The Cunning Man

A Microhistorical Analysis of Jacob Orm and the Economics of Magic in Trondheim, 1730–1742

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Abstract

This article presents a microhistorical analysis of the practices of cunning man Jacob Orm and the so-called "great thief conspiracy of Trondheim" of the 1730s. Orm practised treasure hunting and the finding of lost goods, and he participated in an attempt to conjure up the devil. The article argues that Orm partook in creating the narrative that he was a cunning man by going on frequent magical excursions, maintaining contact with other cunning folk and owning magical objects. The article presents the only known trials with elements of treasure hunting from Norway and contextualizes them within the broader field of Scandinavian and European treasure lore. Finally, the article argues that the form of economic behaviour observed in treasure hunts is best understood through the concept of limited good.

Keywords: crime, theft, magic, treasure, devil, money, limited good, cunning folk

On the 3rd of April 1742, three men were escorted to Steinberget, the execution grounds situated along the main road outside Trondheim. In their company, there would have been armed guards, and a pastor whose task it would have been to prepare the men for their coming execution and death.[1] As they approached the gallows, it is possible that they heard singing, as no fewer than three execution ballads were composed for the executions. The attention these men likely received would not have been unwarranted. The men, Ole Christophersen Blix, Ole Ingebrigtsen Eggen and Jacob Ludvig Pedersen Orm, had been pointed out as the leaders of a band of thieves that operated both in the city of Trondheim and in the surrounding area during the 1730s. The scope of their criminal operations was so extensive that King Christian VI (r. 1730–1746) simply referred to them as "the great thief conspiracy of Trondheim" when he revised their sentences in 1742 (RA, Norske tegnelser, 1741–1743, fol. 354a).[2]

This article presents a microhistorical analysis of one of those men – Jacob Ludvig Pedersen Orm (1698–1742). The source material pertaining to the band of thieves and the practices of Jacob Orm is, by Norwegian

standards, unusually extensive and detailed. Based on the existing interrogations, letters, depositions and verdicts, it is clear that, in addition to being a leading figure in the gang of thieves, Orm operated as a cunning man in Trondheim and its surrounding regions. Orm and his associates performed magical treasure hunts, and he used a black book (grimoire) and an alleged magical mirror in attempts to find gold and other treasure in the ground. He also attended an attempted conjuring of the devil where the intention was to obtain gold.

The richness of the source material pertaining to Orm's criminal activity as well as his more magical practices poses a series of questions that typical court records from the first half of eighteenth-century Denmark-Norway usually fail to answer. Through a microhistorical approach, the glimpses we have of the life and practice of Jacob Orm will therefore be used to investigate two key questions: In what ways was magic used in an urban criminal milieu in the first half of the eighteenth century? How did Jacob Orm become a cunning man? In order to elucidate these questions, I will analyse the composition of the group of thieves and their more standard criminal activities, such as theft, break-ins and fraud, in addition to Orm's more magical activities, such as treasure hunting, the use of magical objects, devil conjuring and divination. There is an additional focus on how the city court (*Bytingsretten*) and the Magistrate court (*Rådstueretten*) addressed and treated these magical activities.[3] By investigating these questions, the study establishes knowledge about the possible connections between cunning folk and criminal milieus in general, and new, in-depth knowledge about cunning folk and the use of magic in eighteenth-century Norway in particular. This is the first study to analyse Orm's practices and, to the best of my knowledge, it also presents some of the first known trials containing elements related to magical treasure hunting from early modern Norway (concerning treasure tales, see Werner 1987).

Many studies have been published about the witchcraft prosecutions that took place in Norway during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (e.g. Næss 1982; Knutsen 1998; Blix Hagen 2007:87–128). Some of them have emphasized the roles of the state, the elites and the courts (e.g. Alm 2000; Blix Hagen 2015:211–247; Schjøtner Skaar 2021). Meanwhile, others have emphasized social and economic factors, demonology and the role of gender and ethnicity in the trials (e.g. Willumsen 2013; Blix Hagen 2017). Through regional studies, the number of known trials has been continuously revised, and 870 witchcraft trials in Norway have been documented (e.g. Botheim 1999:188–189; Sødal 2008:142; for this recent figure, see Alm 2022:197). However, we are faced with a drastically different situation concerning studies on witchcraft and magic in eighteenth-century Norway. There exist only a handful of systematic studies, and they are primarily concerned with demonstrating that elite scepticism ended the witchcraft prosecutions by

analysing the rise in so-called witch trials in reverse (Alm & Blix Hagen 2002:33–34; Chan 2009; Sørlie 2023; Løyland 2010).[4] These witch trials in reverse were trials where the court took the side of someone who had been slandered as a witch or physically assaulted because of suspicions of witchcraft (Henningsen 1975:98; Davies 2018:216). Additionally, although cunning folk are often mentioned in passing in studies of the Norwegian witchcraft trials, there are few in-depth studies about them or their function within Norwegian society. Two notable exceptions in this regard are the studies of Bente Gullveig Alver and Rune Blix Hagen, who highlighted the role of cunning folk as "magical experts", offering services to the general public in the seventeenth century (Alver 2008:60–61; Blix Hagen 2003:46).

There is, therefore, still a need for both further systematic regional studies and in-depth microhistorical or case-oriented analysis of actors and groups, such as cunning folk, who engaged in the sphere of magic during the eighteenth century.

As we currently know of few examples to compare with in Norway, I frequently contextualize the practices of Orm and the group of thieves with similar phenomena and examples from other Scandinavian and European countries – especially scholarship which emphasizes that cunning people participated in creating the narrative that surrounded them through social evaluation of their public appearances and behaviours (Tangherlini 2000; Alver 2011; Johannesen 2018:39). Once they became cunning people, they would offer services that were judicially speaking outlawed in Norway until the abolition of the witchcraft ordinance in 1842. Through their services, they therefore operated within a black market of magical services, filled with ambivalent relations and opportunism that, on an overarching level, was associated with an economic rationale connected to the continuing belief in magic and magical services (Davies 2007:60–62; Alver 2008:60–61; Stanmore 2023:13; Dillinger 2012:196–197).

The choice of a microhistorical approach also requires some further elaboration. It is evident that microhistory has been divided into several traditions since its conception and especially after the coming of postmodernism (Kjelland 2020:15–18). Some would argue that microhistory is its own subfield within the historical sciences, while others label it a practice and therefore a way of working with primary sources which is applicable to all subfields of historical research (Ghobrial 2019:13–14; Cohen 2017:54). Despite their differences, most microhistorians agree that the scope of analysis should be on a microlevel; that details and contextualization are crucial and should be held at a high level; in this article the role of agency among historical actors is also emphasized (Cohen 2017; For two different approaches to microhistory, see Magnússon & Szijártó 2013:4–5, 147).

These tenets of the microhistorical method are activated through close readings of the voluminous sources left behind by investigations into

the activities of the gang of thieves. In the archives of the Magistrate of Trondheim, there is an examination protocol which rather briefly mentions several aspects pertaining to magical treasure hunting and the attempted conjuring of the devil. It also contains testimonies and letters to the Magistrate from both witnesses and the detained thieves (SATR, Magistraten, tyver, mordbrennere, 1711–1741).[5] However, the real treasure trove concerning this case is a protocol found in the archives of the regional governor (SATR, Avhør og dommer, pk. 3 1739–1742, 9.11.1741). In total, the protocol contains the testimonies and confessions of 24 people who had either been part of the band of thieves or in different ways had been in contact with members of the group. The confessions given by all of them stretch over 345 pages, rich in detail, concerning their various activities. It is in this protocol that Jacob Orm elaborates at length about his activities related to treasure hunting, using black books and the attempted conjuring of the devil. Through these and other sources, it is possible to follow and contextualize the activities of the group of thieves throughout the 1730s and gain a deeper understanding of their operations involving both theft and magic.

"The Great Thief Conspiracy of Trondheim": Its Members and Their Activities

With the protocol containing the confessions of the thieves, it becomes clear that the magical practices of the group were intertwined with the break-ins and thefts they committed. The court records frequently refer to them as a gang (*bande*) of thieves and as a rat pack. Tyge Krogh analysed several such groups that were given the title of "gang" in Copenhagen and concluded that they were not gangs in the modern criminological sense of the term (Krogh 2022:151). Although the gangs in Copenhagen could number over one hundred people, Krogh found that their relations were of a more random nature and that there was little clear leadership, planning or organization within the groups. Concerning the group in Trondheim, we see that there were clear leader figures. Usually, the same people joined the various break-ins, there were designated jobs within the group and several of the break-ins were planned long in advance. Therefore, the term "gang" seems fitting for this group. Concerning the leadership of the gang, the court records show that there were nucleus groups revolving around central leaders who began cooperating at different points during the 1730s.

In total, the group numbered 18 people consisting of 16 men and 2 women (RA, Norske tegnelser 1741–1743, fol. 354b–357b). They mainly operated in Trondheim and its surrounding regions, but one break-in took place 90 kilometres outside the city. As the size of the group was so large, it is evident that not all members participated in each break-in. Some were lockpicks and muscle power, others took care of transportation and yet

others acted as fences both in selling and smelting the stolen goods. The group also became more tightly connected by the fact that those who did not participate in the break-ins themselves often received a part of the stolen loot. This was done so that they would become involved as co-conspirators in the theft and therefore be less likely to alert the authorities.

From the interrogations and court records it is clear that Jacob Orm, Ole Ingebrigtsen Eggen and Ole Christophersen Blix were central members of the group. Jacob Orm was born in 1698 and was the son of Sergeant Peder Orm, stationed in Snåsa in Northern-Trøndelag. He moved to Trondheim around 1730. Although involved in many of the break-ins, Jacob Orm seemingly also had a more administrative role: staking out targets, acquiring information and receiving cuts of the obtained goods. Orm was also a central character concerning magical treasure hunting and parts of the cunning trade. Ole Ingebrigtsen Eggen was born in 1710 in Orkdal, which is an area bordering on Trondheim. He had worked for seven years as a soldier before being discharged in 1736 because of poor health. He also worked as a blacksmith both during and after his active enlistment.[6] The third central figure was Ole Christophersen Blix, who was born in Trondheim in 1720. He completed his apprenticeship as a smith in Skien in south-eastern Norway. Blix returned to Trondheim in 1739 and moved into the house next to Jacob Orm in *Repslagerveita*.[7] Orm quickly recruited him to cooperate with him in illegal affairs, and within the span of roughly a year, he participated in twelve thefts and break-ins before the group was arrested in 1740.

