

# 5. The Witchcraft Trial against Anders Poulsen, Vadsø 1692: Critical Perspectives

*Liv Helene Willumsen*

## Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyse a historical source that has attracted considerable attention during the last two decades, namely the court records of the trial of Anders Poulsen, 1692.<sup>1</sup> The trial took place in the town of Vadsø in Finnmark, which is the northernmost district of Northern Norway. The reasons for this attention are multiple, and a few will be mentioned. First, the trial against Anders Poulsen was very dramatic and had a disastrous ending, as he was accused in a severe witchcraft trial and murdered by axe the day after the trial. Second, this trial dealt with the traditional art of shamanism, as he was an old shaman who had practiced the art of rune drumming during a long life. Third, the trial of Anders Poulsen shows the meeting between a Sámi person, representing an ethnic minority group in Finnmark, and the judicial authorities at the end of the seventeenth century. Fourth, this trial put a full stop to the Finnmark witchcraft trials, which had haunted the district for a century. Fifth, from the Sami Museum in Karasjok, a work related to repatriation of ceremonial objects of indigenous cultural heritage is recently undertaken, with particular focus on Anders Poulsen's shaman's drum (North Sámi *goavddis*; in the original source material 'Runnebomen', English 'rune drum'). RidduDuottarMuseat – Sámiid Vuorká Dávvirat (The Sámi Museum in Karasjok, Norway) has had the drum on a long-term loan from The National Museum of Denmark (Copenhagen) since the end of the 1970s. In spring 2021, the Sámi Museum sent a formal repatriation request to Denmark, and got a positive answer from Denmark in January 2022.<sup>2</sup>

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Anders Poulsen was brought before the court because he had played the drum, regarded as an 'evil and devilish art of witchcraft'.<sup>3</sup> He gave a long confession, describing the symbols of the drum. The detailed court records have survived. How can we understand Anders Poulsen's confession? I would like to approach the historical source from a critical perspective and ask: Can these court records be taken at face value, and be read and interpreted as Anders Poulsen's straightforward description of the drum and transmission of Sámi culture? Or do we have to take into account the key point of source criticism: that the context here is a criminal trial wherein the accused person is threatened by a sentence of execution, and that this frame will colour his confession?

My outset is previous readings of the Anders Poulsen trial by historians. The first reading is by Einar Niemi, who maintains that the court records from the trial of Anders Poulsen are 'the most comprehensive first-hand contemporary source available on traditional Sámi religious practices, and on the use of the magic drum in particular'; it is 'one of the most important existing sources of our knowledge on Sámi shamanism'.<sup>4</sup> This interpretation is based on the understanding that the confession of Anders Poulsen is reliable, and that its content accurately represents the field of traditional Sámi religious practice, particularly the use of the drum.

Another reading is given by Rune Blix Hagen. In a number of articles, Hagen refers to Niemi's statement without rejecting the notion that Anders Poulsen's confession provides knowledge about genuine Sámi shamanism and traditional Sámi religious practice. He states: 'As a study of Sámi shamanism, we can read the records from the Poulsen trial as a kind of gateway to seventeenth-century ideas of magic', and further that Poulsen's drum is 'one of a very small number of drums for which we have the owner's own explanation of the drum's symbols and figures'.<sup>5</sup> The reliability of Anders Poulsen's confession is not doubted, but is regarded as a glimpse into seventeenth-century people's mentalities and imagination.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the fact that the court records provide Poulsen's own explanation is presumed to strengthen the authenticity of the description of the drum, not taking into consideration that we are talking here about a confession given in response to interrogation in a severe criminal trial.

The Finnmark witchcraft trials were severe compared to other areas.<sup>7</sup> The strongest persecution of witches in Europe took place in Germany, Switzerland, and Scotland. The intensity of witch-hunting in Finnmark was 60 times the European average.<sup>8</sup> At the very end of the seventeenth century, the severe witchcraft trials in Finnmark had come to an end. During the Finnmark witchcraft trials, which occurred from 1600 to 1692, 135 persons were accused of witchcraft. Of these, 82% were women and 18% were men. Most convicted individuals were sentenced to death by fire at the stake. Other sentences were banishment, whipping at the whipping post, and fines.<sup>9</sup> When Anders Poulsen was brought before the court in 1692, 90 persons had already been executed for witchcraft by fire at the stake in the district of Finnmark, and Poulsen was the next, and the last one during the Finnmark persecution. Of the 91 persons who lost their lives, 77 were women and 14 were men.<sup>10</sup> The execution rate per accused was 67% in Finnmark. The intensity of the witchcraft trials, measured in number of accused per population, was high in this region, which counted just 3 000 inhabitants.<sup>11</sup>

