



Slektforskningsklubb
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**SONS of
NORWAY**

Is your Ancestor a Witch

1 November 2025

Updated 10/30/2025 7:32 PM



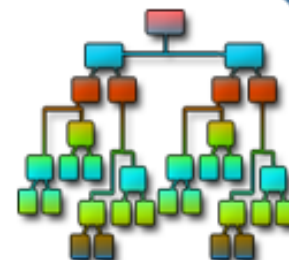
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Is Your Ancestor a Witch

- This is a presentation
 - All examples are in the presentation
- This is designed to take about an hour
 - Questions will be taken and answered or postponed if we will cover them later
 - Questions about your people will be handled after as time permits



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“The Church burned nine million women because they were practitioners of witchcraft.”

Gottfried Christian Voigt

The National Film Board of Canada documentary “The Burning Times” states this as fact.

Dan Brown tells this very tale in “The DaVinci Code.” You can read it on page 105.

The witch craze did not occur in the Middle Ages - between 500-1350. It occurred in the Early Modern Period - between 1350-1700.



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- How Many?
 - 40 years ago, the worldwide estimates were more than 9 million put to death.
 - Now, the estimate is about 35-65,000 total deaths, with 20% of them male.
 - 15 years ago, Norway's estimated number was about 85,000 put to death.
 - Now it's between 863 and 924 tried, with 280 to 287 known deaths.
 - You can't even compare these numbers.



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- Why the exaggerations?
 - For many years, the number of executions has been sensationalized for monetary and political purposes
 - Literary authors had good reason to lie about the death toll. These authors were writing to either make money or to highlight the "Witchcraft threat". In both cases, a high death toll was good for the author. Bigger trials were more sensational -- they sold more copy and made the "threat" of Witchcraft seem much greater.



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- Why the exaggerations?
 - The drop in the scholarly estimate was bitterly opposed by feminists, Pagan, and popular writers. The "Nine Million Martyrs of the Burning Times" are an intense, emotion-laden symbol for many Pagans and feminists. To them, the new estimates were simply a conservative backlash, a ploy to down-play the horror of the Burning Times.
 - For popular authors, the issue was much clearer: big crazes sold more books. "Millions and millions" of deaths are far more titillating than 40,000 - 60,000.



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From the Bergen
Guide:

**“350 Witches were
burnt in Bergen in
the period 1350 –
1700. This stone was
erected in the
memory.”**

***Note – Bergen claims
more than the total
for the entire
country!***

Witch burning in Bergen – Witch Stone

March 22, 2015

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Is Your Ancestor a Witch

Steilneset Memorial , Vardø, Finnmark

96	Synøve Johannesdatter	97	Anders Poulsen
94	Karen Olsdatter	95	Finne-Elli
92	Bodel Clausdatter	93	Birgitte Olufsdatter
90	Dorette Poulsdatter	91	Barbra Olsdatter
88	Sigri Jonsdatter	89	Gundelle Olsdatter
86	Karen Andersdatter	87	Margrette Jonsdatter
84	Solve Nilsdatter	85	Ellen Gundersdatter
82	Ingeborg, Peder Krogs hustru	83	Guri, Laurits' hustru
80	Maren Henningsdatter	81	Sigri Olsdatter
78	Maren Mogensdatter	79	Maritte Rasmusdatter
76	Maren Sigvaldsdatter	77	Ragnild Clemidsdatter
74	Mari Tamisdatter	75	Dorette Lauritsdatter
72	Kirsten Olsdatter	73	Siri Christophersdatter
70	Karen Jonsdatter	71	Marete Rasmusdatter
68	Anne Pedersdatter	69	Gjertrud Thronsdatter
66	Baarne Olsdatter	67	Lisebet Poulsdatter
64	Berigette Christophersdatter	65	Berigette Johannesdatter
62	Berigette Edisdatter	63	Eli Sigvartsdatter
60	Marete Andersdatter	61	Synøve Olsdatter
58	Bodelle Danielsdatter	59	Baarne, Willands Klokkes hustru
56	Mari, Oluf Jonsens hustru	57	Gundelle Omundsdatter
54	Marete, Torstens hustru	55	Oluf Rasmussens hustru
52	Smeld Anne	53	Kirsten Taus
48	Mari, Østens hustru	49	Maren, Jon Dass' hustru
46	Nils Sarresen	47	Sissel Pedersdatter
44	Nils Rastesen	45	Solve Andersdatter
42	Anne Mattisdatter	43	Lisbet, Oluf Nilsens hustru
40	Sarve Pedersen	41	Marete, Oluf Mørings hustru
38	Ingeborg Jørgensdatter	39	Marrite Thamisdatter
36	Synøve, Anders Nordmørings hustru	37	Kirsten, Rasmus Siversens hustru
34	Quiwe Baarsen	35	Kari, Jetmund Siversens hustru
32	Karen Mogensdatter	33	Marrite Edisdatter
30	Anne Edisdatter	31	Gundell Olsdatter
28	Find Thordsen	29	Elin Thorstensdatter
26	Ingri, Thorkild Andersens hustru	27	Rasti Rauelsen
24	Kirsten Sørensdatter	25	Lisebet Nilsdatter
22	Guri Olufsdatter	23	Anne Lauritsdatter
20	Ragnhilde Olufsdatter	21	Gøri Olsdatter
18	Marrite Olufsdatter	19	Kari Olufsdatter
16	Elsebe Knudsdatter	17	Mari Jørgensdatter
14	Karen Edisdatter	15	Siri Knudsdatter
12	Lisbet, Peder Torfindsens hustru	13	Nils Jonsen
10	Mons Storebarn	11	Mons Andersen
8	Anne, Laurits Pedersens hustru	9	Gamle Zare
6	Morten Olsen	7	Peder Mand
		5	Christen Skredder



Vardo claims 96 victims, while Finnmark has a total of 160. This is accurate.