Another group which was connected to Blix, Orm and Eggen and which seemingly floated on the outskirts of the group's activities consisted of Lars Palmberg, Olaus Bergstad and the three brothers Jacob, Johan Peter and Johannes Grodt. As their names suggest, they were Swedes who had taken up residency in Trondheim. While they were imprisoned, it was discovered that the brothers communicated with each other through notes written in a "vagrant language" (*fantesprog*). The Magistrate also noted that Johan Peter Grodt "understands the vagrant language that vagabonds speak when they do not want anyone else to understand them" (SATR, Rådstuerettsprotokoll 1738–1743, fol. 176a).[8] This implies that the brothers had lived itinerant lifestyles before moving to Trondheim, where their father worked as a smith. Nevertheless, the Swedes were not the only members of the group that originated from outside the town of Trondheim. One example is Peder Johansen Ravn, a glassmaker by trade, who was listed as an "unknown" residing in the city in 1729. He was possibly born in the parish of Løten in eastern Norway (SATR, lister over ubekjente losjerende i byen, 1729, IV no. 73).

In addition to consisting of several people who were immigrants to the city, it is evident that many of the members of the group did artisanal labour such as blacksmithing or glassblowing. Even if they were better off than

day labourers, the artisans of Trondheim were not necessarily affluent. In 1679, artisans constituted 28% of the roughly 5,000 inhabitants of the town but paid only 16% of the total tax (Supphellen 1997:194). For example, the above-mentioned glassmaker Ravn was forced to pawn his house to cover his own expenses (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Johan Heinrich Schultz, 21 June 1741). Other members were day labourers such as carriage-drivers and boaters, while others had worked as servants before they became deckhands on ships. At least two of the members, Lars Palmberg and Peder Jensen Aal, were merchants who peddled various goods in the regions bordering on Trondheim. Although registered as a burgher in Trondheim from 1735 to 1739, Palmberg was simply referred to as a Swedish vagrant when he was arrested during a sales trip to Molde in 1741 (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, bailiff Jacob Eeg to regional governor von Nissen 30.05.1741).[9] In other words, even the merchants involved with the group seem to have struggled financially. One of the members was enrolled in the military, while at least two others were ex-military. Although the protocols of the military tribunal at Christiansten fortress are lost, the court records and investigations of the Magistrate give the impression that it was rather common for enlisted soldiers to engage in petty theft in order to subsidize their meagre salaries. As stated by Supphellen, common soldiers often became a natural part of those social circuits in town which struggled with poverty and crime (Supphellen 1997:212–213; See also Heinsen 2018:17–18, 24).

In effect, "the great thief conspiracy of Trondheim" consisted of a group of people with loose social ties, connections, and loyalties to the town they resided in. Several of them belonged to the lower social and economic stratum of society. Some also displayed other forms of antisocial behaviour, such as committing fraud, engaging in brawls, and leading lives which the authorities deemed "unchristian" and "an insult to God" (SATR, Bytingsprotokoll, 1740–1742, fol. 225b). The multitude of struggles and difficulties many of them faced in their everyday lives, in addition to the economic opportunism which presented itself through a successful break-in, was probably in large part what brought this group of people into contact.

The various break-ins conducted by members of group stretched across the 1730s, and the well-planned ones usually targeted high-status individuals. This could be wealthy elites within the city of Trondheim or wealthy farmers in the surrounding regions. A brief example will suffice. One of the break-ins targeted the pastor Jens Lemvig in 1736. After the group had been detained in 1740, several of their victims sent in lists of what had been stolen from them. The then-widow of the pastor sent in a claim stating that the thieves had stolen a total of 1,582 *riksdaler* from him, although the thieves themselves claimed it was only 600 *riksdaler* (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Elen Cathrina Lemvig to the Magistrate 26 June 1741). To put this into context, Christian V's Norwegian law of 1687 defined grand larceny as

stealing anything worth more than 10 *riksdaler* (Christian V 1687:6-17-37). The pastor had been chosen as a target because Ole Ingebrigtsen Eggen felt that he had been stingy with payment for a smithing job that he had completed for him. Additionally, Eggen and Orm managed to recruit a sergeant who had recently helped Lemvig move his money from the house to the outhouse.[10] From there, it was simply a matter of waiting until he left his house to complete the yearly visitation of the parishes. Six months after they agreed to target him, the break-in was completed, and the perpetrators were not caught for five years.

In other cases, the thieves acquired a large number of goods, which were efficiently shifted through fences and pawning. The gang also used female family members as fences, and they efficiently shifted the goods into the urban marketplace. However, the theft from Pastor Lemvig was the group's most successful job, and the rewards of the break-ins varied enormously. On one occasion, the group broke into a boathouse, and the meagre result was nothing more than a pair of shoes.

Considering the number of break-ins and the high status of many of their victims, it was a comparatively trivial matter that led to the group's downfall. During a trip to sell some goods in a village close to Trondheim in 1740, Peder Jensen Aal ended up in a fight with an unrelated thief. The two were quickly arrested, and in the course of that trial the authorities became aware of the activities of the other members of the group. Additional members of the gang were arrested in July 1740 and kept under arrest until the sentences of the Magistrate court were carried out in 1742 (SATR, kopibok no. 52, 1740–1742, 129–130). Three members of the group managed to escape; another was an enrolled soldier and was therefore brought before the military tribunal.

The various members of the group had different reactions to their prolonged imprisonment. Ole Christophersen Blix began writing detailed lists of what he and other members of the group had stolen at various places. He sent these lists to the Magistrate so that "they would receive the truth and so that the stubbornness of others would not lead to a prolonged imprisonment" (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Ole Christophersen Blix to the Magistrate 20 July 1741). He also had a faint hope that the town Magistrate would spare his life because of his youth and cooperation. The lists written by Blix grant us a rather detailed impression of the items and money stolen by the group, although it is doubtful that they reveal everything the group stole. With these lists and the claims presented to the Magistrate by victims of the group, it becomes clear that they had stolen money and items worth several thousand *riksdaler*.

After their arrest, the various members of the group were accused of 25 counts of breaking and entering with subsequent theft from the property. Although they were not charged with them at the final sentencing,

an appendix created by the Magistrate lists an additional 15 break-ins that were planned or that for various reasons had failed (SATR, Rådstuen, Saksvedlegg, 1741). The confessions and lists presented at court show that it was rare that more than four members participated in the same job, although informants and fences received their share after a break-in.

The local city court ordered that seven of the fourteen arrested thieves were forfeit of their property to the king and were to be hanged for theft. The remaining seven were sentenced to whippings, to be branded with the mark of thieves and to serve life sentences of forced labour. The men were sentenced to work at the fortress of Munkholmen, and the women as domestic help in fishing villages in northern Norway (SATR, Bytingsprotokoll 1740–1742, fol. 224a–226b).[11] The appointed prosecutor Lorents Nideros, however, thought that this punishment was too lenient and appealed the sentence to the court of the town Magistrate (*Rådstuereten*). The Magistrate court was presided over by *magistraten* which consisted of the president, mayors and leading burghers who were members of the city council. The Magistrate seemingly shared Nideros's opinion, as they ordered eleven of the accused forfeit of their property and to be hanged. The remaining three members were to be whipped, branded and serve life sentences of forced labour (SATR, Rådstueprotokoll, 1738–1743 fol. 167a–178a).

The death sentences were sent to Copenhagen to be reviewed by the king. During the eighteenth century, it became increasingly normal for the king to alter death sentences. This was also the case concerning this group. The Magistrate was instructed to point out three ringleaders who could be executed as examples, while the sentences of the others were commuted to life sentences with manual labour. The town Magistrate pointed out Jacob Orm, Ole Ingebrigtsen Eggen and Ole Christophersen Blix as the ringleaders, and they were hanged on the 3rd of April 1742.

"A Habit of Digging in the Ground": Jacob Orm's Treasure Hunting and Cunning Arts

Various members of the gang of thieves were accused and found guilty of theft. Unlike the rest of the group, Jacob Orm and Rasmus Gjeldvolden[12] were also found guilty of *signing og manen* (SATR, Bytingsprotokoll 1740–1742, 225a–226a). This is a term that has been translated in various ways, but essentially, it describes verbal magic and conjuring (see Tangherlini 2000:285; Sörlin 1999:35; Hagen 2003:47). However, *signing* was also an umbrella term for benevolent magic. Practising such arts was outlawed in a royal decree of 1593, the witchcraft ordinance of 1617 and in the Norwegian law of 1687 (NRR III:302–303; Secher 1891:517; Christian V 1687:6-1-12). According to the ordinance of 1617 and the Norwegian law of 1687, those found guilty of practising benevolent magic had to forfeit

their property and flee the country. Executions did occur if additional suspicions of *maleficium* or diabolism emerged during the trial. Hans Eyvind Næss has estimated that a third of the accused in Norwegian witchcraft trials were charged with *signing* (Næss 1982:134; Hagen 2007:90). This includes cunning folk, their customers and other people who were caught carrying out a benevolent ritual such as healing people or finding lost goods.

From the interrogations and court records, we learn that Jacob Orm practised magical treasure hunting and used a grimoire to find lost and stolen goods. As noted by Gunnar W. Knutsen and Anne Irene Riisøy (2007:52, n. 40), magical treasure hunting does not appear in any of the known Norwegian trials for witchcraft and magic. As far as I am aware, Orm's case is one of the first known cases of magical treasure hunting in early modern Norway. Of course, it comes as no surprise that magical treasure hunting was practised in Norway, as it was a phenomenon that stretched across Europe (e.g. Monter 2013:276; Dillinger & Feld 2002:161; Klaniczay 2017:115; Macfarlane 1970:24–25). The increase in research on treasure hunting in recent decades enables some general remarks on the practice.