The population of Finnmark was of mixed ethnicity in the seventeenth century. Two ethnic groups lived side by side, Norwegians and Sámi, each with a culture and language of their own. Around one-fifth of the district's inhabitants were Sámi.<sup>12</sup> Norwegian settlements were found along the coast, their populations living of fishing and smallholdings. The Norwegian population of Finnmark consisted of long-established locals and migrants who had come to the north in the previous century and settled in a district well known for its rich fishing grounds. Sámi settlements were found both inland and along the inner parts of the fjords. The inland Sámi settlements were inhabited by reindeer keepers, who migrated to the coast in the summer. Around four-fifths of those accused of practicing witchcraft were Norwegian, the remainder being Sámi.<sup>13</sup>

The Finnmark witchcraft trials were an offshoot of the European witch-hunts, ca. 1450–1750.<sup>14</sup> The witch-hunt in Finnmark was brutal, with torture being used during interrogation. The content of the accused persons' confessions was partly influenced by Central European demonological ideas and partly by traditional sorcery.

Two concepts of witchcraft came to the fore during the Finnmark witch-hunt. On the one hand, there was the European doctrine of demonology, spread throughout Europe via a number of demonological works from the late 1400s until the late 1600s. The most famous of these works is *Malleus Maleficarum* [The Witches' Hammer], from 1496. According to the demonological ideas, when a person entered into a devil's pact, the power to perform witchcraft was transferred from the Devil to the human being. Another important demonological notion was the witches' gatherings, where many witches were supposed to meet in a field or on top of a mountain, with the Devil in their midst.<sup>15</sup> Related to ideas on witches' gatherings were ideas on shape-shifting (metamorphosis) and night flights, as the witches had to be able to fly swiftly through the air to come to the meeting place. There is a clear multiplying element present in the motif of a witches' meeting, as the interrogated person was always asked, after having confessed to participating in a witches' meeting, who else she saw there. The demonological concept of witchcraft was related to a type of witchcraft trials called panics: successive trials during a concentrated period of time.

Then there was traditional witchcraft—*maleficium*. The content of *maleficium* trials was spells cast on humans or animals, resulting in sickness or death. This concept of witchcraft was based on the perception that witchcraft was practiced due to inherent magical power. It was practiced on an individual basis; hence one person at a time was brought before the court and accused of having performed *maleficium*.<sup>16</sup>

Most women accused of and sentenced for witchcraft in Finnmark were Norwegian. They were mainly accused in panics related to demonological ideas and connected with collective witchcraft. In Europe, on average around 80% of the accused and sentenced in witchcraft trials were women, and Finnmark is in line with this rate.<sup>17</sup> The majority of the women accused came from the local fishing communities in East Finnmark.

In the group of men accused of witchcraft in Finnmark, comprising 24 persons, 16 were Sámi, out of whom 13 were executed. The rest were Norwegian men. Most men accused of witchcraft in Finnmark were accused in individual trials. Among the Sámi men accused of witchcraft, two were shamans who used the drum.<sup>18</sup> In

Europe, Sámi men were known to be well versed in sorcery from history books on the Nordic countries.<sup>19</sup> Sámi sorcerers were particularly well known for selling wind to boats, for casting Sámi spells—called *gand*—and for playing the drum. Sámi sorcery was in focus during the beginning and the end of the trial period. Another idea related to Finnmark was that of the superstitious north: that the Devil lived up north and that the entrance to hell was there too. In the European mentality, Finnmark was a place where witchcraft was likely to thrive.

## Anders Poulsen

Who was Anders Poulsen? He was a Sámi man who was, according to himself, 100 years old.<sup>20</sup> He came from Torne Lappmark, the area in Sweden bordering Finnmark, where several ethnic groups lived together and several languages were used. Poulsen himself did not speak Norwegian, and Sámi Constable Poul Iversen was used as a translator during the trial. Anders Poulsen owned a drum and had learned how to play it when he was young. First, Poulsen said that his mother had taught him, later that another man had taught him, and finally again that it had been his mother who had taught him. His mother had learned to play the drum from a man in Torne Lappmark. Poulsen was a married man with many children. He owned two reindeer bulls, four reindeer cows, and two reindeer calves.<sup>21</sup> He was a regular tax payer, a point that he himself emphasised.

