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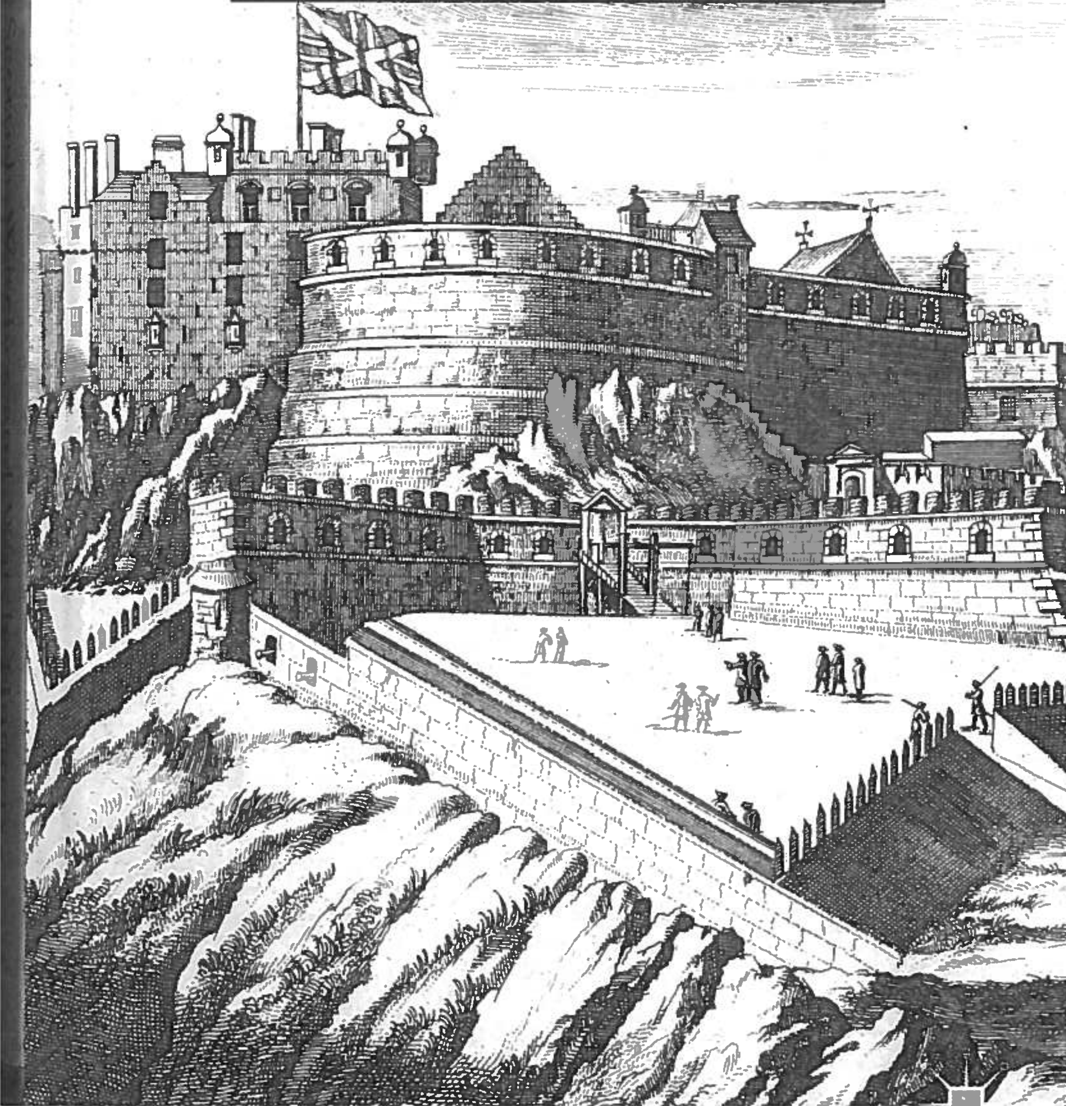
Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters

Edited by Julian Goodare



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STATE AND SOCIETY IN EARLY MODERN SCOTLAND

Scottish Witches and Witch-Hunters

Edited by

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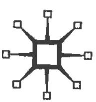

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35. NRS, Dame Jean Lyon to James Lumsden of Airdrie, 18 January 1589, GD150/1956.
36. This would have enabled Lumsden, once the daughter reached the marriageable age of 12, to offer her a suitable marriage partner and to collect a penalty in the event of a refusal. Lumsden and Jean seem thus to have expected at this point to remain friends for some considerable time.
37. NRS, Jean Lyon to Lumsden, December 1588, GD150/482.
38. *RPC*, iv, 51.
39. Ibid., 537.
40. *CSP Scot.*, x, 771.
41. Sir James Balfour Paul (ed.), *The Scots Peerage*, 9 vols. (Edinburgh, 1904–1914), viii, 100.
42. Fraser, *Douglas Book*, iv, 187.
43. *Registrum Honoris De Morton*, 2 vols., ed. Thomas Thomson, Alexander Macdonald and Cosmo Innes (Bannatyne Club, 1853), i, 170.
44. Ibid.
45. Winifred Coutts, *The Business of the College of Justice in 1600* (Stair Society, 2003), 183–4.
46. Sizer, 'Douglas, William, seventh Earl of Morton (1582–1648)', *ODNB*.
47. Fraser, *Douglas Book*, iv, 40–1.
48. Normand and Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft*, 152.
49. Ibid., 157.
50. Ibid., 168.
51. Ibid., 169.
52. Ibid., 166–7.
53. Fraser, *Douglas Book*, iv, 187.
54. Ibid., 185.
55. Ibid., 249–51.
56. *Calendar of Border Papers*, i, 487.
57. Brian P. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics and Religion* (New York, 2008), 34.
58. Normand and Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft*, 378.
59. For a case of husband-murder in 1600, see Keith M. Brown, 'The laird, his daughter, her husband and the minister: unravelling a popular ballad', in Roger Mason and Norman Macdougall (eds.), *People and Power in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1992), 104–25. The wife's crime in this case was murder, but, as was being envisaged with Jean Lyon, she had not carried out the killing herself but had instigated a servant to do it.