Although new cases of treasure hunting in the medieval period have been uncovered, magical treasure hunting seems to have been primarily a phenomenon of the early modern period (Stanmore 2023:68; Dillinger 2012:8; Tóth 2017:306). Magical treasure hunting was usually a collective enterprise, and Johannes Dillinger has identified four types of participants: the leader, who was often economically well-off; the magician, who could be a priest or a monk but on many occasions was a poor person with an itinerant lifestyle, such as a soldier. The third type was supporters who participated in the rituals and helped with manual labour, and lastly, we find curious onlookers (Dillinger 2012:148f). The social and economic status of participants in the same treasure excursion could range from aristocrat to vagrant. As treasure was held to be alive and guarded by ghosts and demons, the treasure hunts were often of a "quasi-religious" nature, especially concerning the soteriological aspects of offering salvation to the ghost bound to the treasure (Dillinger 2022:24). Treasure magic, therefore, revolved around finding the treasure, removing (or liberating) its guardian, and binding the treasure all while maintaining a strict ritual silence. In order to achieve this, the treasure magicians had a variety of magical tools at their disposal: prayers, charms, magical mirrors, divining rods and grimoires. However, many of their tools were linked to high magic and ritual magic, such as magical circles with characters around them used for the conjuration and dismissal of the demons associated with the treasure (Davies 2007:94). Evidently, treasure hunting was closely associated with demonic magic, ghosts and other spiritual entities. When placed in front of a court, treasure hunters were usually charged with superstition or fraud, and on rare occasions, they were charged with being in contact with the demonic

(Dillinger & Feld 2002:115). However, they were usually punished leniently (Dillinger 2012:122; Davies 2007:10). Some states even issued permits to hunt for treasure – provided that no magic was used. Treasure magic was positioned firmly within the realm of male magic used for economic advancement, and it was a form of magic which, in theory, did not contain antisocial consequences for the practitioner's local community. Therefore, treasure hunters were almost never prosecuted for witchcraft (Dillinger 2015:105; Dillinger 2017:11).

Based on the contents of Norwegian black books and Swedish folk tales concerning treasure, Owen Davies has claimed that treasure hunting was as popular in Scandinavia as it was elsewhere in Europe (Davies 2009:124). As it is difficult to date such treasure tales, the following will give some more empirical backing to Davies' claim.

Several of the more than 100 Norwegian black books which still exist contain sections on treasure magic, and by going through the collection kept by *Norsk Folkeminnesamling* (Norwegian Folklore Archive), I found 21 black books with content relating to the discovery of treasure (see also Bang 1901–1902:703–711; Espeland 2014:162–165; Ohrvik 2014:208). Chronologically, the relevant manuscripts stretch from *c*. 1650 to 1850. The various formulas concerned with finding treasure seem to go against Velle Espeland's observation that the contents of Norwegian black books were of a more "homely nature" (Espeland 2014:63). To be clear, there are some formulas for finding treasure that seem to be drawn from Scandinavian tradition, but many of them were also clearly influenced by the European grimoire tradition, with its focus on how to force demons to help one find treasure and how to remove the demons who guard treasure (e.g. Hedmarksmuseet OF 9374). One example is black book NB MS 8° 10, dated to 1790, which contains an almost verbatim translation of an instruction for treasure digging that was published in *Paracelsvs of the supreme mysteries…* translated into English and published by Robert Turner in 1656 (Turner 1656:66). Additionally, several of the manuscripts with information on treasure hunting claim to be *Cyprianus,* meaning copies of the mythical manuscript of Cyprian of Antioch, who became a famed magician in the European grimoire literature (Ohrvik 2018:112–115; Davies 2009:115). Inscriptions in these manuscripts usually claim that they were discovered at the University of Wittenberg, a place steeped in magic and famous for the education of "black book ministers" in Norwegian folklore (Kristiansen 2016:99). Many of the formulas for treasure hunting also seem to have been copied from the same manuscript (or each other), as the formulas are similar and most contain the same figure that was to be drawn where one wanted to dig.

The fact that the sections on treasure hunting in Norwegian black books were influenced by continental treasure lore is another example of what

The figure that was to be drawn on the ground where one wanted to dig for treasure. Source: NFS Joh. Olsen, *Svartebok fra Bærum* p. 23. Dated *c*. 1700–1750.

Davies described as the "democratisation of high magic" (Davies 2007:119; see also Bachter 2004:198). The formulas for treasure hunting give ample examples of how esoteric knowledge spread through the black book/grimoire/*zauberbuch* literature through copying and redistribution and how this literature made available that which had previously been preserved for the few.

When we turn to actual trials for treasure hunting in Scandinavia, we are faced with slimmer pickings. At present, most of the trials we know of where treasure hunting was involved took place in Sweden. In 1726, three men were sentenced to death in southern Sweden for having written the name of Jesus on a cloth to protect themselves against evil forces during a treasure trip. As mentioned, treasure trips were strongly associated with the demonic and with apparitions, and it was common to call upon supporting forces. However, in this instance, using the name of Jesus in such a context was seemingly interpreted as blasphemy by the court (Sörlin 1999:71). Also in 1726, a more elaborate ruse played out, as a man claimed to be looking for treasure in his own house to placate creditors. A retired soldier assisted him by stating that he had chased off the dragon and spirits that guarded the treasure (ibid.:88). In her work on attempted pacts with the devil in Sweden, Soili-Maria Olli also discovered a trial where a trio consisting of a farmer,

a crofter and a soldier were suspected of having abandoned God in order to find treasure. According to Olli, no attempts had been made to enter a pact with the devil, but the authorities drew that conclusion on behalf of the treasure hunters (Olli 2007:36f; in English see Olli 2004:105).

Another study of Gotland mentions a manuscript written by the pastor Lars Nilsson Neogard (*c*. 1683–1758), where he discussed how the devil deceived treasure hunters.[13] According to Neogard, the devil showed himself as a flaming light above buried treasure; he revealed himself in the sky as a dragon that dived into waters containing treasure; he appeared as a ghost above buried treasure; and he revealed himself in the shape of treasure in the middle of the day (Nildin-Wall & Wall 1996:100–102). Neogard was also aware of the rule of ritual silence when digging – a ritual he considered foolish. If we remove the devil from the pastor's examples, we are left with well-established elements of early modern treasure lore (Dillinger 2012:57–59; Espeland 2014:172–173). Although sceptical, Neogard argued that treasure should be located with a divining rod and handed out to the poor. The examples from Sörlin and Solli's research give the impression that treasure magic was punished more harshly in Sweden than in other countries because it was more easily bound to blasphemy and the demonic. Comparative studies will be necessary as more trials in Scandinavia emerge.

In Denmark, trials for treasure hunting seem to be even rarer than in Sweden. Gustav Henningsen found two cases by going through the registers of *Dansk Folkemindesamling* (Danish Folklore Archive). The first was against the itinerant cunning man Jens Clemmedsen, who cured bewitchments and carried a grimoire with him. Clemmedsen was put on trial because he managed to recruit people to dig in a mound where he believed a dragon was guarding treasure. The outcome of his trial is unknown (Henningsen 1975:128f). In 1825, Asmus Møller and two helpers were suspected of witchcraft after digging for treasure in Maribo. Their treasure-digging ritual used a piece of bread, some string, and part of a willow tree. Møller also carried an unknown grimoire. The case was dismissed by the court, but the trio was warned that next time they would be tried according to the paragraph dealing with suspicious arts in the witchcraft ordinance. In 1829, two of the men requested a permit to continue digging in the mound. The application was rejected (ibid.:138).

Clearly, Davies' claim has some backing in the actual trial records as well. Still, there seems to be a rather large difference between the known trials in Sweden and those in Denmark-Norway. The reason for this difference is most likely not because more people in Sweden performed treasure magic and went on treasure hunts. Instead, it is caused by the difference in witchcraft prosecutions and the resulting archival work performed by scholars of witchcraft and magic. Several Swedish regions experienced large numbers of trials for witchcraft and magic well into the eighteenth century (Sörlin

1999:23). Therefore, there has been sustained archival work with an interest in witchcraft, magic, and similar fields for eighteenth-century Sweden as well. The last death sentence for witchcraft in Norway was passed in 1695, and as noted, only a few studies have systematically ventured into the court records from the eighteenth century. More trials will surely appear as archival work proceeds. The following will analyse the magical activities of Jacob Orm and thereby the known trials with elements of treasure hunting in Norway.

According to the confessions they gave in court, we know that the members of "the great thief conspiracy of Trondheim" went on at least four trips where treasure hunting and finding gold was the initial objective. These trips took place between 1731 and 1734, and only two of them were completed. In the remaining two, members of the group committed break-ins before they reached the intended area. These break-ins were part of the more spontaneous break-ins the group committed. However, as the court was gathering evidence to prosecute the group, a woman by the name of Brønnild sent a letter to the Magistrate where she explained that she had been present when Jacob Orm found treasure at Byneset outside of Trondheim and that she was willing to testify (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, signed by Mette Klyverts, no date).[14] Unfortunately, no surviving testimony from Brønnild exists, but her letter implies that Orm went on several treasure hunts that were not mentioned at court. We also know that he went on treasure hunts with people not part of the group of thieves.

Like other treasure hunters, Orm was seemingly on a continuous search for tools that would make the job easier. After all, one of the simple beauties of magical treasure hunting was that there was always something, or someone, to blame when the hunt ultimately failed. Someone broke the ritual silence, the timing was wrong, or a magical instrument had not worked as planned. Based on his confession, we know that Orm acquired a magical instrument after the first treasure hunt we know of. In 1731, he had travelled to Verdalen together with a smith named Andfind to dig for money in a pile of rocks. During the trip, he had a conversation with a Swede who informed him that one of his cousins, named Peder Iversen Kingstad, owned a magical steel mirror. The mirror could allegedly show where treasure was located in the ground. It was most likely similar to a *Bergspiegel*, which was used for the same purpose in Germany (Dillinger 2015:109). The mirror also worked in such a way that when it was held above the ground, it would chase away all the dragons and trolls lying on the treasure (SATR, Forhør og dommer no. 3, 29–34). Orm did not have the finances to buy the mirror outright, and he needed to gather investors. Once he had returned to Trondheim, he managed to convince the blacksmiths Niels, Claus and Anders, the carpenter Svend, a carriage-driver named Peder, Hans Jensen (a retired master of ammunitions at Christiansten fortress), Sergeant Jens

Tiller, and a man named Elias Mathison to pitch in money for the mirror. In a later letter, the master of ammunitions added that a saddle maker by the name of Stig Pedersen and his servant had also chipped in money. In total, ten people invested in the alleged magical mirror (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Hans Jensen to the Magistrate 11 July 1741).