The Steilneset Memorial in Vardø, Norway.

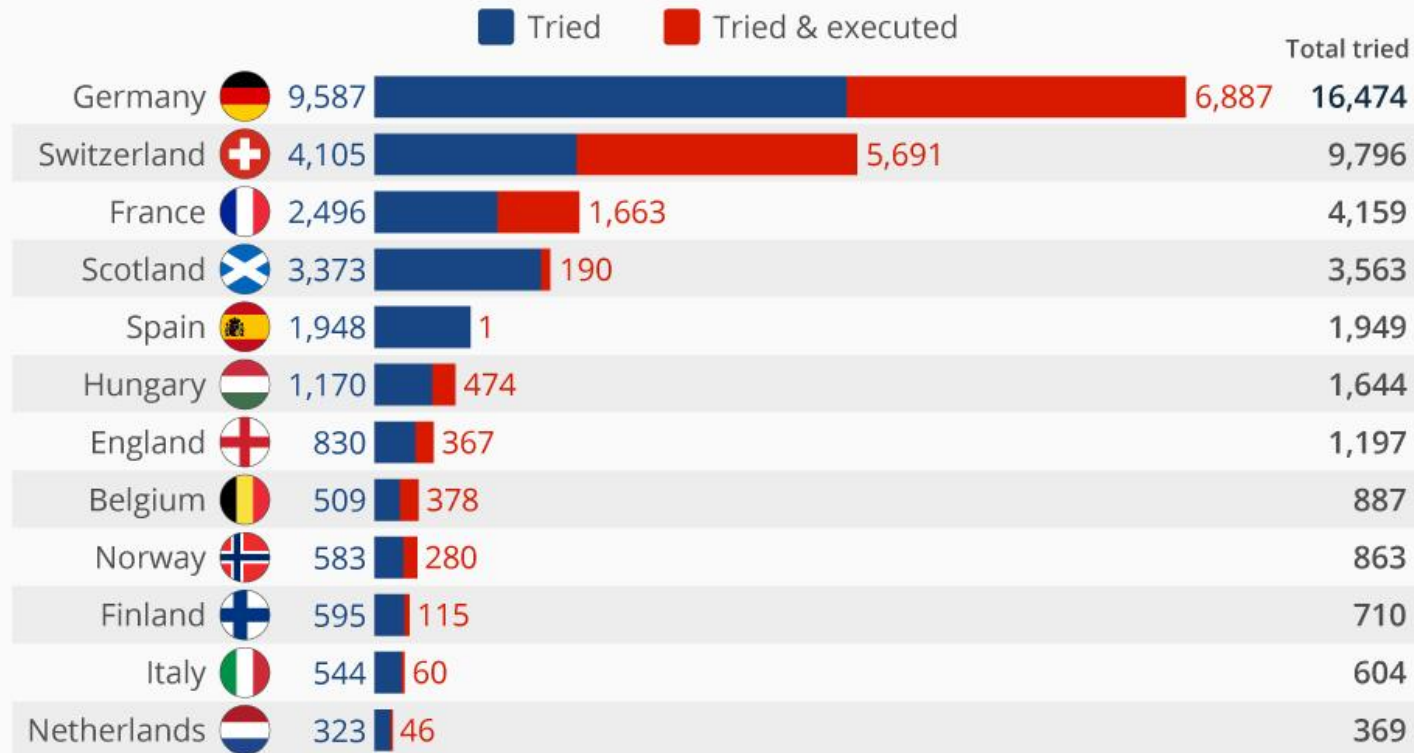


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The Death Toll Of Europe's Witch Trials

People tried and executed in witch trials in Europe between 1300 and 1850



@StatistaCharts

Source: Witch Trials by Peter T. Leeson and Jacob W. Russ

statista  archive

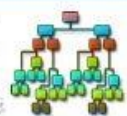


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Is Your Ancestor a Witch

- Witch trials were mostly Catholic – NOT TRUE
- Witch trials were “state” supported – VERY TRUE
 - Only the “state” could put someone to death – not any church
 - In “State-run” church settings, the church could get the government to put someone to death
 - Not common for any church to put a witch to death
- But the church – both Lutheran and Catholic – could excommunicate someone
 - This has a major effect on Genealogy



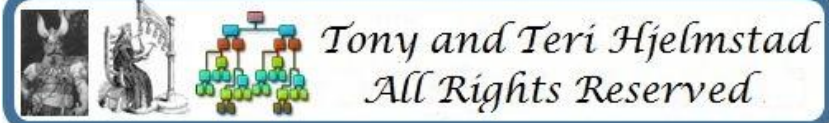
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- Early Norway encouraged “witches” and healers. They were talked about and granted high status in the early writings such as the Edda.