The pre-trial of Anders Poulsen started two months before the formal trial. His drum was confiscated on 7 December 1691. He was questioned about his use of the drum on 8 December 1691, in the presence of Deputy Bailiff Olle Andersen, Deputy Appeal Court Judge Niels Knag, who was the bailiff and magistrate of Finnmark, and Sámi Constable Poul Iversen.<sup>22</sup> The deposition from the interrogation of 8 December was read out loud at the trial on 9 February 1692. Present were Niels Knag, Olle Andersen, Poul Iversen, and a jury of Norwegians in addition to a jury of Sámis. The court was presided over by the Chancellor Secretary and Regional Governor of Vardøhus District, Hans H. Lilienskiold.<sup>23</sup> The trial continued on 10 February. No sentence was passed, because the case, ‘which is indeed a most unusual one, requiring due consideration from superior authorities, be

deferred until such time as a reply from superior authorities in Copenhagen be forthcoming about the matter'.<sup>24</sup> Anders Poulsen was to be kept in legal custody in Vadsø until the answer from the legal authorities in Copenhagen would arrive. Next, he was unexpectedly killed on 11 February by a mentally unstable person. The trial of his killer, Villem Gundersen, started on 22 February and continued on 24 February.<sup>25</sup>

## Four Aspects of the Trial

In the following, I would like to discuss four aspects of the trial of Anders Poulsen. First, the historical context, including the state's demand for power and control and the necessity of interpreting the trial within a legal frame. Second, the voices of central actors during the trial: the voice of the accused person, the voice of the law, and the voice of the scribe. This effort to listen out for voices heard in the courtroom is based on Gérard Genette's methodological work *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972), and also on his later authorship.<sup>26</sup> The third aspect I would like to discuss is the interpretation of the drum's symbols as they come to the fore in Anders Poulsen's confession. The fourth aspect is the court records' information about Sámi shamanism.

### Context

The state's demand for power and control in the secular field is clearly seen in the royal decrees sent from Copenhagen and in the authorities' demand for taxes. The Danish-Norwegian king himself, Christian IV, had travelled north to the Kola peninsula in 1599.<sup>27</sup> He felt threatened by alleged Sámi sorcery on this voyage.<sup>28</sup> Christian IV paid special attention to the northern area and the persons there who were skilled in sorcery. This is indicated by a letter to the district governors of Vardøhus and Nordland in 1609, which required the district governor to be aware of Sámi sorcerers, who were regarded as inclined to practice sorcery by nature. Those who were found guilty of using sorcery were to be sentenced to death without mercy.<sup>29</sup>

There were tensions between the Sámis and the authorities with regard to taxes. For the inland Sámis, the fur trade was very prosperous in the sixteenth century, and they had connections

with networks of merchants in Sweden and Russia. Travelling merchants came from the area around the White Sea, and Russian-Orthodox monasteries were active as well. Due to the lack of fixed borders, Sámis in these inland areas had to pay taxes in three different countries: Norway, Sweden, and Russia.<sup>30</sup> In the seventeenth century, negotiations related to taxation, jurisdiction, and trade were conducted on the part of each of these countries. The Swedish and Danish-Norwegian kings took initiatives to explore the possibilities for taxation in Finnmark and to define borders with their neighbouring states. This was the task of King Christian IV in 1599.

The state possessed religious power. In the post-Reformation period, it was important to get the people to adhere to the right faith. The alleged witches were regarded as enemies of God. The first point in witchcraft sentences always stated the renouncing of the baptism pact as well as the new pact with the Evil One. Church sermons portrayed an image of the Devil as a mighty figure who obtained control over numerous souls on earth. In the early 1700s, the Missionary Collegium in Copenhagen sent missionaries to work among the Sámis in Norway. Thomas von Westen was appointed to lead the mission work among the Sámi population in Finnmark and was installed in his position in 1716.<sup>31</sup> However, the very first teacher and catechist in Finnmark was Isaac Olsen, who came to the region just after 1700.<sup>32</sup>

It is vital to bear in mind that the court records stem from a legal trial. Witchcraft was a serious crime, just like murder and violence. Because it was impossible to provide valid evidence in witchcraft trials, it was considered a *crimen exceptum*. Circumstantial evidence had to be used to influence the question of guilt. Witchcraft was defined in the letters of the law and the sentence of execution had to be passed by a legal court. The church had no such authority in the north of Europe.