According to Hans Jensen, it was always clear to the investors that the money would go towards the purchase, or at least a pawning, of the mirror from the Swede, who in some instances is referred to as a "wise man" (i.e. a cunning man) in the court records. As we can see, all the investors were male and consisted of artisans, day labourers and both former and active military personnel. Although there was a mix of professions, they all belonged to the lower-middle to working class of Trondheim. There seems to be little reason to question that an interest in increased wealth lay behind their investment.

That a troll and a dragon were guarding the treasure is also natural, as in addition to demons and ghosts, treasure guardians were often taken from local folklore (Dillinger 2012:69; Lindow 1982:259–260). Gunnar W. Knutsen and Anne Irene Riisøy (2007:36–37, 51–52) have demonstrated how the medieval laws of Norway forbade sitting outside to wake trolls and how this activity was connected to attempts at gaining money from mounds and mountains. As they emphasized, the connection between trolls and treasure hoards was clear at least until the High Middle Ages. Orm's intention to use the mirror to chase away trolls, although from a (currently) solitary source, implies that this belief could have survived until the eighteenth century. The dragon is more interesting, as Dillinger has noted that the medieval treasure-hoarding dragon disappeared from early modern treasure lore (Dillinger 2012:71). However, we find dragons mentioned both here and in the above-mentioned Swedish and Danish trials. It is of course possible that "dragon" was a metaphor for the devil. The use of this metaphor can be found in a black book dated to the first half of the eighteenth century where the devil is described as "evil spirit and dragon" (NFS, Joh. Olsen, Svartebok fra Bærum). However, a black book dated to 1650 contains a formula for conjuring a dragon lying inside a mound, and although there is some similarity to later formulas for conjuring demons, it is difficult to say whether it is a metaphor for the devil (NB Ms. 8° 81). Another black book from Copenhagen dated to 1760 contains a formula for conjuring a dragon made of silver and gold (NB Ms. 8° 3136) It is therefore possible that the dragon continued to live on in Scandinavian treasure lore. Further comparisons should be conducted when more trials appear.

Orm's acquisition of the magical mirror meant to chase away such trolls and dragons must have happened quickly, as the failed excursion happened in 1731, and Orm was in possession of the mirror by February 1732 (SATR, forhør og dommer no. 3, 29–34). He had travelled to Sweden, where he

hired the mirror from the Swede for the rather hefty sum of 20 *riksdaler*. It is evident that the group tried it out on at least one treasure hunt, as Hans Jensen was able to describe it in quite some detail. It was a polished iron mirror, formed like a globe, and when looking into it one was meant to see everything that was hidden beneath the ground. However, Jensen could confirm in front of court that the mirror did not have the promised qualities. Orm had returned to Sweden to get the money back, but he claimed that he had fallen ill on the way home and spent all the group's money in order to recuperate. The investors, the city court and the Magistrate court all deemed this an obvious fraud.

The court therefore questioned Hans Jensen as to why he had given money to Orm in the first place. Jensen answered that Orm was known for going out to dig for treasure and that, from time to time, people would join him on these excursions. In addition, Orm had convinced them to invest their money through his "sweet talk which was so well done that we all had faith in him and believed that he was an honest, trustworthy man" (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Hans Jensen to the Magistrate 11 July 1741). When answering questions concerning the break-in at Pastor Lemvig's outhouse, his son-in-law also answered that he had heard that Orm and the others travelled around and dug for money, but that he had paid them no mind (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Peder Halset 17 June1741) These two testimonies demonstrate that Orm was known for these treasure hunts both inside and outside of Trondheim, and because he seemingly did it rather frequently, he was perceived as experienced. As already mentioned, he appears to have found some treasure on occasion. It is of course possible that on these earlier trips (as was the case on some of the excursions with the thieves), he returned with stolen rather than buried goods. Whether the items he returned with were stolen goods or not is beside the point. The important thing was that during the 1730s, a rumour developed in Trondheim that Jacob Orm was a treasure hunter.

Even if Orm managed to get away with the 20 *riksdaler* that had been invested into obtaining the mirror, we should be careful of drawing the conclusion that he was simply a fraud. As Owen Davies has argued, cunning folk could be fraudulent in certain interactions and situations, but that did not necessarily mean that they did not believe in the efficiency of magic or in using the spiritual world for personal benefit (Davies 1997:104). That Orm was not simply a fraud, but one who believed that the spirit world could be used for personal gain, can be seen from the fact that he obtained a black book in the late 1730s. The above-mentioned Rasmus Gjeldvolden confessed in court that Orm had acquired the black book in order to conjure the devil from the earth so that he could show Orm where treasure was buried (SATR, Forhør og dommer no. 3, 166). Orm confessed that this was true and that Gjeldvolden also carried a black book, although the court was

unable to ascertain whether Gjeldvolden had put it to any practical use. The fact that an unrelated thief by the name of Lars Rolvsnes (who also boasted about his ability to find treasure) was found carrying a black book upon his arrest in Bergen in 1744 suggests that, to some degree, black books were in circulation in criminal milieus in the first half of the eighteenth century (DRA, Højesteret, voteringsprotkoll no. 90, 1745, 554).

Gjeldvolden was not the only cunning man whom Orm was in contact with. After the above-mentioned break-in at Pastor Lemvig's outhouse, a dragoon and well-known cunning man in Gauldalen by the name of Ingebrigt began blackmailing the group.[15] Orm informed his associates that he demanded 30 *riksdaler* to keep his silence, and the group quickly paid. However, Ingebrigt had only demanded 16 *riksdaler*, and Orm put the remainder in his own pocket (SATR, Forhør og dommer no. 3, 192–197). Once again, we see that Orm had a fraudulent side. This blackmail also provides an example of communicative networks between cunning men in Norway. Unfortunately, the source does not reveal what kind of information was shared, what they discussed or how frequently they were in contact. But it does show that information was shared and that they were not above blackmailing each other. Nevertheless, the black book was apparently acquired by Orm without the help of others. In addition, he confessed in court that he had used it to receive assistance from the devil. The fact that Orm attempted to use the devil to find treasure clearly fits with the prominence of the demonic in treasure-hunting magic. The sources do not grant us detailed information about the formula Orm used to conjure the devil, but such formulas can be found in several extant black books from the eighteenth century. One black book dated to the latter half of the eighteenth century reads: "The great Lucifer who has power over everything that is hidden in the earth such as gold, silver and money, I conjure you to show me…" (NB Ms. 8° 3136, no. 31 [40]; see also NB Ms 640 C:1). However, it would be pure speculation to assess the degree of similarity between the formulas in these later black books and the one used by Orm.

Clearly, Jacob Orm was on a continuous search for magical tools which would increase his chances of finding treasure. Like many other treasure hunters, he acquired the mirror and the black book from the regional "black market" of magical items and the international trade in magical books.[16] Another method he might have used to localize treasure was the interpretation of dreams. On 7 December 1741, that is, after he had been sentenced to death by the city court, Orm urged the members of the Magistrate court to meet him without the presence of others. In a letter, he informed them that he had been lying in his prison cell late one evening when the room had suddenly become brighter. A voice had spoken to him and told him about the whereabouts of a coffin of gold in Meldal, another coffin was to be found close to a farm in Verdal, and finally another was to be found buried

in a marsh between two lakes close to the Swedish border. The voice had informed Orm that he would be saved if he revealed this information, but with the condition that Orm personally attend these treasure hunts (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Orm to the Magistrate 7 December 1741).[17]

When the Magistrate informed him that this was not an option, Orm informed them of a dream he had had while imprisoned. The king himself had sent him to the Ottoman Sultan in order to convert the Ottomans. Orm's conversion attempt had failed, and just as he was to be executed by the Sultan's court, an angel descended with a sword in one hand. The descent of the angel frightened the Sultan so much that he and the Ottomans converted to Christianity and granted Orm several awe-inspiring gifts. In his dream, he subsequently presented these gifts to the king of Denmark-Norway. The king was so pleased with him that he pardoned his life. Orm urged the Magistrate to relay his dream to the king as quickly as possible (ibid.).

Evidently, this was one of the strategies Orm deployed in an attempt to sway the members of the Magistrate while he was awaiting their verdict. The proposal also demonstrates that he had not confessed to trying to obtain the devil's help in treasure hunting because he was suicidal; Orm was a man who wanted to live. If the Magistrate's greed and curiosity had got the better of them Orm would most likely have tried to escape during their excursions for treasure. The idea of converting the Ottomans was an attempt to trigger the king's moral obligation as a Christian king to convert those of differing religions – in addition to any materialistic desires concerning the luxurious gifts Orm would have brought back.

Still, we should not dismiss the potential use of dream interpretation in relation to treasure hunting only because of Orm's desperate attempts at survival. As argued by Jared Pooley, dreams offered an arena in which "supernatural knowledge could be transmitted and made useful" (Pooley 2015:93). It has also been shown that both treasure hunters and cunning folk used the interpretation of dreams to locate treasure, find lost goods and predict love. The interrogations give us extensive insight into one such case where Orm suggested dream interpretation to Hendrich Nitter in order to help him locate a lost silver cannister (*sølvdåse*).