She remembers the first war in the world
When Gold-Brew was hoist on the spears
And in the High One’s hall they burned her
Three times they burned the three times born
Often, not seldom, but she still lives!
She was called Bright One when she came to the settlements
The greatly talented Carrier of the Wand
She performed magic, ecstatically she performed it
She knew how to cast spells
She was always loved by wicked women.

Voluspá, st.21-22 (“The Vision of the Witch”), Poetic Edda



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“All witches [völur] are descended from Widening Wolf. All transsexual sorcerers [Seiðberendr] from the Tree of Intent. All sorcerers [Seiðmennir] from Black Head”.

(Hyndluljóð, st. Poetic Edda)

**“Wed to the Wand” –
the *Völva*, a Norse Witch**



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“Then came the völva Gróa there, wife of Aurvandil the Bold. She sang her galðr [spell-songs] over Thor until the piece of stone loosened [from his flesh]. When Thor noticed this, and understood that there was a good hope that she would be able to completely remove the byrnie-piece, he wished to reward Gróa for her healing by doing her an honor...”

***Snorri Sturluson, Skaldskáparmál,
Prose Edda***



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- Many “royal” burials were the graves of **wand-carrying** witches, such as that of the Oseberg ladies from 834 A.D.
 - The burial contents – more than 20 horses and several other animals, alongside incredible riches such as a **witch’s wand**, tapestries showing hanging sacrifice and cart processions, magical amulets and pouches filled with **cannabis seeds**, wagons and sledges of exquisite craftsmanship suitable only for ceremonial use, countless artistic references to the world of the gods, to the dísir [female powers such as norns, valkyrias and giantesses] and to the underworld, to the Sacred Marriage ritual and to the art of seiðr – a type of magic practiced in Norse society during the Norse Iron Age.



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The Oseberg ship (Norwegian: Osebergskipet) is a well-preserved Viking ship discovered in a large burial mound at the Oseberg farm near Tønsberg in Vestfold county, Norway.



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- From before the Vikings through the early Viking era, witches were honored and revered and sought as wise women, healers, prophets, oracles, shamans and priestesses.
- Sagas show that if a witch came to visit, the lord and lady of the house would give up the high seat to her, a very powerful way of indicating that the witch had higher authority.



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- The sources also make a point out of how the witch can talk or not talk to anybody at whim, regardless of their status – which means that she was outside and above the normal hierarchy of society.
- The primeval Norse witch was the goddess Freyia, who introduced the art of *seiðr* [fate-magic, shamanism] and the art of conquering death to men and women, and in the first instance even to the gods.



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- All free Norse and Germanic women were expected to be versed in magic
- Most of the Germanic tribes, as well as the Vikings, nurtured groups of wise women, witches or priestesses
- They lived unmarried (though not necessarily in celibacy) and could travel alone wherever they liked without fear



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- A woman who carried the wand of the witch would never be harmed
- They were allied with the fate goddesses and thus wielded the greatest of powers
- In the Viking Age Norse context, these women were called the völrur, singular völva. The literal translation of this title is “Wand-Wed” or “Staff-Carrier”.



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Even in modern times, Norwegians believe in witches:

The Witches is a children's fantasy novel by the British writer Roald Dahl which is somewhat autobiographical. His grandmother was Norwegian and Roald lived with her parts of the year.

Roald Dahl 1916-1990



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From *The Witches*:

- “My grandmother was Norwegian. The Norwegians know all about witches, for Norway, with its black forests and icy mountains, is where the first witches came from.”
- “REAL WITCHES dress in ordinary clothes and look very much like ordinary women. They live in ordinary houses, and they work in ORDINARY JOBS.”



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**What
Changed
?**



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- Beginning in 1022, the Church started executing "heretics", people who disagreed with its teachings. When the which "Burning Times" began, Europeans were accustomed to murdering religious dissidents. In fact, the traditional method of killing a Witch (burning her at the stake) was the "normal" way of executing heretics.
- The Church can honestly say that it killed few Witches. Most religious courts imposed non-lethal penalties, like penance or imprisonment.



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- The Inquisition played a small but critical role in the Burning Times. Contrary to what you may have heard, the Inquisition killed very few Witches. The Inquisition investigated charges of Witchcraft from roughly 1300 to 1500, a time when the death rate was quite low. After the Reformation, the Inquisition did not operate in most European nations.



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- Governments did most of the killing in the Burning Times. Lucky Witches were tried by the Church -- the truly damned had to appear before a secular court.
- Most died in the transition between the dark ages and the renaissance leading some to believe it was more a fear of change or sickness than anything else. Panic spread along the roads following the path of travelers and commerce.
- Whole areas were skipped.



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- Simple theories ignore evidence.
- Blaming the witch trials as an attempt to destroy Paganism ignores two crucial facts: most of the victims of the Burning Times were Christians, not Pagans, and the death toll was always lowest when and where the Church ran the trials.



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- Simple theories ignore evidence.
- Blaming the trials on misogyny – Fear of Women - there's absolutely no correlation between the status of women and the intensity of Witch hunting. Sexism was the norm in the Burning Times, so of course it's simple to point out sexist elements in Witch trials. But the centers of Witch hunting weren't noticeably more sexist than the countries that killed a mere handful of Witches, nor do the beginning and end of the Burning Times correlate to any shifts in women's rights.