3

Exporting the Devil across the North Sea: John Cunningham and the Finnmark Witch-Hunt

Liv Helene Willumsen

European witchcraft trials were unevenly distributed from one district to a neighbouring one. The question why this happened still has to be answered, but there is consensus among witchcraft scholars that a complex of several factors together caused the trials, including top-down as well as bottom-up explanation models. This chapter will concentrate on the personal factor: how governmental representatives influenced the upsurge of witchcraft trials in their areas. One person, the Scotsman John Cunningham, and his influence on the seventeenth-century witch-hunt in Finnmark, the northernmost district of Norway, of which he was governor, will be highlighted.

In this chapter, it will be argued that John Cunningham's appointment in 1619 announced a new era for the Finnmark witch-hunt – a witch-hunt that had started in 1601 and would continue till 1692. This remote region experienced one of the most intense witch-hunts in Europe, relative to its population. Whereas the first two decades of the Finnmark witchcraft trials were focused on traditional sorcery carried out on an individual basis, Cunningham added new ideas. These ideas centred about the learned doctrine of demonology and referred to witchcraft performed on a collective basis, with the Devil's pact as its core.[1] When these thoughts were introduced into the witch-hunt, they changed judicial practice as well as the contents of the accused persons' confessions. Demonological ideas appeared in the court records. A specific Scottish connection can be argued on linguistic grounds; there are strong indications that expressions found in the accused persons' confessions during the Scottish witchcraft trials are also found in similar contexts in Finnmark.

I

John Cunningham entered the service of the Danish–Norwegian King Christian IV on 7 June 1603, employed as a naval captain under the name of Hanns Køningham.[2] The employment had effect from 20 January 1603. Cunningham was installed as district governor of Vardøhus and Finnmark on 26 March 1619.[3] He was based at Vardøhus Castle, near the Russian border. He kept his position as district governor until 1651, the year that he died.[4]

Cunningham's life was a varied one, even before he moved to the extreme north of Europe in 1619. He was an illegitimate son of John Cunningham of Barns, who had a son, John, who was legitimated on 16 April 1596.[5] He was probably born in *c*.1575. Barns was in the parish of Crail in Fife. Our John Cunningham's grandfather was William Cunningham of West Barns, from whom a continuous line of ancestors may be traced.[6] William Cunningham was the head of a large family, whose members can be traced in archival sources buying and selling property to each other related to marriage and death.[7] They were well-to-do people, burgesses of Crail with influence in local society. John Cunningham's contemporary relative Alexander Cunningham has a memorial inside the kirk of Crail, a carved oak panel with the initials A. C. on either side of the family coat of arms, a shake-fork with a star in chief.[8] John Cunningham's own coat of arms survives in Norway; this also has a shake-fork with a star in chief, with the name Hans Koninck, and in addition a unicorn. It is carved on the pulpit of the old Vardø church, today preserved in Trondheim.[9]

Unlike several of his cousins, John Cunningham did not study at the nearby University of St Andrews.[10] He was a man of the sea, and probably had more in common with his relative Alan Cunningham, who in 1600 paid money to get an English merchant ship released from the *Dunkirker*, a Spanish warship.[11] In several contexts John Cunningham is said 'to have travelled much and far, before he settled in Denmark',[12] to have been a 'widely travelled' man[13] and to have looked widely around in the world.[14] It has also been suggested that Cunningham was employed in the Danish navy due to his knowledge of 'Arctic waters'.[15] A contemporary source says that in his younger years Cunningham had sailed to 'Frisland' and other land towards the western side of the Atlantic.[16] When John Cunningham entered the service of King Christian IV, it was on King James's 'request and recommendation'.[17] Cunningham was allegedly sent to the Danish king in a costly ship at King James's coronation, thus giving rise to the name Køning Hans.[18]

John Cunningham married in Copenhagen in 1607, with King Christian IV present.[19]

There was a friendly relationship between King James and King Christian at the time Cunningham was employed, with frequent exchange of letters during the summer of 1603. James was invited to Denmark for the baptism of Christian's newborn son, though he declined to cross the North Sea again.[20] Cunningham must have been favoured by James in the years before he left for Denmark, and this favour continued after 1603. As a result of an apparent controversy between Cunningham and King Christian in 1605, Cunningham contacted King James, who wrote to his brother-in-law that

> the noble man, John Cunningham, descended from Scotland, who wished to devote his work to Your Serene Highness, we owe and give you our great thanks; and we thank you even more because he acknowledges and professes that he was received very kindly. What therefore, is there that we are requesting of Your Serene Highness on his behalf? Certainly that he may always be deemed worthy of the same kind and generous will, because that fact might seem doubtful to him. But since we favour him and wish him well, it will be very pleasing to us if he feels that your kindness has been strengthened and increased more and more at our request. And this will be reckoned by us as among the very many other proofs and indications of your good will toward us.[21]

The letter shows that King James knew Cunningham well and wanted him to be treated with respect. Christian IV seems to have taken the request seriously, because shortly afterwards Cunningham was entrusted with a difficult and important task. He was appointed captain of the ship *Trost* (*Thrush*), one of three ships which left Denmark in May 1605 on an expedition to Greenland.[22] The principal pilot of the *Trost*, James Hall, portrayed his captain in his diary as an eminent seaman and strong leader – loyal to the king, uncompromising, persevering and decisive.[23] When the ship encountered great icebergs near Greenland, the men were determined to return home, but 'the Captaine as an honest and resolute Gentleman stood by mee, protesting to stand by me so long as his blood was warme, for the good of the Kings Majestie, who had set us forth, and also to the performing of the Voyage'.[24] During this expedition several places in Greenland were put on the map, among them Mount Cunningham, Queen Anne's Cape and 'King Christianus Foord [*fiord*]'.[25]

However, Cunningham's unsavoury qualities should not be overlooked. He was characterised by people who met him as a strange and peculiar man, especially when drunk.[26] During the 1605 expedition, two men from the crew, 'both being Malefactors', were set ashore in Greenland, with some provisions to keep them alive.[27] The ship brought back to Denmark four natives from Greenland and, because they were troublesome on board, Cunningham shot one of them to make an example of him. The other three were taken to Denmark, and reportedly behaved well and attracted public interest.[28]