Nitter was an apprentice tailor and was loosely affiliated with the group of thieves, as he lodged in Ole Christophersen Blix's house. He participated in at least one break-in. According to the lists sent by Blix to the Magistrate, Nitter also socialized with members of the group through gambling and card games. In 1740, someone had stolen Nitter's silver cannister, and he apparently suspected someone from the group of having taken it. Upon inquiring with Blix, Jacob Orm was summoned, but he denied all accusations. Although he proclaimed his innocence, Orm promised Nitter that he would help him retrieve his cannister. Orm presented his black book, from which he read the following:

I conjure by the Northern winds, the Western wind, the Eastern wind and the Southern wind, by the sun and the moon, by heaven and earth, that whoever has taken the silver cannister belonging to Hendrich Nitter shall know no peace or rest until the cannister has been returned. (SATR, Forhør og dommer no. 3, 37–38).[18]

After the conjuration, Orm told Nitter that the cannister would be returned by the following morning. When this failed to come to fruition, Orm informed Nitter to go to the graveyard and take two shinbones from a grave, which he was to bind in a cross underneath his pillow, in order to see the thief in his dreams (SATR, Forhør og dommer no. 3, 39). To sleep on a cross to see a thief while dreaming was suggested in several black books, but they recommended drawing the cross on parchment (Bang 1901–1902:514). Karen Andersdatter, the wife of Ole Christophersen Blix, testified that Nitter had followed Orm's advice, as she had discovered the bones one morning while she was cleaning his lodgings (SATR, Forhør og dommer no. 3, 35). Although he had completed the ritual as instructed, Nitter informed the court that he had not seen the thief in his dreams and that the cannister was never returned to him.

The discovery and return of stolen and lost goods was one of the main activities of cunning folk. Although it is possible that Orm also practised other parts of the cunning trade, this is the only type the court records grant us access to. It is also because of this case that he can be referred to as a cunning man rather than a strictly specialized treasure hunter and thief. As we can see from this example, Orm apparently carried the black book on his person. Naturally, a magical book could not be "out in the open" and had to be either hidden or carried by the owner. This does, however, tell us something about the availability of cunning men. They carried their tools on them and could therefore be consulted on very short notice (see also Davies 2007:69). The conjuration and threat uttered against the thief, in addition to the suggestion of using the bones of the dead, show that Orm had knowledge of common practices for rediscovering lost goods. It is well established that the bones of the dead, and especially the body and possessions of an executed criminal, were believed to have magical potency and were used in everything from magical rituals to medicine (Sörlin 1999:36; Davies & Matteoni 2017:31–32; Klassen & Philips 2006:157).

At court, Orm stated that he had uttered the threat against the unknown thief in order to frighten the thief into returning Nitter's cannister. His explanation therefore fits with what several scholars have identified as one of the primary ways in which cunning folk in England would go about recovering lost goods. A menacing threat concerning the thief's health and future would be uttered with the hope that it would reach the thief and cause him to return the goods out of fear (Thomas 1991:262; Davies 2007:97).

Nevertheless, as far as we can tell from the witchcraft prosecutions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, dream interpretation was not a very

common method of finding lost items in Norway. It was more common to use various divinatory practices that were referred to as *igjenvisning* (showing again). The divinatory practice of the sieve and shears is but one example of rituals that would be considered *igjenvisning.* As I will return to, it was participation in situations such as these that played a role in making Orm known for both treasure hunting and cunning activities in Trondheim.

The Attempted Conjuring of the Devil

The last example concerning the practices of Jacob Orm is his attendance at the attempted conjuring of the devil, at Ila, immediately outside Trondheim. This ceremony took place in the house belonging to the mother of the above-mentioned Grodt brothers. According to Orm's confession, the assembled party consisted of a retired Swedish lieutenant named Røding, Sergeant Anders Paulsen, himself, Jacob Grodt and an unnamed young boy who was the son of Mads Bing, a sailmaker living in Trondheim. It was the unnamed son of Mads Bing who conducted the attempted conjuring, and the ritual is worth quoting at length.

> Jacob Orm explained that roughly four years ago, a retired Swedish lieutenant from Nordland[19] by the name of Røding came to his house. He had asked him to follow him to Ila if he wanted to see Mads Bing's son attempt something interesting. He had followed the lieutenant to the house of Jacob Grodt's mother by the copper mill in Ila. There, he gathered in an attic together with the son of Mads Bing, the retired lieutenant Røding, Sergeant Anders Paulsen and Jacob Grodt. The son of Mads Bing held a book called *Agripa* [sic] in one hand, and with chalk he drew a round circle on the floor, and around it he wrote some Latin letters.[20] Thereafter, he dressed in a white shirt and stepped into the circle, where he began to speak both Latin and Greek, which Orm did not understand. However, he did hear the son say in Danish that he was going to conjure the devil so that the devil could bring him gold. His speech lasted for a while, but nothing appeared, he told them that nothing was going to happen, and that it was best that they stopped. He then removed his shirt and put the book in his pocket. (SATR, forhør og dommer no. 3, 170–171).[21]

Such a detailed description of a ritual to conjure the devil is very rare in the Norwegian source material. The entire situation might remind us of Émile Durkheim's famous statement that "there is no Church of magic" (Durkheim 1995:42). There were no institutional bonds between these men. They were secretly gathered in an attic on the outskirts of town for the sole purpose of attempting to conjure the devil. The difference between their secret activities and the institutionalized repetitive rituals and processions of organized religion become screamingly evident. Still, the ritual was clearly organized and conducted in a ceremonial fashion. From the use of the white shirt as pre-chosen piece of clothing to the use of the learned languages of Latin and Greek, the conjuration had clearly drawn inspiration from high magic

with its magical circles, conjuring of the devil, and ceremonial proceedings. This attempted conjuring is also another case in point of the process of the above-mentioned "democratization of high magic" which allowed this group of men to attempt a conjuration of the devil for personal enrichment (Davies 2007:119).

In this case, the democratization of high magic becomes evident as Orm describes the manual used for the ritual as being a book written by Agrippa. Although we are never given more than this name, is it most likely a reference to Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535). As numerous scholars have pointed out, Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy,* as well as a *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy* that was commonly attributed to but was not actually written by Agrippa, became some of the sixteenth century's most influential texts concerning magic and occult practices (Sharpe 2006:441; Davies 2007:122–123; Frenschkowski 2008:26–30). The attempted conjuring described by Orm is rather reminiscent of, but not identical to, the ritual found in the *Fourth Book* concerning the use of circles or "rings" for the raising of evil spirits (Agrippa & Turner 1665:65–67).

Acquiring one of Agrippa's books should not have posed too much of a problem for those with connections in Trondheim's shipping community. Trondheim was a merchant town where international trade was conducted. Ships from England, France, Germany and other European countries frequently came to the town, and through this active shipping the town was evidently connected to the market of occult books which stretched across Europe[22] (Dillinger 2012:95). As we have already seen, Orm and Gjeldvolden seem to have had few problems acquiring black books. Others in town, such as the young boy, must also have had access to the same "black market" of magical items and occult literature.

Concerning the attendees at the conjuration, we see the presence of military personnel with one retired lieutenant and an actively enrolled sergeant in addition to Jacob Grodt and Jacob Orm, who conducted break-ins and treasure hunts together. It also tells us something about Orm that he, at least according to his own confession, was summoned by the retired lieutenant to witness this ceremony. As Hans Jensen's testimony demonstrated, a rumour had spread that Orm was a treasure hunter, and we know that treasure magic was highly oriented towards contact with apparitions and demons. It is therefore possible that Orm was summoned as he was perceived as having experience in dealing with the demonic.

In seeking the aid of the devil for economic gain, the group was in the company of several other men in Scandinavia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, these were not devil pacts like the alleged ones we find in witchcraft trials. These devil pacts were attempted by individuals seeking to sell themselves (often through a physical written contract) to the

devil to get something in return. Soili-Maria Olli's studies from Sweden have found that it was primarily teenage boys from literate urban cultures who attempted to enter such pacts with the devil (Olli 2012:94). Concerning Denmark, Tyge Krogh found that it was almost exclusively soldiers who attempted to enter these pacts (Krogh 2000:125f). In both Sweden and Denmark there are examples of suicidal people who deliberately let themselves be caught with such contracts in order to be executed by the authorities (Krogh 2012:59; Sörlin 1999:33). Ultimately, however, it was the wish to acquire money or gold from the devil that was most frequently expressed in attempted pacts with the devil (Olli 2004:107). In the case of Orm, it should be stressed that the attempted conjuring is interesting because it was another criminal activity that he was involved in that used high magic and ceremonial proceedings. It therefore fits within a repertoire of services and activities that he engaged in. After all, the formulas in his black book, which he claimed to have used to raise the devil to find treasure, were of the same category as the ritual used at the conjuring, and both types were highly illegal and attempted to use the demonic to acquire material wealth.

"With His Self-Imagined Magic": How the Courts Dealt with Orm's Magical Activities

On 13 October 1741, the city court was finally ready to pass its sentence on the gang of thieves (SATR, Bytingsprotokoll, 1740–1742, fol. 210a–215a, 216b–218b, 224a–226b). The focus in the verdict given by the court was primarily on the many break-ins committed by the different people in the group. There was, however, some consideration of the magical activities of Orm and Gjeldvolden. The following section examines how the courts addressed these magical activities.

In the verdict, it is stated early on that Orm had used verbal magic and conjuration (*signeri og manen*) which had caused a misuse and a desecration of God's name. With his own evil example, he had deceived others into buying the steel mirror which he wanted to use to chase away the trolls, dragons and ghosts that protected buried goods. All of this, the court stated, was so that he himself would have easier access to practise theft and other ungodly deeds (SATR, Bytingsprotokoll 1740–1742, fol. 225a). The verdict implies that the court viewed any possible treasure found by Orm as theft. This would be in keeping with King Christian V's Norwegian law of 1687, which stipulated that all discovered goods had to be announced in court. This was in order to check whether the goods belonged to a living person. If no one came forward, the goods would be shared between the finder, the owner of the land where they were found, and the state. Failure to announce discovered goods in court was seemingly a widespread practice, but judicially speaking, it was categorized as theft (Christian V 1687:5-9-1–3; e.g.

Dahle Hermanstad 2022:173–179). The city court's mention of ghosts in the charges against Orm is the only instance in which ghosts are mentioned in relation to his activities. It could be that Orm added the ghosts to his confession at a later date, or it could be seen as the court's understanding that ghosts also guarded the treasure, in addition to trolls and dragons.

