examples above demonstrate that, even in his master's thesis, Arne was a researcher who heeded landscape in his analyses of place-names, yet inserted many other threads of interpretation into his scholarly work – particularly linguistics, championing interdisciplinarity from the very beginning of his career.

Interdisciplinarity is a keyword of Arne's research, and involves intersections between (comparative) linguistics, history,

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10. Genette 1980; 1988; 1993, 55-56.

geography, archaeology, etymology, international transmission, and *histoire croisée*. He is always searching for etymological explanations, whether from a Nordic perspective (Old Norse, Icelandic) or a Scottish one (Gaelic, Old Norse). Bringing in etymology is a compulsory part of Arne's research in order to find the appropriate origin and time period of place-names.

### Arne Kruse's mentor

I would like to say a few words about a person who has certainly motivated and influenced Arne Kruse as a scholar – Nils Hallan, who was Arne's supervisor during his master's thesis.<sup>11</sup> Hallan, based at the University of Trondheim, was one of Norway's most renowned experts on place-names. For a number of years, from 1976 onwards, he was a *statsstipendiat*, a scholarly position appointed by the Norwegian state.

Hallan always stuck to a down-to-earth interpretation of place-names. He argued that a simple, common-sense interpretation of a place-name was often the most likely one – a fact I will return to below – and he made an impact on a generation of students from the University of Trondheim in arguing for a down-to-earth interpretation of place-names. According to him, if there was a logical interpretation for the name related to landscape, language, and/or culture in the local area, this option should be preferred.

I think that Hallan, as Arne's mentor and supervisor, strengthened not just one approach of Arne Kruse's

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11. Nils Hallan (1926–1997), Norwegian historian and *statsstipendiat*. Educated as teacher; worked as teacher, journalist and director of museum in Mo i Rana until 1976, when he was appointed *statsstipendiat*, and connected to the Department of History and Department of Nordic Studies at the University of Trondheim.

interpretations of place-names, but has also, in a broader sense, paved the way for a basic pragmatic nuance that is included in the Arne Kruse Method. The methodology applied by Arne never enters into the esoteric or speculative. Instead, it is firmly grounded and relies, for part of its argumentation, on common people's knowledge over the course of generations. The practical act of standing in a landscape is echoed in this approach.

### Exploration of language

I have titled this chapter 'Language and Landscape', and have already pointed to landscape as a long-lasting field of research in Arne's work. In what follows, I would like to demonstrate the role of language in the two research articles I have written together with Arne Kruse in recent years. Both articles are based on court records from the witchcraft trials in Finnmark, an area in northern Norway which suffered a severe persecution of witches in the period 1600–1692.

The first article we authored together focused on the interpretation of the place-name Ballvollen, allegedly the site of witches' gatherings on the island of Vardø, in Finnmark.<sup>12</sup> The name featured in confessions in witchcraft trials during the period 1621–1624, but not before and not after these years. It is not known as a place-name in Vardø.<sup>13</sup> The article deals with the exploration of the name as related to the transmission of particular demonological ideas.

The name Ballvollen has a corresponding name in Scotland: Ball Ley, located in Orkney, which also occurs in witchcraft records as a place for witches' gatherings. It is argued that John

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12. Kruse and Willumsen 2014.

13. *Ibid.*: 407–424.

Cunningham, a Scotsman who entered the service of the Danish king and was appointed district governor in Finnmark, brought with him demonological ideas from Scotland to Finnmark.<sup>14</sup> As Cunningham knew about the Scottish notion of the Ball Ley, and was versed in the Danish language, he was able to introduce the name Ballvollen in Finnmark. During interrogation in witchcraft trials in a Vardø courtroom, he translated the Scottish name Ball Ley into the Norwegian name Ballvollen. The possibility of connecting linguistic markers to the transfer of ideas and to identifiable persons provides a strong argument for transfer of ideas.

The place-name Ballvollen was of special interest for us as authors, because it was so short-lived and only related to witches' gatherings. Arne's great competence in place-name research, as well as his sharp analysis of courtroom discourse, contributed valuable insights into a possible linguistic transfer during the interrogation. Interesting discussions arose between Arne and myself, related to how the interrogation might have taken place and the impact of John Cunningham's bilingual competence, leading to an ad hoc translation.

The interpretation of the two language elements in Ballvollen and Ball Ley clearly pointed in the same direction as Nils Hallan's understanding – namely, the first part interpreted as a ball, the second part interpreted as a field. It later turned out that Hallan himself had written an article on Ballvollen, arguing for the same interpretation Arne and I reached on an independent basis.<sup>15</sup> Hallan must also have found the name Ballvollen very special. Exactly where on the island of Vardø this field was situated is not known, so there remains an enigma connected to this place-name.

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14. Willumsen 2013; Willumsen and Baptie 2013.

15. Hallan 1975: 276–287.

During our work on the article on the place-name Ballvollen, I learned of Arne's interest and love of language. His need to scrutinise linguistic expressions in order to find new explanations, to ask challenging questions, is characteristic of his attitude. This courage leads to posing new research questions, finding new explanations, and suggesting new explanatory paradigms. His need to turn another stone, to look for possibilities that have not been scrutinised before, is a wonderful quality to possess as a scholar.