The following year, 1606, King Christian sent an expedition of five ships to Greenland.[29] John Cunningham was this time captain of the ship *Den røde Løve* (*The red lion*).[30] During this expedition he made a landing on the Labrador coast of modern Canada. It has been pointed out that 'by laying claim to Greenland on behalf of Christian IV he ironically placed his two benefactors at loggerheads'.[31] After the expeditions to Greenland, Cunningham was for several years a sea captain in the North Sea.[32] He took part in the Calmar War between Denmark–Norway and Sweden (1611–1613), initially as captain of the *Leopard*.[33] In 1612, Cunningham was captain of the *David*, another royal ship.[34] In time of peace he was often sent out 'to control the monarchy's territorial waters', especially the passage through Øresund.[35]

The new district governor of Finnmark, therefore, was a good seafarer, a man who could take quick decisions and deal with unexpected problems, and a loyal servant. In addition, he was a person who was trusted to deal with the witches of the north – a problem of which the king had become aware during his visit to the northernmost parts of his kingdom, Finnmark and Kola, in 1599.[36] The ethnic conditions in the very north of King Christian's kingdom were distinctive, with Norwegian and Sami populations living side by side. Sami males had a reputation for sorcery all over Europe at the time, being particularly well versed in selling wind to seafarers.[37] The new century made the king even more concerned about the danger of sorcery. The sudden death in 1601 of the governor of Finnmark, Hans Olsen Kofoed, was blamed on Sami sorcery, and the result was the first two witchcraft trials in Finnmark of Christen the Tailor and the Sami Morten Olsen.[38] No wonder that Christian IV in 1609 wrote to the next district governor, Claus Gagge, warning him to beware of witchcraft, especially Sami sorcery, and to show no mercy in such cases.[39] One of the main reasons for Cunningham's appointment was allegedly the king's expectation that he would prosecute Sami sorcerers with a strong hand.[40]

II

Cleansing Finnmark of witches was only one of several demanding tasks Cunningham had to undertake as district governor. The king needed a strong man in several respects watching the northern borders of his kingdom. The fortress of Vardøhus had to guard the borders and the king's seas. The fortress had to be expanded. Churches had to be repaired.[41] Taxes had to be collected even in the most remote areas, among them the border areas towards Russia and Sweden. In some of these areas, for instance Kola, Russia also collected taxes. Cunningham applied in 1621 to cancel the taxation journey to Kola in order to save expenses, but the king ordered that he should continue.[42] The same point was repeated related to the Swedes.[43]

Finnmark had approximately 3,000 inhabitants in 1600, mainly peasants and fishermen.[44] The Bergen trade was important to the economy: fishermen from the north of Norway sailed with small cargo boats called 'jekter' to Bergen to sell stockfish in exchange for flour and other types of food.[45] The Bergen merchants, with roots going back to the Hanseatic League, had a monopoly of the Finnmark trade. However, in the period 1500–1650, the economy had shifted from expansion to stagnation.[46] People struggled to pay their taxes, and Cunningham applied successfully in 1628 to the king to get tax relief for the common people due to poor fisheries over many years.[47]

III

The Finnmark witchcraft trials changed character after Cunningham's arrival in 1619. The number of trials increased enormously from 1620 onwards, as the first panic started that year. Whereas before 1620 the focus was on traditional sorcery, there was now a shift towards demonological ideas, as seen through questions posed during interrogation as well as through the accused persons' confessions. While prosecutions of men and Sami sorcery often occurred during the first two decades of the witch-hunt in Finnmark, prosecutions of women and demonological witchcraft came to the fore after 1620. Traditional Sami sorcery was seen as an individual skill, displaying inherent magical power. Contrary to this was witchcraft learned from a pact with the Devil. Collective performance of witchcraft took over, highlighting witches' meetings and collective witchcraft operations.[48] The district of Finnmark was administratively divided into East Finnmark and West

Finnmark. East Finnmark bordered to Russia and included the fishing villages Vardø and Vadsø, with Vardøhus Castle as the most important place. West Finnmark covered the western part of the district, including the fishing villages Hammerfest and Honningsvåg. Whereas witchcraft trials in Finnmark before 1620 were scattered in East as well as West Finnmark, after 1620 the witchcraft trials were centred round Vardøhus Castle. So we see changes around 1620 related to the scale, the content and the location of the trials.

During the whole period of the Finnmark witchcraft trials, 135 persons were accused of witchcraft.[49] Of these, ninety-one persons were executed, an execution rate of 67 per cent. Among the accused persons, 82 per cent were females and 18 per cent males. This is similar to the percentage we find in most European countries, wherein women were clearly in the majority.[50] However, in a few countries and areas, for instance Iceland, Estonia, Russia and Normandy, fewer than half of those who were accused of witchcraft were women.[51] The male dominance was particularly clear in Iceland, where accusations were based on *maleficium*, not demonology. Only ten out of one hundred and twenty witchcraft trials concerned women, and only one woman was burned out of twenty-two in total.[52] In Finnmark, among the accused males, the Sami men were in a majority, as two-thirds of the males were Samis.[53]

During the first two decades of the seventeenth century, nine persons were accused of witchcraft, all executed. Demonological ideas were not mentioned during these trials, neither was the figure of the Devil. The collective element implied in witches' meetings and collective sorcery operations was absent. In 1617, a decree was issued for Denmark–Norway, stating that the 'real witches' were those who had sworn themselves to the Devil. With this decree, demonological elements had found their way into the laws of Denmark–Norway. For Finnmark, more than other regions in Norway with other ethnic conditions, this decree had the effect that demonological witchcraft and learned witchcraft ideas were adopted. In this way, the ground was prepared for a type of witch-hunting based on learned ideological grounds. The intensity of witchcraft persecution was particularly high in the district of Finnmark compared to the rest of Norway. With only 0.8 per cent of Norway's population at the time, Finnmark had 16 per cent of all Norwegian witchcraft trials and 31 per cent of all death sentences in witchcraft trials.[54] This points to the personal factor as important in promoting the prosecution of witches. The appointment of a new district governor is the most likely explanation for the new direction the Finnmark witch-hunt took after 1620.