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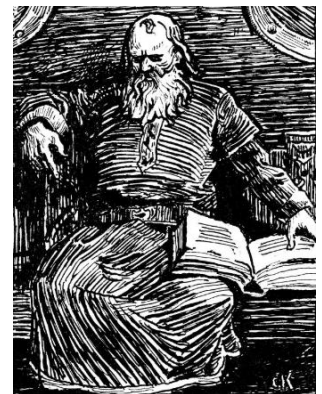
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- So how did they determine who was a Witch
 - A Witch has a low social rank and is a bad public speaker
 - A Witch has a physical abnormality
 - You or your neighbor wants something a Witch has
 - A married Witch has few or no children – or is a spinster
 - A Witch is contentious and stubborn
 - A Witch has a reputation for slander and/or small thefts
 - Negative things happen around a Witch – a Witch has bad luck
 - Positive things happen around a Witch – a Witch has good luck



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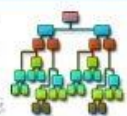
- The Snorre sagas - The Heimskringla: A History of The Norse Kings -discussed what probably was the first witchcraft case. Eirik Bloodaxe (895-954) burned his brother Ragnvald alive, along with 80 advisors he called warlocks, at Hadeland near Eisvold north of Oslo. But this was probably political and not anti-witch as Ragnvald was contending for Eirik's rightful (?) inheritance.
- [Heimskringla, by Snorri Sturlason](#)



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- It was almost 400 years later till the first recorded Norwegian witch burning occurred.
- The older Norwegian laws from 1100-1200 contained provisions against witchcraft or to traveling to Finnmark to get your fortune told.
- According to Gulating Law, whoever was found guilty of conducting a witch song or performing sorcery had to leave the king's country. Yet we know of no cases of death because of witchcraft in medieval Norway.

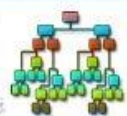
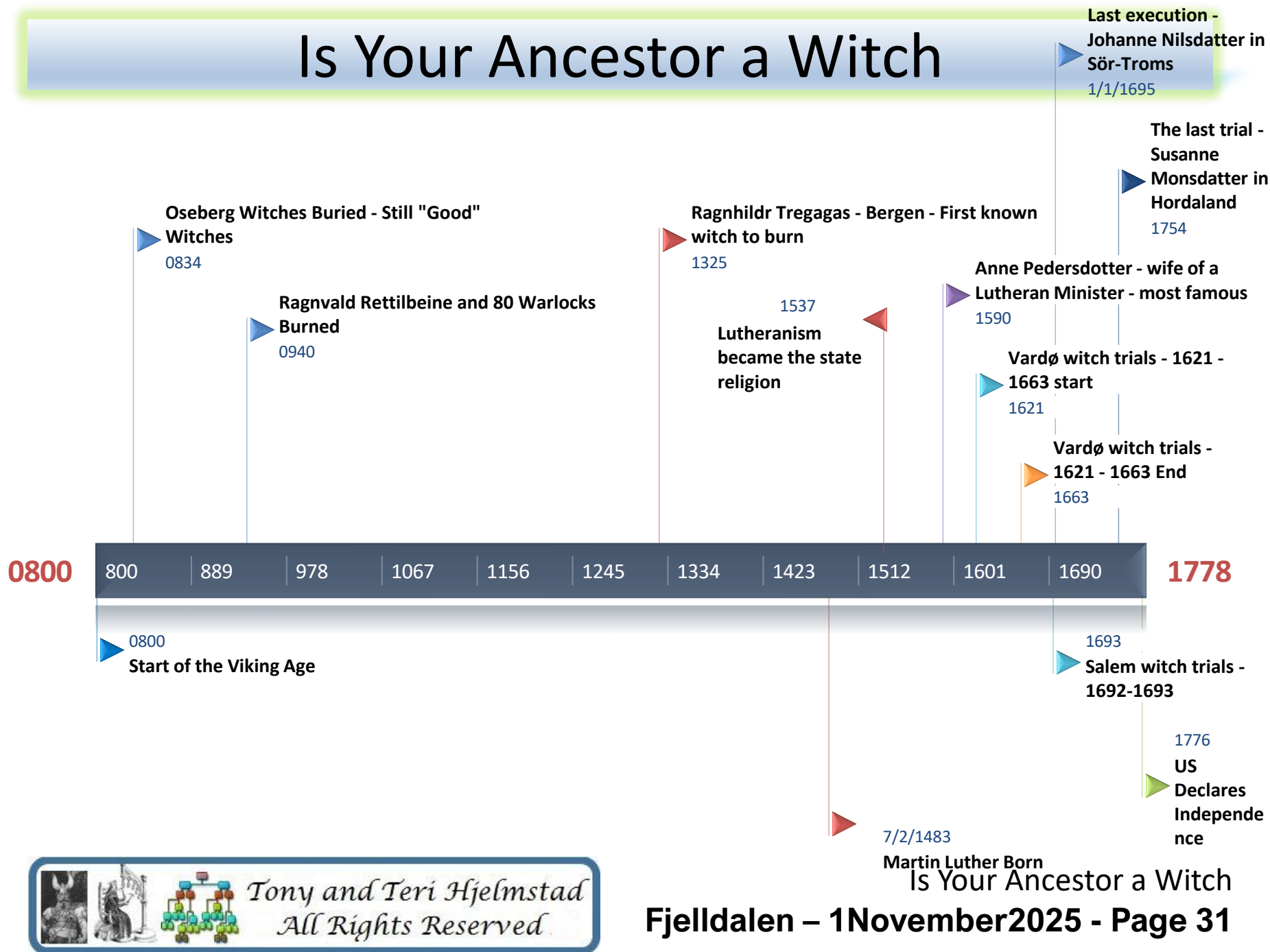