The aim of our next joint article was to map out a fascinating transnational path regarding the transfer of ideas on witchcraft.<sup>16</sup> The article demonstrates how language has the ability to carry and transport an ideological doctrine across national and linguistic borders – in this case, knowledge directly related to the learned European doctrine of demonology, which influenced witchcraft persecution in Finnmark.

By tracing certain linguistic markers, which can be associated with the ideology of the demonologists, cognate words can be found in the source material on both sides of the North Sea in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. These findings offer direct evidence for transmission of certain ideas linked to them. Through concrete examples from Scotland and Finnmark, it is argued that a direct oral transmission is evident, and that the transmission revolved around two individuals: King James VI of Scotland and the 'king' of Vardøhus, district governor John Cunningham. The article is a continuation of the research questions posed in the paper on Ballvollen, and includes source material from both Finnmark and Scotland. The linguistic arguments offered in the article are new, highlighting the possibility of connecting linguistic markers to the transfer of ideas and to identifiable persons.

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16. Kruse and Willumsen 2020.



As for linguistic analysis, particular attention is paid to the phrase 'master and admiral'. This expression occurs during the North Berwick trials in the interrogation of Euphame MacCalzean (1591),<sup>17</sup> and in the trial of Kirsten Sørensdatter in Finnmark (1621).<sup>18</sup> During the former interrogation, she is led to admit that there is truth in the accusation that Robert Greirsoun is 'youre [her] admerall and maister man'.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the entire panic of 1620–1621 in Finnmark, the word 'admiral' and the extended phrase *mester och Admiral* ('master and admiral') were in use. When the trial of Kirsten Sørensdatter started, seven trials were already finished, and seven accused women had confessed that Kirsten was their 'master and admiral'. Threatened with both torture and the water ordeal, Kirsten confessed a couple of days later, this time likewise 'in the very own presence of the illustrious Hans Kønigh',<sup>20</sup> that she had practised witchcraft and that she was guilty in several of the accusations 'except that she was not their Admiral'.<sup>21</sup>

The article includes reflections on linguistic context. In the phrase 'master and admiral', the command structure is emphasised. The fact that the metaphor is sourced from a naval setting is initially surprising, as those charged are accused of witchcraft. It has the effect, however, of strengthening the aspect of an urgent and absolute institution: in a fleet and on a ship, there are no questions of authority and obedience. Further, features of orality are paid attention to. As a doublet, wherein the two words both indicate authority, it is an example of a semantic repetition

17. National Record Office of Scotland, Circuit Court Books, JC2/2, f. 224a.

18. Regional State Archives of Tromsø, The Archive of Finnmark District Magistrate, 6, ff. 10v–12v.

19. National Record Office of Scotland, Circuit Court Books, JC2/2, f. 224a.

20. Regional State Archives of Tromsø, The Archive of Finnmark District Magistrate, 6, f. 28r.

21. *Ibid.*: f. 29r.

or pleonasm, whose the first word of provides an expectation that another word with more or less similar meaning will follow suit. This is a significant feature of oral culture, where semantic redundancy functions as an aid to keep both the speaker and the listener on track.<sup>22</sup> It also has a function of a mnemonic tool.

Through accurate linguistic analysis, the article argues that a linguistic phrase is able to convey meaning. The linguistic argument is that the joining of the two words 'master' and 'admiral' – as a *meme* – can convey a notion, carry a whole dogma in three words, and relate to a doctrine of leadership, one being in charge of a group performing collective witchcraft. Not 'master' alone, not 'admiral' alone, but the joining of the two words.

When we read the court records from Finnmark aloud, it was Arne who observed that the same joining of words took place in Scotland and in Finnmark – I had not noticed this before. This moment of revelation made us both understand something about transference of ideas through linguistic expressions. One of the words had not been enough to prove a conveyance of the same ideas, but both words in a string in two countries is a proof of transference – it is not haphazard that these three words are expressed. Although the word order in the Scottish court records is reversed – i.e. 'admerall and maister man' – the doublet 'master and admiral' or more common 'master and commander', has become set in a fixed and non-reversible word order in Modern English and Scots, and this seems to be the most usual word order in Older Scots as well.<sup>23</sup> This way of scrutinising linguistic expressions, to observe and examine not only every word but also the linguistic surroundings and the context of the expression, is a quality that Arne has as a scholar. It was also Arne's suggestion to title the article 'Magic Language'.

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22. Ong 1989: 39–41.

23. Kruse and Willumsen 2020: 22.

## Conclusion

I would like to thank Arne Kruse for his insightful contributions to the study of landscape and language – wherein research threads of pragmatic, empirical, theoretical, methodical, and interdisciplinary character are interwoven in ‘the Arne Kruse Method’.



Figure 5: Arne Kruse and Liv Helene Willumsen in East Lothian.  
Photo: Brigitte Guenier-Kruse, used with kind permission.

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