IV

What kind of ideas about witchcraft did Cunningham bring with him to Finnmark? To answer this question we have to turn to the situation in Scotland and the early witchcraft trials there. Among the episodes that stand out as periods of high-level accusation and prosecution of witches there are two early ones, the 1590–1591 and 1597 panics.

During the North Berwick panic of 1590–1591, several persons from East Lothian and Edinburgh were accused of witchcraft.[55] The initial accusations were related to the raising of a storm against the ship of King James VI's future bride, Princess Anne from Denmark, sister of Christian IV, who was on her way to Scotland to meet her husband-to-be.[56] The North Berwick witches, in alliance with Danish witches, were believed to have raised a storm so that the princess's ship had to turn back to Norway. The 1590–1591 panic shows clear demonological ideas, including witches' meetings and digging up corpses near the church.[57]

John Cunningham had witnessed this panic as a young man, as the alleged evildoings had taken place near his birthplace, Barns in Fife, from where he could look across the firth to North Berwick. In an oral society, as the seventeenth century was, the stories emerging from the trials must have been hot news for people living nearby. In addition to the North Berwick cases, Cunningham must have known about early witchcraft trials in his home district of Fife.[58]

The other Scottish witchcraft panic that Cunningham probably knew thoroughly was the panic of 1597. This panic took place mainly in Aberdeenshire, Fife, Perthshire, Glasgow and Stirlingshire, and has been suggested to have involved about 400 cases, half of them resulting in executions.[59] Stuart Macdonald documents twenty-six cases in Fife in 1597, and there were certainly numerous further cases.[60] The 1597 hunt particularly affected the presbyteries of Kirkcaldy and St Andrews (including Crail).[61] King James was present during several witchcraft trials there in July. The 1597 panic was also noteworthy because many suspected persons were subjected to the water ordeal, which was unusual in Scotland. The water ordeal would be used extensively in Finnmark, as we shall see. Demonological notions were present during the 1597 panic, with the Devil's pact as well as the witches' sabbath as part of the confessions.[62] Like the 1590–1591 panic, this had a combination of witchcraft and treason at its centre. It certainly would have attracted public interest. Cunningham would surely have known about the trials, not least because some witches were prosecuted near Crail.

Cunningham's early years thus brought him into contact with two monarchs both concerned with hunting witches and with a strong anxiety for the evil deeds witches could perform. King James's active role during the early Scottish panics shows his strong conviction about what the witches could do. He was the only monarch in Europe to publish a treatise on demonology, *Daemonologie*, written between the 1590–1591 and the 1597 panics, and published in 1597.[63] King Christian IV was also a strong believer in the evildoings of witches, with a particular fear of the witches in the north of his kingdom. The influence on Cunningham in this respect must have gone only in one direction.

V

The echo of European demonological ideas was clearly heard during the first Finnmark panic, in 1620–1621. Thirteen women were implicated, twelve of whom were executed. The main accusation concerned a shipwreck in 1617, when ten boats with forty men from Kiberg and Vardø went down on Christmas Eve. The trial of a Sami woman, Karen Edisdatter, who was brought before the court on 13 May 1620, was the first.[64] The district governor, Cunningham, was present as well as the appeal court judge.[65] Central demonological elements, like the pact with the Devil, were now heard in the courtrooms in Finnmark for the first time.[66] Karen Edisdatter was accused of casting spells on persons, causing sickness and death. She was tried by the water ordeal and confessed afterwards as follows:

> The first time she was involved with the Devil was when she was but a lass and was tending herds in the fields. A heaviness came over her near a hill, and presently a big headless man came to her asking her whether she was asleep. She said, I am neither asleep nor awake. In his hand, he was holding a large ring of keys which he offered her, saying, If you accept these keys, all you wish to undertake in this world will come to pass. She noticed he had a beautiful ribbon and she said, Give me that ribbon, I do not know how to use the keys. She got her ribbon, and when she reached home, she became demented, and since then, she confessed, the Devil has always been with her, unless the minister was present and now, in the presence of the Reverend Master Mogens, while he prepared her spiritually, she confessed that she was to blame for the death of the said Abraham Nielsen and for the said Johannis's sake [*sic*], as has been touched upon.[67]

Karen Edisdatter denounced two other women, thus introducing the collective aspect of demonological trials:

> She confessed she was to blame for all of their deaths, for as soon as her anger flared and she said, may the Evil One take you, or if she hoped evil might strike them, the Evil One would be there at once. At the height of her distress, she screamed that Rasmus Joensen's Lisebet in Omgangh and Morten Nielsen's Anne in Langefiørd were both just as guilty as she in the handling of witchcraft. On the aforementioned grounds, and in accordance with her own confession, the court finds that she is to be punished in fire at the stake.[68]

We next see the same elements in the confession of Kirsten Sørensdatter, originally from Helsingør in Denmark, now living in the small fishing village of Kiberg in Finnmark. She was denounced by seven other women. On 26 April 1621, she was brought before the court at a session held at Vardøhus Castle, with the bailiff, the magistrate, the jurors and 'the illustrious Hans Køning' (Cunningham) present.[69] Kirsten Sørensdatter first denied knowing witchcraft:

> His Royal Majesty's bailiff, Søffren Nielsen, asked her why so many witches have denounced her for being familiar with witchcraft and sorcery, adding that if this was the case, and if she were willing to confess of her own accord, she would not be tortured. She fiercely denied she had any such skills; they had slandered her cruelly. Since seven witches have denounced her for being familiar with the craft, as she herself has heard from their testimonies about her, and since, according to their sentences that have been recited to her, she was their master and admiral and also learned a bit from them, the court found that she should be tried by the water ordeal.[70]

After this she confessed:

> When she heard she was to be tried by the water ordeal, she said she would confess what she knew of her own accord. First, that when she was sixteen years old, she went to Helsingør, to an old woman whose name she could not recall. One day, as she was on her way into the fields to fetch some geese for the old woman, Satan came to her in the likeness of a dog, saying, If you agree to learn witchcraft, all you undertake in this world will succeed. However, she had to forswear God and her baptismal pact with God; and he followed her into the

> house to the old woman, who then read to her and taught her and tested her abilities with a ball of yarn on water. It rolled around on the water, and that amused her.[71]

The formulation about forswearing God and the baptismal pact is well known from witchcraft trials in other places, including Scotland; so is the image of Satan appearing in the shape of a dog.[72] Kirsten Sørensdatter, like many others in the seventeenth century, went north to Finnmark and settled there.