### Poulsen's Voice: The Description of the Drum's Symbols

Genette refers to texts for which an analysis of their discourse may be productive as 'judicial narratives'. Within narratological methodology, a set of court records is regarded in its entirety as a narrative penned by a scribe. In addition, narrative structures are

seen as constitutive at other levels, for instance in the confession of the accused person. Genette's narratology works with the category 'voice'. A variety of discursive 'voices' may be listened out for; so also in the confession of Anders Poulsen. In this chapter, the main emphasis will be placed on Poulsen's voice and what it communicates.

The voice of Anders Poulsen, as it is rendered in the court records, is the most important thread in the analysis that follows: questions and answers that can be listened out for in the records. Poulsen explained he used the hammer and a hollow ring or a small object<sup>33</sup> to obtain 'answers' from the drum. When he used the hammer, the ring danced, and it mattered which way it danced around the drumskin. If the ring danced anti-clockwise, the person he was playing for would have bad luck. He said that when he lifted the drum high into the air, he would get an answer, 'just as two persons do when they speak to each other'.<sup>34</sup> In the courtroom, he demonstrated how he used the drum: he lifted it up and read the Lord's Prayer in Finnish (cf. Fig. 5.1).<sup>35</sup>

Poulsen's voice was detailed when he described the symbols of the drum. In the first row, there are three symbols: the figure of a human called *Ilmaris*, who represents tempest and bad weather; the figure of a human called *Diermis*, who represents thunder; and the 'figure of a wild reindeer whom he calls *Gvodde*; it is a wild reindeer which, when God is prayed to, gives good fortune in the hunt of wild reindeer'.<sup>36</sup> He repeated, when he was interpreting the symbols, 'When God is prayed to [...]'.<sup>37</sup> In the original record, 'God' is consistently written without a capital initial letter. Presumably, the lowercased 'g' implies the scribe's rejection of the idea that this was the Christian 'God'. Based on parts of Poulsen's confession, it seems that the One Christian God is referred to several times. However, the language of the drum as a religious language seems to have been flexible: new contexts and approaches enabled new interpretations of the drum's fixed structures and figures.<sup>38</sup> One of the religious insights Anders Poulsen pointed out in his confession was that God is almighty. God is in a position to delegate his power to his helpers, represented on the drum, but the helpers can act only at God's command. The drum can be used for better or for worse, but the name of God is mentioned only in connection with the good effects of the drum: when God is prayed



**Figure 5.1.** Copy of Anders Poulsen's *goavddis* (drum). Exhibited in the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo. The original drum is exhibited in the Sámiid Vuorká-Dávvirat/Sámi Museum in Karasjok. Photo 'Sandivas', Wikimedia Commons. License: CC BY-SA 3.0.

to, *Diermis* is helpful in that when floods and a lot of rain occur, he will call back the weather. This '*Diermis has no power unless God gives it to him*'. Poulsen now also confessed that '*Diermis can cause evil and bad weather that damages ships and boats, but Diermis can also make good weather again and prevent mishaps when God lets him*'.<sup>39</sup> [My italics.]

Likewise with the figure of *Ilmaris*: when God is prayed to, *Ilmaris* is able to call back or drive away bad weather that has been conjured. However, he is also able to make bad weather, 'but he says it is *sinful* to ask for that'.<sup>40</sup> The use of the word 'sinful', which is a word frequently used in Christian discourse, suggests that there is a border between good and bad use of the drum, even if it can be used for both purposes. Similarly, the figure of the wild reindeer may bring good or bad luck. It 'gives good fortune in the hunt for wild reindeer and when the rune drum is played. If the ring will not dance for this reindeer, the one who asks for good hunting will not get any reindeer, no matter how hard he

tries'. Poulsen's explanations are ambiguous. On the one hand, he underlines the blessings given by God through the figures of the drum, the positive effects of practicing drumming; on the other hand, he reveals that the drum might be used for evil purposes.<sup>41</sup>

In the second row, there are five figures. First a round circle pierced by a line called *Peive*: the sun. Then a figure called the child *Jumal*: God's child or God's son the Christ. Next, there is the figure of a human called *Juma-Etziem*: God the father. Then the figure of a church, called *Dom Kirch*.<sup>42</sup> Finally, there is the figure of a human called *Engil*,<sup>43</sup> who represents the Holy Spirit.