Rasmus Gjeldvolden was also found guilty of verbal magic, conjuring and the desecration of God's name. The court emphasized that he had used the black book to increase his opportunities to practise theft (SATR, Bytingsprotokoll 1740–1742, fol. 226a). The city court sentenced Orm to be hanged as a thief; meanwhile, Gjeldvolden was to serve a lifetime of forced labour at Munkholmen fortress.

As the sentences were appealed by the prosecutor Lorents Nideros, the thieves ended up in the hands of the leading burghers of Trondheim, who manned the Magistrate court. The verdict of the Magistrate is more extensive but also more sceptical of Orm's treasure hunting and magic. It stated that he had pretended to practise treasure hunting so that he could deceive others to join him on these excursions and then make them his accomplices in theft. In addition, it emphasized that he, through numerous acts of "self-imagined magic" (*selv opdiktede koglerier*), had attempted to convince his associates and others that he was "wise" and understood parts of the art of witchcraft (*hexekonsten*) (SATR, Rådstuerettsprotokoll 1738–1743, fol. 171a). The formulation of the Magistrate's verdict is interesting because it highlights Orm's attempts at appearing to be a cunning man. To strengthen their point the Magistrate listed the activities they were thinking of: the public display of the black book to Gjeldvolden, the magical mirror, the attempt to rediscover Nitter's cannister, and his presence at the attempted devil conjuring. The verdict of the Magistrate allows some insight into a process where Orm, seemingly actively, partook in forming the narrative that surrounded him. Through his various activities, and contacts with other wise men, the narrative surrounding him became connected to what Timothy Tangherlini calls the narrative tradition of cunning folk – a narrative tradition closely related to, but still different from, that of the witch (Tangherlini 2000:296). The Magistrate's formulation informs us, then, that one way of becoming a cunning man was to repeatedly portray oneself as one through networks, activities and in public situations (see also Davies 2003:84–87; de Blécourt 1994:297; Johannsen 2018:41). Over time, repeated engagement with "cunning activities" could develop a rumour about a person's knowledge and experience and cause people to seek them out. To repeatedly participate in such activities was therefore a way of influencing the developing narrative about oneself, although there was always an element of external evaluation by others in the community, which implied a risk that the narrative could turn into a witch narrative.

As we can see, the Magistrate's verdict did not outright deny the existence of witchcraft and magic; it simply denied that Orm had mastered it.

Such a sceptical attitude is unsurprising to encounter in the early 1740s. It is clearly established, in both the Norwegian and international historiography of the witchcraft prosecutions, that increased judicial scepticism towards accusations and proof were part of their demise (Næss 1982:256–257; W. Knutsen 2005:601–604; Levack 2016:231–240). In the Magistrate's summary, the attempted devil conjuring was referred to only as an "infuriating spectacle" (*forargeligt spectacul*) without being addressed any further. The Magistrate was so sceptical of the magical elements that these were left out of the final sentencing; and Orm and Gjeldvolden were sentenced to death solely for their thefts and break-ins.

The lacking emphasis on the magical elements in the final verdict is, however, a recurring theme, as we can observe in the two other known treasure-hunting trials from early modern Norway. In 1727, two Sámi men, Thomas and Amund, were put on trial in Senja.[23] They had been digging for treasure in the remnants of old houses, and a rumour had spread that they had found both money and silver. Because of this circulating rumour, they had been granted lodging and food on credit by the locals. During a drunken stupor, one of the Sámi said that the bailiff (*fogd*) had received his part of the share. The bailiff took great offence at this, as the Sámi had not announced their alleged discoveries at the court and they were therefore, judicially speaking, to be considered thieves. Therefore, the claim that they had cooperated with the bailiff could not stand. The bailiff sued them and accused them of being liars; the alleged treasure was barely mentioned and was treated as fiction when it did come up. The bailiff won the case. As the bailiff had sued them, the case was treated as defamation rather than as a trial for fraud (SATR, Senja sorenskriveri, no. 2, 1727–1731, fol. 22a–23a). This is the only case I have found where Sámi were involved in a treasure hunt in Norway. However, in 1682 a man from Finland was fined in Jukkasjärvi in Sweden because of his intention to get a Sámi to help him reveal a treasure buried at the bottom of a bay, by means of "witchcraft" (Edsman 1985:124; Umeå University library, Erik Nordbergs arkiv, vol. 25:43 ab, 63–66).

In 1741, a much more serious trial took place in Follo, close to Christiania (Oslo).[24] A Swede by the name of Anders Bentson had travelled with three others to search for buried treasure in nearby Nesodden. The men had gone up the mountainside and begun digging for money in a pile of rocks. After digging for approximately an hour, they gave up and returned to the boat. After they arrived at the boat, Anders Bentson beat Peder Giellum to death with a wooden pole. When he was questioned by the court, Bentson argued that there had been quarrels within the group as he was unable to locate the treasure. A third member of the entourage testified that Bentson had claimed he knew how to find buried goods. Tensions had been rising within the group, as Bentson had continued to postpone the dig because he felt

the timing was wrong. Most likely, he was waiting for the most "magically potent" time to begin digging. When the work finally began, late in the evening, Bentson gave each of the members a nail which he had collected from execution grounds. As mentioned, anything associated with the corpse of a criminal was seen to hold magical power. After digging for a while, the murder happened as described. Bentson gave no other reason for the murder than that he had become temporarily deranged. The location for the dig had been chosen because some thieves had been executed there some years prior. In addition, Bentson confessed in the court of appeal that they had abandoned the work as they were afraid of ghosts. Although this trial is filled to the brim with material relating to the treasure-hunting activities of the group, these are not mentioned with a single word in the court's decision. It simply states that Anders Bentson had murdered Peder Giellum and was therefore sentenced to death[25] (SAO, Follo sorenskriveri no. A38, 1741–1747, fol. 96a–101a; SAO, Christiania lagting no. A13, 1738–1761, fol. 118a–119a).

Clear similarities exist between these trials and Orm's. The treasure excursions were collective endeavours consisting of a duo and a trio, which emphasizes that treasure hunting was seldom carried out alone (Dillinger 2012:163). Both these two and the treasure hunts carried out by Orm were carried out by outsiders. The Sámi came from Vesterålen and were apparently not permanent residents of the area where they were put on trial. The trial of the Sámi is also another example of how treasure digging, and its alleged discoveries, could be used for fraudulent purposes. The treasure magician Anders Bentson was a Swede and evidently an outsider to Oslo, where he resided. There was an assumption within the group that he had experience and knowledge concerning how to find and acquire buried goods. This is reminiscent of the expectations the investors in the magical mirror had of Jacob Orm. In a similar vein, the treasure hunters in Follo were scared of encountering ghosts, who were strongly connected to ideas about treasure in the early modern period. Orm, on the other hand, had to seek out tools to chase away the dragons and trolls who guarded the buried treasures he was after. Lastly, all the participants were male. These trials, of course, share many characteristics with trials of treasure hunters in other European countries.

Surviving on the Margins of Society: Magic and Economic Behaviour

This in-depth presentation of "the great thief conspiracy of Trondheim" has made it obvious that they weren't all that great. The number of successful, profitable break-ins they managed to pull off is impressive, but eventually it all came crumbling down. Although only the three leaders were executed

(after a series of royal pardons), the remaining members lived out their lives in forced labour and misery. The group itself consisted of people of different nationalities and backgrounds with the common denominator that most were outsiders to the city of Trondheim. Many of them also scraped by amongst the lower social and economic stratum of the city. Their difficult situation was most likely what initially led them to carry out the thefts and break-ins.

It seems that at least the leaders Jacob Orm, Ole Ingebrigtsen Eggen and Ole Christophersen Blix managed to support a decent lifestyle due to their crimes. Orm submitted a list detailing how he had spent the money he had acquired and listed 215 *riksdaler*. Furthermore, he stated that an undisclosed amount had been spent on his house and children (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Orm to the Magistrate 21 July 1741). Ole Christophersen Blix, on the other hand, accounted for 185 *riksdaler* that he had acquired within the span of the year he worked with the group (SATR, tyver, mordbrennere, Ole Christophersen Blix to the Magistrate 22 June 1741).

This prompts the question why several members of the group, and especially Jacob Orm and Rasmus Gjeldvolden, engaged in treasure hunting and the use of black books. Orm even attended an attempted conjuring of the devil. One would assume that all attention from the authorities was bad attention when committing over twenty break-ins primarily targeting the wealthy in the span of a decade. It also prompts the question as to why so many people were willing to invest in Orm's treasure hunts, and why the authorities seemingly did nothing about him even though he had a reputation as a cunning man and treasure hunter.

In recent decades there has been an increasing tendency to use the theory of limited good when explaining economic behaviour and its relation to witchcraft and magic (e.g. Tschaikner 2006:135; Davies 2008:192f; Klaniczay 2017:120; Ostling 2013:320). In particular, Johannes Dillinger has used this theory to explain why treasure hunters were not accused of witchcraft and why the authorities had an ambivalent relationship towards them (Dillinger & Feld 2002:182; Dillinger 2012:190–197; Dillinger 2015:120–121). The following discussion builds on this scholarship and attempts to demonstrate its applicability to the Norwegian treasure trials.

In short, George Foster argued that the theory of limited good is applicable to study the economic rationale and behaviour of people living in traditional agrarian societies. As the name suggests, Foster argued that he could observe an economic mentality in these agrarian societies which operated as if everything existed in a limited amount, which could never increase (Foster 1965:301). One man's gain was therefore to everybody else's detriment. This led to a mentality of social conformism which punished aggressive attempts at rapid economic accumulation within the village, and therefore, within the system of limited good. It was of course possible to

work towards enriching oneself inside this system, but it would come with social stigma (Dillinger 2015:120). It was possible to introduce money and other forms of material wealth into the system of limited good from the outside, however. This could be achieved by taking jobs in a distant city, or, as Foster explores – by finding treasure or winning the lottery. Newly acquired wealth which was difficult to explain would be rationalized through treasure tales. Although this new wealth might be frowned upon, it was not considered antisocial or detrimental to the community. As Keith Thomas has found, the newly rich in England during the Tudor era could be nicknamed "Hill-diggers", implying that their wealth came from finding treasure rather than a nose for business (Thomas 1991:280). Such nicknames and false designations of where wealth originated helped maintain the idea of limited good and a static economy (Foster 1964:42). Rapid acquisition of wealth was therefore not explained through protocapitalist entrepreneurialism but through either antisocial behaviour or luck.