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- During the “Burning Times” in Norway, there were basically three outcomes if you were accused of being a witch:

1. You were tried and convicted and sentenced to burn
2. You were tried and convicted and sentenced to penance or imprisonment
3. You were excommunicated from the Church – both Catholic and Lutheran

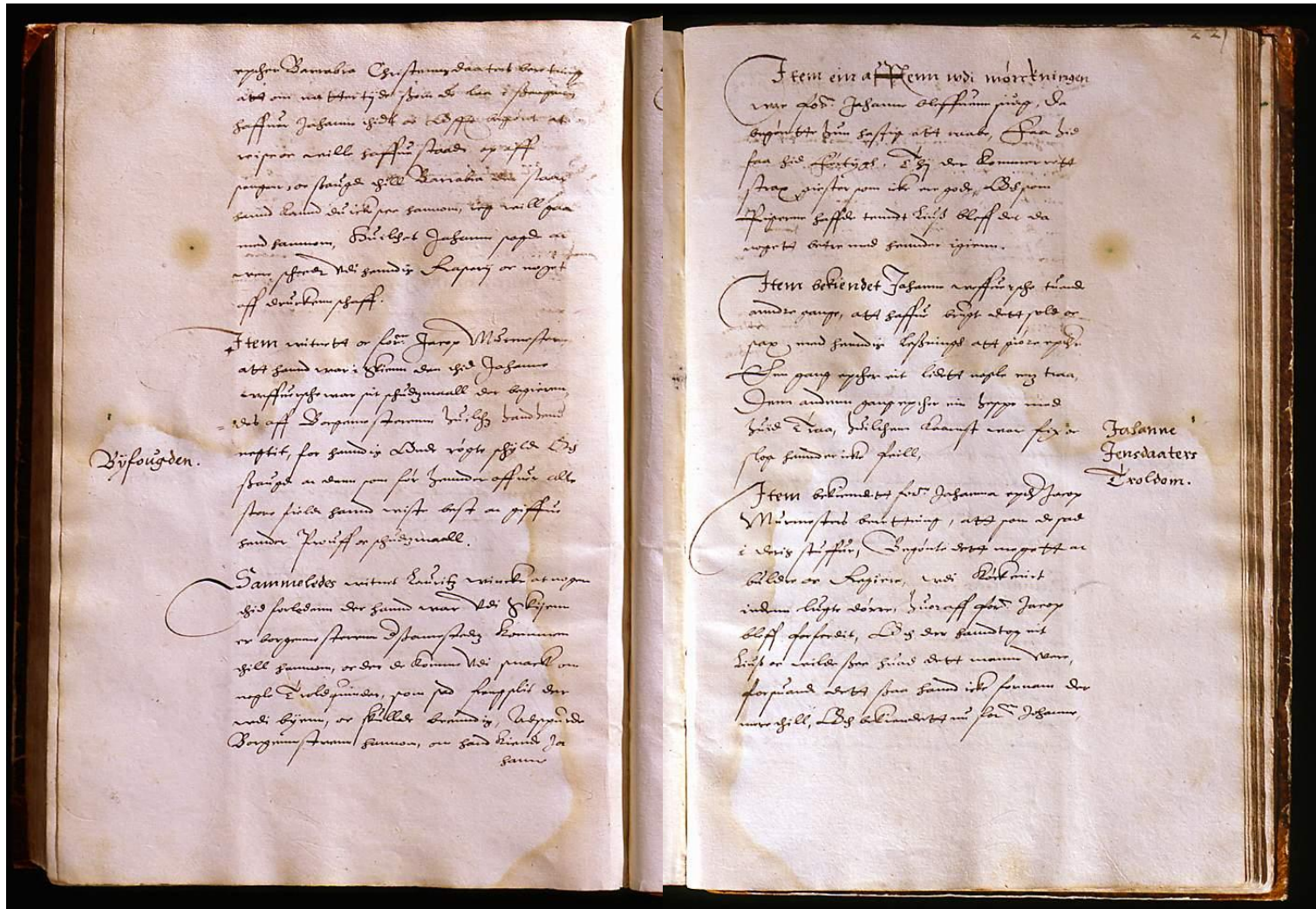


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- The document shown on the next page is a section of the trial from 1593 against Johanne Jensdatter Flamske. She was accused of inflicting illness on people, reading forbidden literature and having unnatural powers. One of the testimonies to this latter accusation reads like this:
 - "But the night before there came many cats outside Johanne's window and made such strange and dreadful sounds that people were afraid. Then said Jacob Engils, a bricklayer who stayed there, "God protect us, from where do these many evil cats come?" Johanne answered, "dear little Jacop, just you knock on the wall a little, and they will run away." After he had so done, they disappeared immediately, but soon thereafter, the same New Years Eve, there came a dreadful storm that made much damage." (fol. 220a-220b)
- A few pages later we can read that Johanne was sentenced to death and burned at the stake 16 April 1594 at Nordnes.