Anders Poulsen interprets four of these symbols as Christian symbols, even more so than those on the first row, although the legal officials seem to doubt this interpretation. The first symbol, *Peive*—the sun—is a bit different from the others in this row, as it is related to the blessings of good weather: 'When God is prayed to, it will yield sunny and beautiful weather and fair air, particularly when the reindeer are calving and when grain and grass are supposed to grow, and generally good weather when this is asked for'.<sup>44</sup>

The next four symbols in this row are religious symbols with Christian connotations, explained within the framework of Christian discourse: God's son Christ absolves from all sin, God the father 'castigates for all sins and other than that helps and provides, commands and punishes when asked to',<sup>45</sup> and *Engil* will absolve all sin. In the same row, there is a symbol of a cathedral, which provides absolution, peace of mind, and a Christian death, 'and whether you die or are alive, that same church will help'.<sup>46</sup> The language Anders Poulsen used to interpret the figures referred to the Christian trinity and mirrored central notions of the Christian church: God is a strong, blessing, and punishing father, Christ grants absolution from all sins, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, 'you become a new and clean man'.<sup>47</sup> The interpretation of the Holy Spirit is very much like the interpretation of the figure of Christ, so it might be that Anders Poulsen was uncertain of the difference. When describing the cathedral as granting absolution, peace of mind, and a Christian death, several fields of Christian religious life are touched upon.

However, the discourse is ambiguous. The legal officials were apparently interested in knowing what kind of God Poulsen

worshipped. The court records note his answer, ‘The God that is worshipped, *as has often been reiterated*, are those figures that he has painted, the deities, about whom he says his mother taught him’.<sup>48</sup> [My italics.] Poulsen seems to have been of the opinion that he had often repeated what kind of God he had been worshipping, understood as the Christian God. But at the same time, he referred to what his mother had taught him, a mother who was said not to share the Christian faith. The contradiction in Anders Poulsen’s confession is a reason to become suspicious of his interpretation, even if he himself denied worshipping pagan gods. The ambiguity and blurred lines between different language levels become even more striking when Anders Poulsen interprets the figures’ staffs, called *Juncher sabbe* or *Herr Sabbe*, painted on the drum. These were ‘Juncher’s staff’ or ‘the staff of great lords, for he says that just as the masters on earth hold staffs, so do these persons’.<sup>49</sup> Juncher—meaning a young nobleman—was a term used for the district governor at Vardøhus castle and a title Anders Poulsen certainly related to the highest authority under the king. In Anders Poulsen’s interpretation, these figures were actual human lords or government officials.

In the third row, there are five figures: a human figure called St Anne, a figure of Mary, the mother of Christ, and three figures called *Julle*<sup>50</sup>*Peive* or *Julle Herr*. They ‘are Christmas days or Christmas masters who rule over Christmas’.<sup>51</sup> On this row, for the first time, women appear. Poulsen said that the first of the two figures, St Anne, was ‘Mary’s sister who assists Mary when she gives succour, but in other respects she can do nothing unless Mary wishes her to’.<sup>52</sup> In Christian lore, St Anne was Mary’s mother. The second female figure is given various names by Anders Poulsen: Mary, *Jumal Enne*, *Jumal Ache*: ‘This is Mary, the mother of Christ, God’s wife, and when prayed to she will in particular help women in confinement, and she is conducive to absolution from sin and she is worshipped at God’s side’.<sup>53</sup> Here we have two female symbols, the first one given a saint’s name and the second being God’s wife. This is certainly not in accordance with standard Protestant religious doctrine. However, underlining the function of the female symbols as helpers seems appropriate for the task of a *noaidi*, a person who was often contacted in problematic situations. The fact that women were seen as suitable

helpers for those who were in need, and especially in connection to confinement, might be seen as an echo of his clients' questions.

About the figures representing the three Christmas days, Anders Poulsen explained:

They are Christmas days, Christmas masters who rule over Christmas. *Oucht Jule Peiv* is the master of the first Christmas day, *Gought Jule Peive* is the master of the second Christmas day, *Gvolme Jul Peive* is the master of the third Christmas day. If anybody defiles these days, God will punish them, but if somebody honours them and then prays to God for something, then these days are exhibited to God and it will be submitted that so and so has honoured the days and that God will help for that very reason.<sup>54</sup>

This explanation might or might not have been in accordance with the teachings of the church. God is described as blessing those who keep his commandments and punishing those who do not. However, the Yule symbols might well be a mixture of several aspects.<sup>55</sup> Yule has been celebrated since pre-Christian times when the year turns, a time for sacrifice.