Even if there was a developing market economy during the early modern period, many of the constraints of the old system were still in place. The monopolies of mercantilism and the guilds' tight grip on artisan labour are but two examples of objects that stood in the way of aggressive social and economic climbing. It was of course not impossible, and there are many success stories, but they came with a cost. Up-and-coming people with wanton disregard for socionormative restrictions on economic behaviour could be suspected of witchcraft because they went against the notion of limited good and were thought to infringe on the communal pot. This was a potential fate for the "rich witch" (Dillinger 2022:219). The clearest difference between Foster's theory based on modern societies and the early modern period is that in the latter, magic was to an even greater extent very much real, and it could be used to circumvent the obstacles placed on economic behaviour.

For as several scholars have noted, there is without a doubt a clear economic element connected to witchcraft and magic (e.g. Tangherlini 2000:283; Dillinger 2017:21). The witches accused of *maleficium* were often people who in some way or another were accused of infringing on the communal or personal good. They could be accused of stealing milk from their neighbours by using a *trollkatt* (Lecoutex 2013:91f).[26] Or they could be accused of having used a *drache* to steal money from their neighbours (Dillinger 2022:212). The economic behaviour of the witch was antisocial in nature. She took as hers that which belonged to her neighbours; in addition, she was capable of total destruction. Cunning people were in a more ambivalent position. As argued by Tabitha Stanmore, it is likely that the market of magical services in which cunning people operated was influenced by protocapitalist tendencies (Stanmore 2023:93). As the sale and acquisition of magical services were judicially outlawed, there were no state-sanctioned

regulations concerning their price. Supply, demand, the difficulty of the service, and the status of the practitioner most likely played roles in setting the price (see also Davies:2007:84–87). However, cunning folk often operated within the system of limited good. Their job was seldom to introduce new wealth or fortune; it was rather to restore that which had been damaged or lost – as is evident through the practices of healing, counter-witchcraft, and finding lost goods. Aggressive economic behaviour from cunning folk, or antisocial behaviour in general, could change the narrative that surrounded them such that they could be accused of antisocial witchcraft, although this was rare (Tangherlini 2000:286).

Treasure hunters then present a third alternative that worked outside of the concept of limited good. As we have seen, their activities were strongly bound to the magical and to the conjuring of both demons and spirits. Through these activities, they did not attempt to harvest resources from the world of the living. They used magic to battle for the unlimited resources that were perceived to exist in the spirit world (Dillinger 2017:20–21). Therefore, they did not actively or passively infringe on the community or the idea of limited good. If the treasure hunt failed, this would affect only the treasure-hunting party (given that they hadn't dug up someone else's property). As Dillinger has argued, treasure hunting was a form of economic behaviour practised by those who wanted to amass wealth without violating society's norms concerning increases in material wealth (Dillinger 2012:207). That is why treasure-hunting groups consisted of all social classes, from the destitute poor who wanted a better life to the entrepreneurial middle class who wanted to expand their wealth.

It does seem absurd to discuss treasure hunting as an activity of someone who wanted to climb the economic ladder without stepping on their neighbour's feet, when the case in point is one of the leaders of a gang of thieves. Once again, it would be useful to approach it through Tangherlini's focus on the narrative surrounding a person. It could not have been common knowledge in Trondheim during the 1730s that Orm was a large-scale thief (if it had been he would have been apprehended and prosecuted). This was information that was most likely confined to the circle of his associates (and probably family members). As discussed, Orm gathered a reputation as a treasure hunter and a cunning man during the 1730s. He was bound to the narrative tradition of cunning folk. The example of the magical mirror also demonstrates that he attracted people willing to invest money in magical treasure hunting. Evidently, these men fit more cleanly the bill of people who wanted economic gain without social repercussions. Although the men who invested in the mirror complained to the Magistrate that they had been deceived, this apparently did not happen until Orm was arrested. It is therefore just as likely that the men eyed an opportunity to get their money back from the failed investment. After all, treasure hunts usually failed. That was

the reason treasure magicians usually lived itinerant lifestyles. In this sense, Orm breaks away from Dillinger's categorization of the four typical participants, as he was both leader and magician (Dillinger 2012:148f). The reason Orm was able to stay in Trondheim was that he was an outsider there and an outsider to the places where they dug for treasure. Orm's ambivalent position as a treasure-hunting cunning man meant that he operated both in the sphere that tried to introduce wealth from the spirit world and in the sphere of the cunning people who operated within the limited good. Most importantly, neither his neighbours nor the authorities seemed to think that his magical activities were endangering anyone else. This is also a reason why he was able to attract investors who wanted wealth without antisocial consequences.

The same can be said about the murder trial in Oslo where the participants attempted to gain access to the treasure of executed thieves. The treasure they were after clearly belonged to the world of the dead. The trial of the Sámi demonstrates that the local inhabitants gave them credit because of the alleged treasure. This is unsurprising because the alleged treasure had been reintroduced into society. It was therefore safe for the locals to accept it, as they believed that it was not stolen from the living. Therefore, they did not partake in antisocial behaviour by accepting it as a basis for credit.

One should not underemphasize that Orm's use of magic such as black books and magical mirrors did breach the witchcraft ordinance of 1687; but as we have seen, the Magistrate did not think that magic or witchcraft had been involved at all. Orm and Gjeldvolden were sentenced as thieves. This was due to both the court's scepticism towards witchcraft and to the fact that his treasure hunting, in itself, did not pose any threat to the well-being of society at large. In their ruling, the Magistrate even provided psychological reasoning as to why Orm practised treasure hunting. It was to lure, bait and trick other economically opportunistic people into coming along with him to find wealth – and ultimately make them assist him in what the Magistrate perceived as the true crime – theft.

There is another type of source which can help strengthen this argument: the execution ballads written about Jacob Orm, Ole Ingebrigtsen Eggen and Ole Christophersen Blix. It is estimated that fewer than 200 execution ballads exist for the entirety of Scandinavia (Mcilvenna, Brandtzæg & Gomis 2021:136). Three of them are concerned with the executions of Orm, Eggen and Blix in 1742 (Anonymous 1742a; Anonymous 1742b; Vigant 1742).[27] As a subgenre of the broadside ballad, execution ballads were a commercial product intended for sale, and therefore, they did not spare the macabre details of crimes, which were often presented through sensationalist phrasings (Brandtzæg 2017:30). Execution ballads also contained a highly religious and didactic motif, as they would present the criminal's decline throughout life, a warning to the listener of the dangers of committing

crime and, usually, the criminal as a repentant sinner prepared to meet salvation through God (Krogh 2000:304–313; Brandtzæg 2017:34; Mcilvenna 2022:6).

It would then seem likely that the trial of Jacob Orm presented itself as a treasure trove for the writers of execution ballads in Trondheim with its elements of divination, magical treasure hunting, attendance at an attempted conjuring of the devil and multiple break-ins and thefts. Orm's trial might have presented a rare opportunity to elaborate on a delinquent's decline into the clutches of the devil through an actual case where the perpetrator had, on several occasions, sought contact with the demonic. And yet, all three execution ballads focus almost exclusively on the break-ins and thefts. There are ample references to the three delinquents' close association with the devil, but this was a common phrasing in execution ballads in Denmark-Norway (Krogh 2000:304–307). The one reference to Orm's magical practices is a mention that he desecrated God's name (Anonymous 1742a). This is a formulation which can be found in several trials for witchcraft and magic in the seventeenth century. It is unlikely that the writers of the ballads were unaware of Orm's magical activities and association with the demonic, as they appeared both in the accusations against him and in the confessions he gave. To strengthen this point, one of the execution ballads demonstrates that the author had intimate knowledge of what was happening during the prosecutions. The ballad mentions that Ole Christophersen Blix had broken one of the bars to the window in his cell, which was something he was ultimately charged with and found guilty of doing (1742b). The authors, therefore, seem to have had a good grasp of what was going on. Evidently, they deemed the string of break-ins and thefts as the most sensational and newsworthy.

Based on the previous discussion, I would argue that the lack of focus on magical and demonic aspects in the execution ballads is fitting with the concept of limited good. The reason the focus was on the thefts and break-ins was that they were the clearest forms of Orm's antisocial economic behaviour. He took for personal gain that which rightfully belonged to others. As argued, Orm's magical treasure hunting fell outside this form of antisocial economic behaviour, as the intention was to collect money from the spirit world and the realm of the deceased. Similarly, the attempted conjuration of the devil was about personal economic gain with personal consequences for the conjuror. Although it was an unorthodox way of obtaining wealth, it did not, at least from a purely economic perspective, affect other members of the community. The ballads also point towards this – the thefts were the most outrageous because they directly inflicted economic damage on others.

Treasure hunters were accused of fraud and blasphemy but almost never of witchcraft. As we have seen in the few treasure hunting cases we know of from Norway so far, they were not really accused of treasure hunting at all.

Conclusion

"Now Jacob, farewell! You sinful worm!" (Anonymous 1742b).

This article has presented an in-depth analysis of the activities of Jacob Orm and a group of thieves in Trondheim in the 1730s. It is evident that Orm and several other members of the gang carried out magical treasure hunts in attempts to enrich themselves. As the son of a military sergeant, Orm was most likely raised within a military culture before he moved to Trondheim, but it remains uncertain if that is where he learned about treasure hunting and magic.[28] Orm's actions and practices, at least as these can be perceived through the court records, strengthen the notion that some cunning people could be unscrupulous, fraudulent and criminal. Two of the members of the gang owned a black book, which adds evidence to the argument that the black book/grimoire/*zauberbuch* literature participated in democratizing high magic and spreading it amongst different social classes. Like many other treasure hunters and cunning people, Orm was seemingly on a continuous search for magical items which could aid him, and they seemingly played an important role concerning how he practised his magical skills.