In addition to confessing to the Devil's pact, witches' meetings and collective witchcraft operations, fantastic elements were brought into the confessions – particularly the long distances witches managed to fly to attend meetings. The witches could fly from Vardø in Finnmark to the Lyder Horn, a well-known witches' mountain near Bergen, in a short time:

> She confessed she went carousing with the others, just as they have confessed about her, except that she was not here on Balduolden[73] last Christmas Eve; nor has she been on Lyder Horn since that summer when she sailed south, and there had been a whole bevy of them and she did not recognise nearly everyone. When asked if she was the cause of Hendrich Meyer's death, she confessed that they had a quarrel about a drying rack, and for that reason she had cursed him and wished him the worst, because when you are angry with someone you are not that person's well-wisher.[74]

Shape-shifting was another fantastic aspect of these witchcraft trials, and it was not always necessary to be shaped as birds to fly quickly:

> Moreover, she confessed that last Christmas night, Marrite Oelsdaatter, in the likeness of a dog, fetched her from Bergen and put her down here in Vardøen on Balduolden. As for herself, she was in the likeness of a bitch. Several others had been there, two of them in the shapes of wolves, one of which was thin and long and black around the head; that was Bertell Hendrichsen who did the writing for them. The other was fat with a white chest; that was Eluffue Oelsen. And they drank and danced and played, and Else Knudtzdaatter waited on them. She also confessed that Else's daughter Mette was with them, too, in the likeness of a grey cat. She generally confirmed everything the others had testified about her except that she was their admiral. She would gladly stake her life upon the truth of what she had said, and accept the final rites.[75]

Shape-shifting and flying are similarly found in the early Scottish panics, for instance at the convention in Atholl in 1597 where 2,300 witches allegedly participated, 'and the Devill amongst them'.[76]

During Cunningham's period in office fifty-two persons were accused of witchcraft, of whom forty-one were executed. About half of the death sentences were passed at Vardøhus. Torture was frequently used, sometimes applied after sentence was passed in order to extort names of accomplices. Of those who received death sentences, twenty were tried by the water ordeal. Demonological elements recurred frequently.

VI

The most specific evidence of Scottish influence on the Finnmark witchcraft trials is linguistic. When particular words and linguistic images are found on both sides of the North Sea, but not in European witchcraft documents elsewhere, this cannot be accidental. In the following I will draw attention to two such linguistic images found both in Scottish and in Finnmark witchcraft trial documents.

The first of the expressions has to do with witches' meetings and the wording is that one person is 'admiral and master' for other witches during a witches' meeting. In the Scottish material this expression is first found in Euphemia MacCalzean's case in 1591. Several points concerning persons she had harmed, witches' meetings and witchcraft operations lead up to this one:

> Item i[n]dytit and accusit for ane conventioun haldin be yow and utheris notorious wiches youre associatis att the BrouneHoillis quhair ye and thay tuik the sea Ro[ber]t Greirsoun bei[n]g youre *admerall and m[aiste]r* man past owre the sea in ridillis to ane schip q[uhai]r ye enterit w[i]th the devill yo[u]r m[aiste]r th[air]in q[uhai]r eftir ye had eittin and drinkkin ye caist owr ane blak dog that skippit under the schip and th[air]by ye leving the devill yo[u]r m[aiste]r th[air]in quha drownit the schip be tumbling q[uhair]by the quene wes putt bak be storme.[77]
>
> (*my italics*)

The expression 'admiral and master' is an interesting one. The 'admiral' in Scotland was an officer of the crown; his job was to organise

and command ships for the king, and to act as a judge in the admiral's court. At the time of the North Berwick panic, the admiral of Scotland was Francis Stewart, earl of Bothwell, the king's enemy on whose behalf the witches were accused of acting. The title was used by Bothwell himself, but he could appoint one or more deputes to do the actual work.[78] In England, too, it could be used in maritime connections, through the phrase 'admiral of the sea'.[79]

We also find the same expression, one person being an admiral for other persons at a witches' meeting, in the case of Kirsten Sørensdatter mentioned above: 'she was their master and admiral and also learned a bit from them'. Later in the same case a parallel wording is used: 'She generally confirmed everything the others had testified about her except that she was their admiral.' The idea of a military ranking system among the witches is found in Bohuslän in Sweden, where a woman led a 'Compagnie'.[80] But the crucial expression of being an 'admiral' does not occur. The meaning of the word 'admiral' in Danish and Norwegian would in a general sense be 'a naval officer'. In the setting of the court, it could additionally have referred to Cunningham himself, as he was known to have been a naval captain. This similarity is a strong argument that the image of a woman being the admiral for other witches is taken from Scotland and brought to Finnmark orally – presumably by the district governor himself. The expression could then have been spread among the common people as a result of interrogation at the court.