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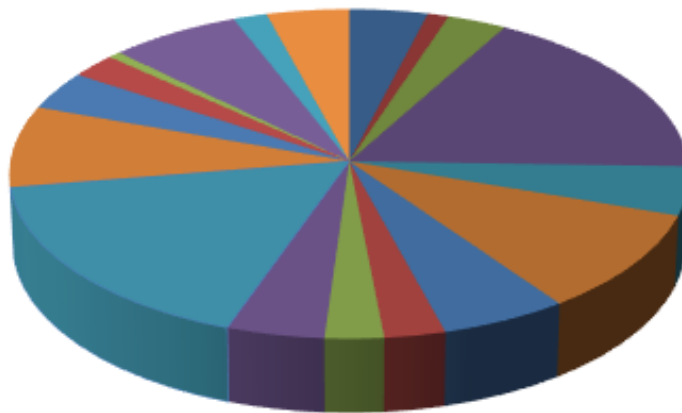
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- Now to Genealogy . . .

Trials by Region

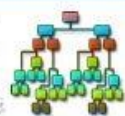


Akershus	37
Aust-Agder	10
Buskerud	28
Finnmark	160
Hedmark	44
Hordaland	91
Møre og Romsdal	52
Nord-Trøndelag	25
Nordland	24
Oppland	40
Rogaland	157
Sogn og Fjordane	74
Sør-Trøndelag	35
Telemark	22
Troms	6
Vest-Agder	62
Vestfold	16
Østfold	39



Is Your Ancestor a Witch

- The bottom line for Genealogist:
 - All the trials are documented
 - In every case I've found – whether the person was found guilty or not, they were excommunicated
 - In some cases, accusations did not result in a trial – so there was no record. But the person was excommunicated anyway
 - In all cases of excommunication, the church:
 - Ceased to record any future information about this person
 - Often, older records would have a witch's rune placed on the records of child births, a marriage, or the witch's birth record – if in the same parish.



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- A list of all 924 persons placed on trial is available – with links to the trial documents
 - <https://www.edd.uio.no/perl/search/search.cgi?appid=143&tabid=2154>
 - NB THE WITCH ARCHIVE IS CLOSED BY UIO DUE TO SECURITY CHALLENGES ON THE SITES. NFS is working to find alternatives, but as of today the trial material is only available by visiting the archive at Blindern

Norske trolldomsprosesser

Norske trolldomsprosesser

Fylke (%)

Lokalitet (%)

Prosessnummer (%)

Registreringsid

Tiltaltes navn (%)

År (%)

Søk

Innstillinger

Søkeoppsett:

Resultatoppsett:

Antall rader pr resultatside:

Fylke (%)

Lokalitet (%)

Prosessnummer (%)

Registreringsid

Tiltaltes navn (%)

År (%)

Søk

Innstillinger

Søkeoppsett:

Resultatoppsett:

Antall rader pr resultatside:



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- Looking for Ragnhild Pedersdatter from Ringsaker
- NB THE WITCH ARCHIVE IS CLOSED BY UIO DUE TO SECURITY CHALLENGES ON THE SITES. NFS is working to find alternatives, but as of today the trial material is only available by visiting the archive at Blindern**

Norske trolldomsprosesser

Fylke (%) ▼

Lokalitet (%)

Prosessnummer (%)

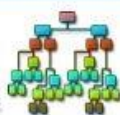
Registreringsid

Tiltaltes navn (%) ▼

År (%) ▼

[Innstillinger](#)

Prosessnummer	Tiltaltes navn	Fylke	Lokalitet	År
116	Karine Lille Hverven	Hedmark	Stange	1620
118	Ragnhild Pedersdatter	Hedmark	Løiten	1620
119	Gunnbjørn Heggen	Hedmark	Løiten	1620
121	Sigrid Flåberg	Hedmark	Solør	1623
121b	Halvor Komelbekks kone	Hedmark	Solør	1623
125	Peder Øksensett	Hedmark	Elverum	1624
126	Ingeborg Knutsdatter Øksensett	Hedmark	Elverum	1625
129	Knut Boens kone	Hedmark	Tynset	1658
130	Ole Rønnes kone	Hedmark	Hoff	1638
131	Frans kullbrenners kone	Hedmark	Kvikne	1640
133	Kirsten Håkerud	Hedmark	Grue	1671
134c	Ingrid Nordsett	Hedmark	Rendalen	1671-1673
134e	Else Horsett	Hedmark	Rendalen	1671-1673