Together with members of both the group of thieves and other investors, Orm went on several journeys to search and dig for treasure. Unfortunately, we are not given information on how he proceeded during the actual digs, but he most likely followed the same pattern seen in other countries: locate the treasure, remove the guardian and bind the treasure. Concerning the recovery of stolen goods, he practised the same type of spells found in many black books. He also participated in the tradition of using the bones of the dead for extra magical potency. As we have seen, there are some clear similarities between the Norwegian trials for treasure hunting and those in other countries. The prevalence of the dragon as a treasure guardian in the Scandinavian trials needs to be further examined when more trials are discovered. All the participants in the treasure hunts in Norway, that we know of so far, were men, and they seem to have stemmed from lower to middle classes of society. Many, but not all, were also strangers and outsiders to the town they resided in or the districts where they were prosecuted. This clearly fits with the European trend where especially the treasure magician was often an outsider to the areas he worked in.

The article has attempted to argue that the treasure hunts can be interpreted through the theory of limited good in Norway as well. The activities of the treasure magicians did not infringe on their neighbours, as their magic attempted to gain money from the spirit world. Therefore, the courts had an ambivalent relationship towards it. Even if treasure hunting featured, no one in the known Norwegian trials was punished for treasure hunting or magic in the final verdict. There were no antisocial elements in their economic behaviour which gave reason to prosecute for witchcraft or magic, as

the norms of limited good had not been broken. The fragile border between acceptable and antisocial was disturbed only when someone considered themselves scammed, swindled or robbed.

Orm then represents a rather extreme example of how deep the ambivalent connection between common magic, cunning folk and the more traditional types of crime could run within a populous urban centre. His treasure hunting gave him a pretext to travel outside the city with other thieves and also with his actual treasure-hunting clients. His presence in the surrounding villages did not necessarily raise any eyebrows – he was accepted by some, ignored by others and was surely an ambivalent figure. This position gave him considerable agency, which he used both in thieving in order to augment his own finances and in offering divination and treasure hunts to his clients. In this sense Orm, like other cunning folk, was able to exist within a sphere between what the state uncomfortably tolerated and that which it rejected.

The court records also give an interesting glimpse into how Orm came to be recognized as a cunning man. As he carried out his treasure hunts and cunning activities, rumours about him spread in the regions surrounding Trondheim. He evidently interacted with the "black market" for magical items and books, and he was in contact with other people reputed to be cunning men. As the court emphasized, it seems as if Orm played an active role in creating the narrative that he was a cunning man. It was this narrative that attracted people to seek him out and join him in business ventures such as treasure hunting and possibly also the attempted conjuring of the devil. This also fits with research from both Scandinavia and other countries which argues that in order to be a cunning man, it was necessary to be, at least partly, a public figure who presented himself as such.[29]

Ultimately, this article has also attempted to demonstrate that we do find trials that are a far stretch from the more common divination, healing and witch trials in reverse that the eighteenth century is mostly known for. There remains a great need for further archival research concerning magic and witchcraft in eighteenth-century Norway.

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[2] Original: "det i Trundheim anholdne store tyvecomplot." Archival references in the running text will be given in short form. The full archival reference is given in the bibliography.

[3] A note on terminology. I refer to *Rådstueretten* as the Magistrate court. *Rådstueretten* was presided by what is known as *magistraten* in Norwegian (from the Latin: "magistratus") which consisted of the president, mayors and often a few city councillors. It was therefore a court where several people acted as judges, but I still refer to their decisions as the decision(s) of "the Magistrate". To avoid confusion with the English magistrate court, the capitalized "Magistrate" is used consistently throughout the article when discussing the actions and sentences of *Rådstueretten*.

[4] Anne-Sofie Schjøtner Skaar is currently pursuing a PhD investigating trials for magic, witchcraft and witch trials in reverse in northern Trøndelag *c.* 1700–1750.

[5] This file contains a multitude of documents relating to the trials. Some of the documents, but far from all, are numbered with letters and/or numbers, but there is no necessary order or relation between the various marked documents. Therefore when referencing to this source, I give the name of the sender and the date.

[6] According to various royal ordinances, soldiers and former soldiers were allowed to practise an artisanal occupation without being part of a guild as long as they did not take on apprentices. Eggen entered such an agreement with the smith's guild in 1734; however, he later took on an apprentice, which led to a legal dispute with the smith's guild in 1737.

[7] *Repslagerveita* can be translated as "Ropemaker Street". Originally, it was primarily inhabited by ropemakers who worked at *reperbanen* at Kalvskinnet.

[8] Original: "[f]orstaar det fantesprog som alle landstrygere haver sig imellem paa det ingen skal kunde forstaae dem…» The word *fant* was frequently used concerning vagrants. It could also be used to denote Romani alongside the contemporary term *tater*. Their father and at least one of the brothers worked as coppersmiths at the copper mill in Ila just outside Trondheim.

[9] As a merchant burgher, Palmberg had privileges to conduct inland trade. He carried out a nomadic sales business drifting long distances away from the town with his goods. When he was arrested together with Johannes Grodt, both were described as "Swedish vagrants" (*svendsche landstrygere*). The term *landstrygere* is an even more general term for vagrants than *fant*, which was used to describe the language the Grodt brothers used to communicate with each other. Palmberg managed to escape during the guarded transportation from Molde to Trondheim.

[10] In Norwegian, the type of outhouse is known as a *stabbur*. Many of the break-ins carried out by the group targeted *stabbur*, as they usually had a door with a lock and key and were used to store food, goods and sometimes valuables.

[11] The deportation of criminals to fishing villages in either Nordlandene or Finnmark was part of the repopulation project that the Danish-Norwegian state pursued from the 1680s. For lesser crimes such as repeatedly having premarital relations, sentences could be limited to three-year periods. For serious offences such as incestual relations, aggravated robberies and theft, life sentences were the norm.

[12] There is a farm in Snåsa with the name Gjeldvolden. It is therefore possible that Jacob Orm and Peder Gjeldvolden came from the same area and knew each other before they moved to Trondheim.

[13] The manuscript is located in the special collections at Uppsala University Library and is called *Gautau-Minning* (c. 1732).

[14] Mette Klyverts was one of Jacob Orm's neighbours. After she became a widow, Orm broke into her house and stole most of what her husband had left her while he knew she was away taking care of a sick person. According to the confessions of other members of the gang, Mette had considered Orm a friend.

[15] The dragoon Ingebrigt had drowned in the river Gaula some years before the trials began in 1741. Gauldalen is a region close to Trondheim.

[16] The Swede lived close by the border on the Swedish side of Femunden Lake, so although Orm did cross into Sweden, he was in regional proximity to Trondheim.

[17] If these treasure troves actually existed, they might have consisted of Orm's personal collections of stolen goods. From his probate record, we learn that he had buried quite extensive amounts of stolen goods in his backyard. Apparently, he also frequently travelled in the areas he mentioned to the Magistrate.

[18] Original: "Jeg maner ved Norden Wind, Westen Wind, Østen Wind, og Synden Wind, soel og maane, himmell og jord, at dend som har taget Hendrich Nitters sølvdaase ikke skall faa nogen roe eller freed, førend dend skaffede Daa-sen tilbage."

[19] It is unclear whether this refers to the region of Norrland in Sweden or the region of Nordlandene in Norway. Røding's last name is also spelled "Ryding" on one occasion.

[20] Latin letters instead of Gothic letters, which was the common writing style in Denmark-Norway at the time.

[21] Original: "Jacob Orm forklarede, at for omtrent 4 aar siden, kom een aftakket svensch lieutnant fra Nordland ved nafn Ryding til ham i hands huus, og bad ham at følge med sig i Ihlen da deponenten skulle faa it artig pus at see af Mads Bing seyelmagers søn, hvilchet hand og giorde, og fuldtes ad med Lieutnant Røding til Jacob Grodtes moders huus i Ihlen, ved kaabermøllen, hvor hand tillige med Lieutenanten forefandt for sig paa it loft Mads Bings søn, Sergiant Anders Povelsen, og Jacob Grodt da Mads Bings søn hafde een bog i haanden kaldet Agripa, og derefter med krid giorde een rundt krids paa gulvet, og der omteignet eendeel latinsche bogstaver, derefter paatog hand een hvid schiorte og træde saa ind i kredsen, og begyndte at tale; hands tale var paa Latin og Graisch som deponenten ikke forstoed, mens dette hørte hand sige af Mads Bing søn paa Dansch, at hand vilde mane diævelen frem som skulde schaffe ham guld, denne hands tale varede saaledes een stund, mens indtet fremkom, hvorpaa hand sagde her bliver indtet mere af, det er best at holde op, og derpaa tog skiorten af sig, og bogen stak hand i lommen…"

[22] The town of Flensburg in Schleswig-Holstein played an especially important role in the shipping traffic to Trondheim.

[23] The surnames (patronyms) of the Sámi men were not entered into the court records during their trial. They are referred to as Thomas Find and Amund Find, meaning Thomas the Sámi and Amund the Sámi.

[24] I am grateful to Ola Teige, who alerted me to this trial.

[25] Bentson was never executed, as he died while in custody.

[26] The *trollkatt* is a rare phenomenon in Norwegian witchcraft trials. I know of only four cases. They were said to steal butter, which they delivered to the witch. W. Knutsen and Riisøy describe them as a Norwegian version of the witches' familiar (W. Knutsen & Riisøy 2007:46)

[27] The three execution ballads concerning Orm, Eggen and Blix have been digitized and are available at https://skillingsvisene.hf.ntnu.no/ (last accessed 6 August 2024). Search using the word: Orm. Original: "Nu Jakob Farvel! Du Syndige Orm". The author of the execution ballad played on Orm's surname, which means worm/snake.

[28] Unfortunately, the court records for the magistrate district of Inderøy are missing for the 1720s. During this period, Orm would have been in his twenties and could perhaps have appeared at local court sessions in Snåsa. As they are missing, we know little about him before he moved to Trondheim in 1730.

[29] There are of course exceptions to this rule as well. In 1710, the clergy in Helgeland cited Peder Christensen Oxtinden at court on several occasions, as they believed that he had practised healing on several villagers. Although they never got their convictions, the sources make it seem like Peder was sought out at the remote Okstinden as he was widely recommended. It does not seem as though he posed as a healer.