The other expression found in Scottish as well as in Finnmark witchcraft cases is the word 'Ball-Ley'. In the case of Barbara Bowndie (Orkney, 1644), she was repeatedly asked what she knew about Marjorie Paplay, who had been denounced for witchcraft earlier: 'Quarto, being posed in particular, concerning the Devill his apparitions in diverse shapes *upon the Ball-Ley*, and his having carnall copulation with Marjorie Paplay at that tyme, as a man hes adoe with a woman'.[81] (*my italics*) A 'ley' was a tract of grassland, meadow or pasture; it is also found as a second element in Scottish place-names.[82] With the addition of the element 'ball', today we would call this a playing field or a sports field, somewhere where ball games are played. Locations where games were held may be traced in place-names in Orkney back to the fourteenth century, like 'Leik-kvi' or 'Leikakvi'.[83] The word 'Ball-greene' or 'Balgrene' is used about a green on which ball games are played. The words 'Ba'Fields' and 'Ba'greens' are used with the same meaning at the time.[84] The word 'Ball-grene' is mentioned in Scottish court records in 1611.[85]

Several words similar to 'Ball-Ley' are used in Scottish witchcraft documents in the same context as 'Ball-Ley', namely a playing field used as a meeting place for witches and the Devil. In the case of Margaret Duchill, tried before Stirling Court 1659, the word 'croft' is used.[86] Margaret Duchill confessed that Elisabeth Blak came to her and took her to the 'crofts of Alloway', where the Devil came to them.[87] A 'croft' is a piece of enclosed land, or small field, used for tillage or pasture. A witches' meeting at the 'cuning yaird' (rabbit warren) is also mentioned in connection with Duchill.[88]

In Norwegian court records the parallel term is 'Balduolden'. The word is mentioned in the confession of Kirsten Sørensdatter, given on 26 April 1621 at Vardøhus: 'She confessed she went carousing with the others, just as they have confessed about her, except that she was not here *on Balduolden* last Christmas Eve.'[89] (*my italics*) The word next occurs during the interrogation of Mette Thorgiersdatter: 'Bastian Hess asked her whether she, too, was *on Balduolden* in Vardøen last winter, as Kirsten said in her denunciation.'[90] (*my italics*) The word reappears three years later, during the trial of Gundell Olsdatter, which started on 22 April 1624 at Vardøhus:

> On April 25, after she had been sentenced and the sentence had been explained, she confessed, however, without torture, that Oluff Mogensen's wife Ingeborgh from Haffningbergh was with them *on Balduolden* on Christmas night, together with the others, holding a piece of cloth in her hand, with a knot on it. She recognised nobody else, for the others were in the shapes of cats and dogs whereas she ran ahead of them and was shaped as a human, above her belt, but she was not thus shaped below. Now she was tortured and she confessed, in Ingeborgh's presence, that she [*Ingeborgh*] had a tall companion with her, someone in the likeness of a man, but she did not know him.[91]
>
> (*my italics*)

This last example also shows that the interrogator's main intention was to make the accused person confess not only participation at a witches' meeting, but also the Devil's presence there. It seems that the notion of witches' meetings on 'Balduolden' in Vardø was a consistent one, lasting for several years. However, the word does not occur in witchcraft trial records after 1624.

The word 'Balduolden' is a descriptive noun, the first part denoting a ball, the latter part denoting a piece of grassland or turf. Kirsten Sørensdatter uses the word about a place in Vardø where witches' meetings were held, probably a playing field. There is no place today called 'Balduolden' or 'Ballvollen' in Vardø. A somewhat shorter, but similar

word, which also is a descriptive noun, is used in the trial of Lisebet Nilsdatter. In her confession she mentions 'Wolden' in the village Omgang, a word identical with the second element in 'Balduolden'.

When we find exactly the same image of witches' meeting at a 'Ball-Ley' in the Scottish material and 'Balduolden' in the Finnmark material, thus forming a Scottish connection, this is remarkable. When these words with identical meaning and used in the same semantic context are documented on both sides of the North Sea, this cannot be accidental. A link is shown on linguistic grounds.

VII

John Cunningham's influence on the Finnmark witchcraft trials may thus be traced in two ways. In general terms, his arrival at Vardøhus Castle coincided with, and may well have prompted, a shift in the contents and ideas of the trials. In special terms, he is a necessary link with regard to specific words and expressions found in the accused persons' confessions both in Scotland and in Finnmark.

In my view the particular expressions 'admiral' and 'Ball-Ley', used in similar contexts in witchcraft cases in Scotland and Norway, indicate a connection between these two areas as far as the contents of witchcraft trials are concerned. Both expressions are used to express demonological ideas. 'Admiral' refers to the ranking system among the witches. It also denotes the collective aspect of demonological witchcraft, in the sense that an accused person's confession gives information about many persons participating in a witches' meeting, thus making it possible for the witch-hunters to prosecute a group. 'Ball-Ley' denotes a place for a witches' meeting, and, in the examples above, the Devil was present at the meetings. When these expressions are known in Scottish witchcraft documents and found in Finnmark in court records after John Cunningham arrived there, there is reason to believe that the expressions are orally transmitted from one area to the other. Both linguistic images are distinct and easy to remember. In local societies, all news and traditions had to be transmitted orally. There had to be a person to transmit new ideas, including ideas related to witchcraft. John Cunningham's arrival in Finnmark was an opportunity for demonological notions from Scotland to acquire a foothold in Europe's northernmost land.

Notes

1. Liv Helene Willumsen, 'Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway' (University of Edinburgh PhD thesis, 2008), 8–11.