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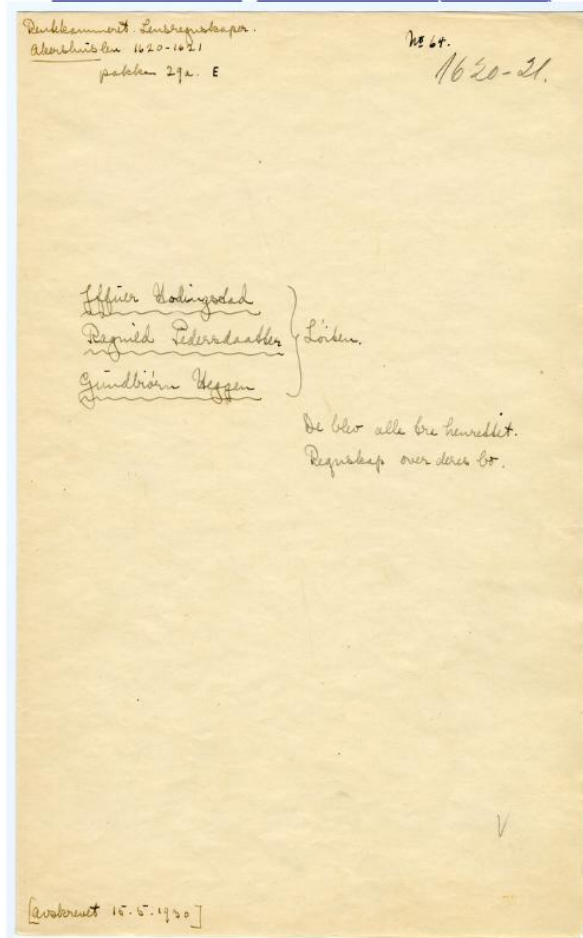
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- [http://www.edd.uio.no/per/1/search/display.cgi?schema=usd ikos heksep.usd objectpresentation&exec=event as html\(%2721%27\)](http://www.edd.uio.no/per/1/search/display.cgi?schema=usd ikos heksep.usd objectpresentation&exec=event as html(%2721%27))
- [http://www.edd.uio.no/per/1/search/display.cgi?schema=usd ikos heksep.usd objectpresentation&exec=event as html\(%2754%27\)](http://www.edd.uio.no/per/1/search/display.cgi?schema=usd ikos heksep.usd objectpresentation&exec=event as html(%2754%27))

Norske trolldomsprosesser

Prosess nr	Tiltaltes navn	År	Fylke	Lokalsamfunn	Kildebelegg	Merknad
118	Ragnhild Pedersdatter	1620	Hedmark	Loiten	RK Lr. Akerhus len 1620-1621, pk 54	

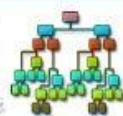
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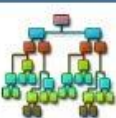
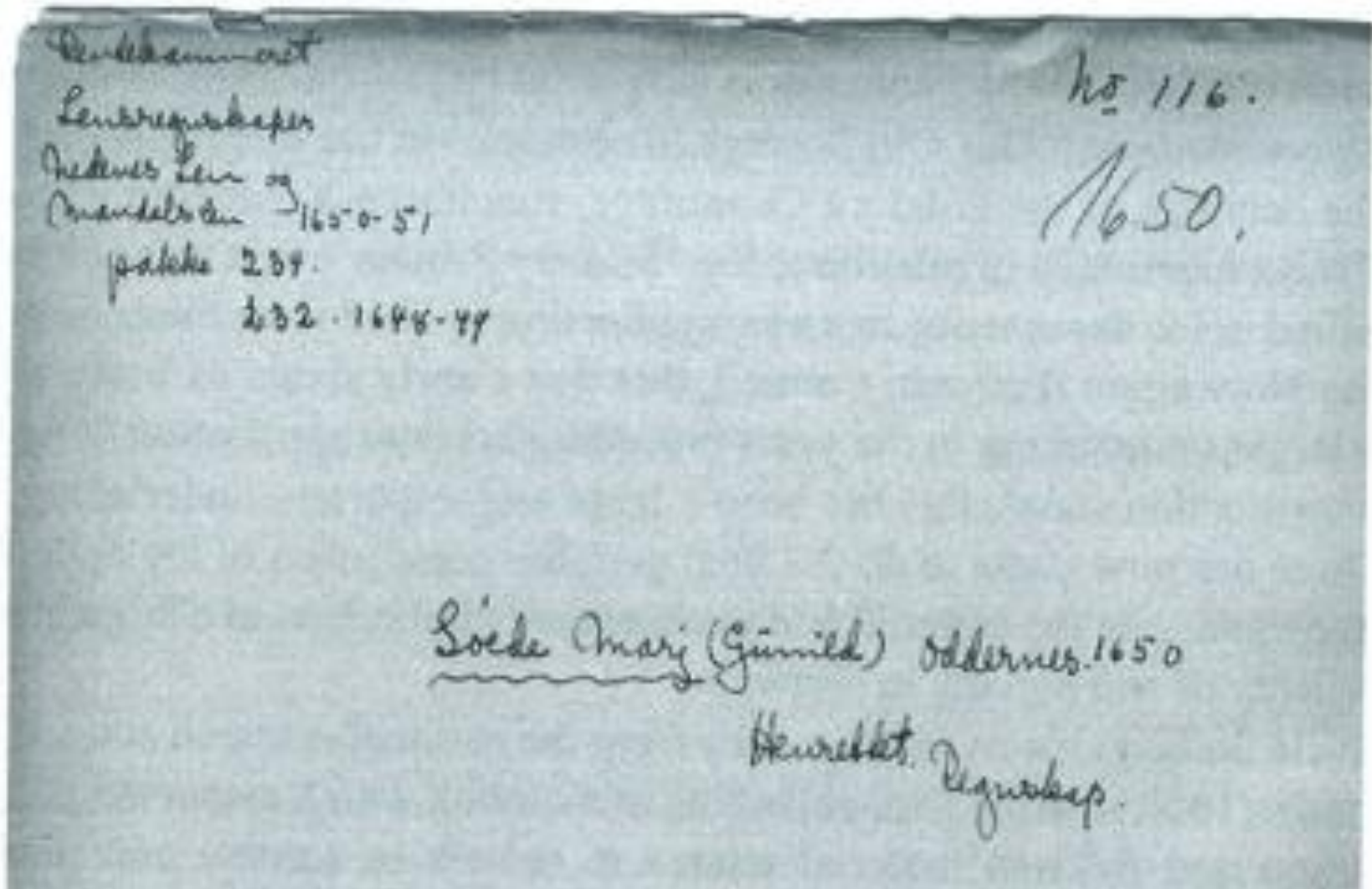
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- This is an example of the transcriptions in The Norwegian Folklore Archives, showing the front page and the transcribed documents. The front page states the archival provenience, the name of the accused, the year and the outcome of the case. This particular case concerns "Soede Marj" ("Sweet Mary"), her real name being Gunhild, who was triad and executed in Mandal, in the southern part of Norway, in 1650. The sources transcribed are the county accounts from the County of Nedenes, in to days Vest-Agder, and gives the figures for the cost of her uphold in prison for 4 months and the payment for the executioner. She was beheaded by sword. Her number in the process-register is no. 189. Her confession is recorded in the documents of another case, no. 203, against Gunhild Nedrebø from Kristiansand.