2. In Danish his title was 'Skibshöffuidzmannd', meaning the leader of a crew; captain or mate. NAD, Danske Kancelli 232, Sjællandske Registre 1572–1660, Arkivnr. B 54D, protokoll 1596–1604, fos. 405v.–406r.
3. Otto Gr. Lundh and Johan Ernst Sars (eds.), *Norske Rigs-Registranter* (Christiania, 1861–1891), v, 12–14.
4. Buried 9 December 1651 Eggeslevmagle church: NAD, Church records Eggeslevmagle parish 1651.
5. *RMS*, vi, 430. This corresponds with information in Rune Hagen, 'At the edge of civilisation: John Cunningham, lensmann of Finnmark, 1619–51', in Andrew Mackillop and Steve Murdoch (eds.), *Military Governors and Imperial Frontiers, c.1600–1800* (Leiden, 2003). However, in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Hagen has Alexander Cunningham as John Cunningham's father and Christiane Wood as his mother. This cannot be correct, as this couple had lived apart for two years in 1561 and were divorced in 1563: *St Andrews Kirk Session Register, 1559–1600*, 2 vols., ed. D. Hay Fleming (SHS, 1889–1890), i, 133–5; St Andrews University Library, Dept. of Special Collections, CH2/316/1/1; NRS, Register of Deeds, RD1/6, fo. 133. Research at NRS by Diane Baptie. See Liv Helene Willumsen and Diane Baptie, 'John Cunningham – karriere og bakgrunn', *Norsk slektshistorisk tidsskrift*, 1 (2013), 159–76, at p. 176.
6. Ole Kjølseth, '"Kong Hans" og hans dramatiske løpebane', *Slekt og data*, 4 (1996), 6–9, at p. 6; Willumsen and Baptie, 'Cunningham'; Liv Helene Willumsen and Diane Baptie, 'From Fife to Finnmark – John Cunningham's way to the North', *The Genealogist* (2013, forthcoming).
7. NRS, Register of Deeds, RD1/6, fo. 133; RD1/7, fo. 187; RD1/16, fo. 205.
8. The initials are on either side, with the motto 'Salus per Christum' above: *The Kirk of Crail* (folder published by Crail parish), p. 10. A shake-fork is a figure in the shape of a letter Y, three arms with the ends cut off in a straight line (couped). It is almost entirely confined to Scottish families, and chiefly to those of Cunningham, who bear it in a variety of ways: James Parker, *A Glossary of Terms used in Heraldry* (Oxford, 1894), s.v. Shake-fork.
9. Hans A. K. T. Cappelen, 'Det norske Cunningham-våpnet – en heraldisk identifisering –', *Heraldisk tidsskrift*, no. 26 (1972), 249–61, at pp. 249–50.
10. St Andrews University Library, Dept. of Special Collections, Acta Rectorum 1590–1620, UY305/3.
11. *CSP Scot.*, xiii, II, 659, 664.
12. C. C. A. Gosch (ed.), *The Danish Arctic Expeditions, 1605 to 1620* (Hakluyt Society, 1897), i, pp. xxviii–xxix.
13. C. Pingel, 'Om de vigstigste reiser, som i nyere tider ere foretagne fra Danmark og Norge, for igjen at opsöge det tabte Grönland og at undersöge det gjenfundne' in *Grønlandsk historiske mindesmærker* III (Copenhagen, 1845), 625–794, at p. 671.
14. *Dansk Biografisk Lexikon*, iv (Copenhagen, 1890).
15. *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, iii (3rd edn., Copenhagen, 1979).
16. Claus C. Lyschander, *Den Grønlandske Chronica* (2nd edn., Copenhagen, 1726; orig. publ. 1607), 96. Frisland was an imaginary island, a Venetian fabrication in the North Atlantic. An account of an alleged fourteenth-century voyage, with a map, was published by Nicolo Zeno the Younger in 1558. In 1569, Gerhard Mercator copied the Zeno map into his world map and

in 1595 included Frisland in a separate inset on his map of the North Pole. Thus Frisland came to be known as 'fact' and was copied by other cartographers.
17. NAD, Tyske Kancelli, Udenrigske Afdeling 1223–1770, Topografisk henlagte sager, England Breweksling mellom Kongehusene 1602–1625, 63:2, England AI 85. Letters from King James VI and I to Christian IV dated 18 February 1605.
18. After John Cunningham came to Scandinavia, he is mentioned as Hans Køning, Hans Kønning, Hans Kønigh and Hans Cunninghiemb in documents; even Hans Keymand is used, according to Lyschander, *Grønlandske*, 120. *Jon Olafsons oplevelser som bøsseskytte under Christian IV, nedskrevne af ham selv*, in the series Julius Clausen and P. Fr. Rist (eds.), *Memoirer og Breve* (Copenhagen 1905), 130–1. The surname Køning relates to the German term for king, *König*.
19. H. D. Lind, *Kong Kristian den fjerde og hans mænd paa Bremerholm* (2nd edn., Copenhagen, 1974), 166. The name of Cunningham's first wife is not known.
20. NAD, Tyske Kancelli, Udenrigske Afdeling 1223–1770, Topografisk henlagte sager, England Breweksling mellom Kongehusene 1602–1625, 63:2, England AI 85. Letters from King James VI and I to Christian IV dated 4 June 1603 and 4 July 1603. Translated from Latin into English by Frank Bigwood.
21. R. M. Meldrum (ed.), *Letters from James I to Christian IV, 1603–1625* (Washington, 1977), 40–1.
22. Pingel, 'Om de vigtigste', 671–2.
23. Samuel Purchas (ed.), 'James Hall his voyage forth of Denmarke for the discovery of Greeneland, in the yeare 1605', in *Purchas his Pilgrimes* (London, 1625), 318–53.
24. Purchas, 'James Hall his Voyage', 324.
25. Ibid., 326.
26. *Jon Olafsons*, 131.
27. Purchas, 'James Hall his Voyage', 335.
28. Pingel, 'Om de vigtigste', 686–7.
29. *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, iii (1979).
30. *Grønlandsk historiske*, iii, 690.
31. Steve Murdoch, 'Scotsmen on the Danish-Norwegian frontiers, *c.*1580–1680', in Mackillop and Murdoch (eds.), *Military Governors and Imperial Frontiers*, 6.
32. *Jon Olafsons*, 130–1.
33. 'Mogens Ulfelds Tog udi Østersøen med Kongelig Majestets Skibs-Flode 1611', *Danske Magazin*, 1. Række, i, 114–18, at p. 115.
34. E. F. Bricka, 'Gabriel Kruses Beretning om den danske Flaades Virksomhed i Efteraaret 1612', *Danske Magazin*, 4. Række, v, 280–8, at p. 286.
35. NAD, Danske Kancelli 232, Sjællandske Registre 1605–1612, B54E, fos. 236r., 263v., 296v., 297r., 425r.; ibid., Sjællandske Registre 1613–1619, B54F, fos. 23r.–v., 177v., 354v.–355v.
36. Einar Niemi, 'Christian 4s Finnmarksreise i 1599', *Årbok for Foreningen til norske fortidsminnesmerkers bevaring* (Oslo, 1988), 34.
37. Liv Helene Willumsen, *Trollkvinne i nord* (Tromsø, 1994), 51–2; Olaus Magnus, *Historia om de nordiska folken* (Uppsala, 1909); Peder Claussøn Friis, *Norriges Beskriffuelse* (Copenhagen, 1632); Johan Schefferus, *Lapponia* (Frankfurt am Main, 1673).
38. National Archives of Norway, District Accounts for Vardøhus, 1601–1602, bundle 1.
39. Willumsen, *Trollkvinne*, 57.
40. *Jon Olafsons*, 131–2.
41. Lundh and Sars, *Norske Rigs-Registranter*, vi, 463.
42. Ibid., v, 190.
43. Ibid., vi, 167–8.
44. Hans Eivind Næss, *Trolldomsprosessene i Norge på 1500–1600-tallet* (Oslo, 1982), 32.
45. Alf Kiil, *Når bøndene seilte* (Oslo, 1993).
46. Einar Niemi, *Vadsøs historie*, i (Vadsø, 1983), 69–217; Randi Balsvik, *Vardø. Grensepost og fiskevær 1850–1950* (Vardø, 1989), 20–33.
47. Lundh and Sars, *Norske Rigs-Registranter*, vi, 60.
48. Willumsen, 'Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials', 101–4.
49. Ibid., 94.
50. Ibid., 36.
51. Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (3rd edn., Harlow, 2006), 142.
52. Kirsten Hastrup, 'Iceland: sorcerers and paganism', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds.), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1993), 383–401, at p. 386.
53. Willumsen, 'Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials', 108.
54. Næss, *Trolldomsprosessene i Norge*, 32.
55. Normand and Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft*, 22.
56. For more on North Berwick, see Victoria Carr, 'The countess of Angus's escape from the North Berwick witch-hunt', Chapter 2 in this volume.
57. Normand and Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft*, 135–274.
58. Stuart Macdonald, 'In search of the Devil in Fife witchcraft cases, 1560–1705', in Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), 33–50.
59. Julian Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', in Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context*, 51–72.
60. Stuart Macdonald, *The Witches of Fife: Witch-Hunting in a Scottish Shire, 1560–1710* (East Linton, 2002), 38. For some additional cases, see Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', 57–8.
61. Macdonald, *Witches of Fife*, 59, 61.
62. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', 61, 55.
63. Normand and Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft*, 327–8.
64. RAT, FM no. 6, fos. 10v.–12v.
65. Hans H. Lilienskiold, 'Troldom oc anden ugudelighed', National Library of Denmark, Thott's collection, 950, 2°, fo. 40r.
66. Cf. Julian Goodare, 'The Finnmark witches in European context', in Reidun Laura Andreassen and Liv Helene Willumsen (eds.), *Steilneset Memorial: Art, Architecture, History* (Stamsund, 2013, forthcoming).
67. RAT, FM no. 6, fo. 12r.–v. Translation of Norwegian sources into English is made by Katjana Edwardsen.
68. RAT, FM no. 6, fo. 12v.

69. RAT, FM, Court Records 1620–7, fo. 27r.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Normand and Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft*, 145.
73. 'Balduolden', a descriptive noun composed of two elements, 'ball' and 'volden' (meadow, grassland); probably a field outside Vardø where people gathered, possibly for games.
74. RAT, FM, Court Records 1620–7, fos. 27v., 28r.
75. Ibid., fos. 28v., 29r.
76. Goodare, 'The Scottish witchcraft panic of 1597', 58; Julian Goodare, 'Flying witches in Scotland', Chapter 9 in this volume.
77. NRS, JC2/2, fo. 224r. Transcription by Diane Baptie. For modernised text with some different readings, see Normand and Roberts (eds.), *Witchcraft*, 267–8.
78. Julian Goodare, *The Government of Scotland, 1560–1625* (Oxford, 2004), 165–8.
79. *Oxford English Dictionary*.
80. Lars Mannfred Svennungsson, *Rannsakingarna om Trolldomen i Bohuslän, 1669–1672* (Uddevalla, 1970), 56.
81. Orkney Library and Archive, Kirkwall, Orkney Presbytery Records, CH2/1082/1, p. 255.
82. *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, s.v. ley (4, 5).
83. The word is found in Orkney in 1329: *Records of the Earldom of Orkney, 1299–1614*, ed. J. Storer Clouston (SHS, 1914), 12.
84. John D. M. Robertson, *The Kirkwall Ba': Between the Water and the Wall* (2nd edn., Edinburgh, 2005), 230.
85. Pitcairn (ed.), *Trials*, iii, I, 214, 'the Reidhous was vpone the Ball-grene, playing with him'.
86. BL, Egerton MS 2879. I would like to thank Julian Goodare for letting me read his transcription of this document.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. RAT, FM, Court Records 1620–7, fos. 27v., 28r.
90. Ibid., fo. 41r.
91. Ibid., fo. 94r.

4

The Witch, the Household and the Community: Isobel Young in East Barns, 1580–1629

Lauren Martin

Isobel Young had land, wealth and power. Most of her life looks successful by early modern standards. In her prime from 1590 to 1622, Young wielded influence over many people in her community. She was a competent, perhaps skilled, household manager. Her husband, George Smith, was the proprietor (holding a feu, a heritable lease) of a productive piece of land in East Barns in the parish of Dunbar, a fertile area of Scotland. She had four sons who brought wives into the household; she may also have had daughters. As well as controlling the labour of at least twelve servants, she also held sway over tenants and households to whom she lent money and leased land. In 1622, her eldest son John combined Smith's holding with his own – doubling the family's holding at a time when other comparable East Barns families either stayed the same or declined.

Yet, in 1629 Isobel Young was executed for witchcraft. Forty-five of her neighbours and relatives, including her husband, testified against her, telling a story that unfolded over four decades. Witnesses alleged that Young engaged in a wide range of witch-like activities, including causing magical harm following quarrels, shape-shifting into animals and carrying out healing rituals for humans and cattle. Strange portents accompanied her words and actions. She was widely regarded as ill-tempered, power-hungry and vengeful.

Quarrelsome and difficult women were not uncommon in early modern Scotland and across Europe.[1] Young's case, while outstanding in the amount and quality of its documentation, resonates with the primary themes in Scottish witchcraft. Like most witchcraft cases in Scotland, the case against Young had two main components, 'malefice' (magical