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1650-
 Kong Mayte regenskab aff
 Mandel, Nedenes, och
 Raabingdelungis leine, som
 velvinding forgen befieldt ehr
 med forleant. Pæregnit fra
 Philippi Jacobj dag anno 1650.
 och till aars degon igjen, anno 1651.

Side Marij. Gmild;
 Wgiffte penge di øtschebige
 mæder som effter følger,

Giffuit for en fanges kaest som
 for tholdt dumb och anholden
 i di 4 mæder som leet sig
 kalde side Marij, som ellers
 hede Gmildt, hundes reke mæffer,
 om vigen till kaest penge 5g
 ehr

Penne _____ 10de

Giffuit merket manden for samme
 penge ved sverdet at kemre for
 hundes tholdtomb och spogerij

Penne _____ 6de



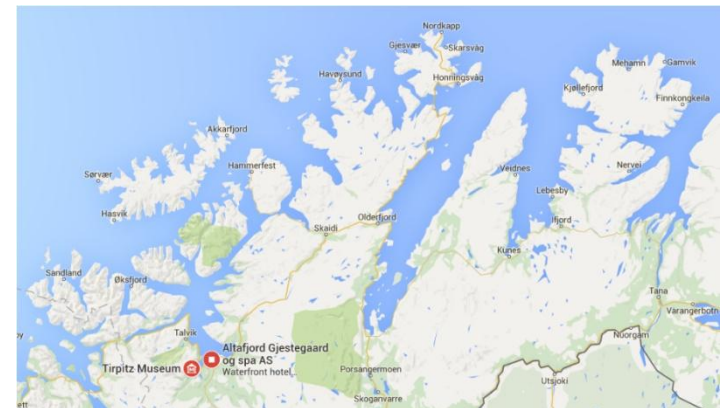
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Is Your Ancestor a Witch

The Lapp Qvive Baardsen was a specialist in making sailing wind by magic. He would put his bare foot in the sea and command the wind to blow. His services were sought by the community. From the trial transcript, it appears that when his practice resulted in the death of some of his clients, however, he was legally held responsible. Qvive Baardsen described how the Lapps used their rune drums to put themselves into trances in which to communicate with the spirit world. In the eyes of the court, these practices must have seemed heretical; they were reason enough to condemn the accused to death.



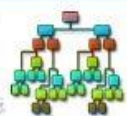
Transcripts of documents from the witch trials in Finnmark in 1627 provided by Lenvik Museum. Indexes include documents against Sami Qvive Baardsen and documentation that his residence at Alta Fjord was burned to the ground in 1627.



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Is Your Ancestor a Witch

“After that, my darling, the greatest task of all will begin for you and me! We shall pack our bags and go travelling all over the world! In every country we visit, we shall seek out the houses where the witches are living! We shall find each house, one by one, and having found it, you will creep inside and leave your little drops of deadly Mouse-Maker in the bread, or the cornflakes, or the rice-pudding or whatever food you see lying about. It will be a triumph, my darling! A colossal unbeatable triumph. We shall do it entirely by ourselves, just you and me! That will be our work for the rest of our lives!” **Roald Dahl**



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Is Your Ancestor a Witch

A good article . . .

From David Nikel's "Life in Norway" Blog / Podcast / Newsletter

[The 17th Century Vardø Witch Trials - Life in Norway](https://www.lifeinnorway.net/var-do-witch-trials/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=the_history_of_norway&utm_term=2023-03-30)

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The 17th Century Vardø Witch Trials

July 28, 2021 by David Nikel

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Between 1593 and 1692, 91 people—mostly women—were found guilty of witchcraft and killed in a remote part of Northern Norway.



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