In the fourth row, five figures are painted: a round circle representing the moon, the figures of two men going to church, the figure of the church Anders Poulsen belongs to, and a figure of a man coming to church from the opposite direction. About the symbol of the moon, *Manna*, Anders Poulsen explained: 'When God is worshipped, it shines brightly and the nocturnal weather will be fine, even if there is a heavy cover of clouds'.<sup>56</sup> The other figures in the row represent the church<sup>57</sup> and persons going to church and giving to the church. The logic about giving to the church is interesting: 'Yet, he adds, nobody gives unless they receive help'. The kind of trouble he mentioned that help was asked for was related to reindeer and illness. Again, the interpretation was influenced by the preaching of the church: that people should attend services and give money to the church.

In the fifth and last row, there are seven figures and symbols who are all related to the Devil: first, a woman who is supposed to be the wife of the bound devil; second, a devil who kills people and who represents disease; third, a figure of the devil 'who is on the loose now and rules in Hell and floats about in the world'.<sup>58</sup>

The fourth symbol is *Hilvet Tol*, the flames of hell: the fire that consumes people's souls in hell. The fifth symbol is *Hilved Tarve Giedme*, hell's tar cauldron, in which people's souls in hell are boiled. The sixth symbol is *Hilvet Haufd*, hell's grave, into which all people who believe in the Devil are thrown, and God is the one to throw them. Images of the flames of hell, the tar cauldron, and hell's grave are drawn in the court records.<sup>59</sup> The seventh figure, called *Hvenaales Gvolisis*, is 'a bound devil in chains, the one who was bound up when God created the world'.<sup>60</sup>

The interpretation of these different devils is coloured by the Bible and the notions about hell and punishment found in there, although here we hear that people's *souls* are consumed by the flames of hell and boiled in the tar cauldron of hell, not their bodies, and the image thus deviates from common visual representations of the boiling water of hell. There are several devils: one who is disease, one who is loose, for whom Anders Poulsen has no name, and one tied. The explanation of how one of the devils escaped is very earth-focused: 'This devil escaped when God tied up the other devil, described below, and God was wearing iron shoes when he found this one and trampled on him so he disappeared in a great bog'.<sup>61</sup> During the explanation of the devils, Anders Poulsen touched upon God's creation of the world and the gruesome punishment in hell for those who believed in the wrong Master. There are no comments from the legal officials during this part of Anders Poulsen's interpretation of the drum's symbols, even if the explanations about the devils must have been regarded as extremely important.

Anders Poulsen was questioned about the maker of his drum. He confessed first that a man in Torne Lappmark had made the drum. Finally, he confessed to have made the drum himself. In addition, there was an interest in the use of the drum regarding the lifting of curses, removing of *gand*, and punishing of a thief. Poulsen emphasised that he only wanted to do good using the drum.

Anders Poulsen's final words in court consist of a statement of his innocence: he had not forsworn God in heaven or his Christian faith, and when worshipping the depicted gods, he believed they were all God in heaven. And 'since the authorities objected to his

using the rune drum, he would relinquish it now, and believe in God in Heaven just like other people'.<sup>62</sup> He expressed a contradiction between using the drum and Christendom.

## The Voice of the Law and the Scribe

Taking a narratological approach to the analysis of court records, the voices of the law and the scribe are important to listen out for in addition to the voice of the accused person. The voice of the law displays the official legal attitude to and understanding of witchcraft. The voice of the scribe might reveal his attitude to what is told: whether he is establishing a distance from the recorded text—indicating that he does not believe in what is uttered—or presents his own opinion.

The voices of the law and the scribe are heard particularly at the end of the trial, as the court found it necessary to send the case to Copenhagen for a final decision and keep Anders Poulsen in legal custody. The sentence in this trial was never known. However, the attitude of the judiciary was clear: 'The Sámi [...] was a witchcraft practitioner and idol worshipper who had forfeited his body to be burned at the stake.'<sup>63</sup>

The voice of the scribe is mostly withdrawn. We meet a professional scribe in the records, who provides detailed and accurate records. It was important to document the interrogation—what was confessed to and the arguments coming to the fore—in case the trial was passed on to a higher instance court. However, there are some signs about the attitude of the scribe, Deputy Appeal Court Judge Niels Knag. Once, he presents his opinion by recording himself as an 'I', making it clear that he thinks Anders Poulsen should be severely punished for his serious crime. His second mark is the lowercased initial g in 'god'. These textual incidences show that the scribe, whatever his ambition was in terms of neutrality and however he was educated, always had the possibility to influence the records he was taking down. However, my opinion is that when recording courtroom discourse, the seventeenth-century scribe did his uttermost to get down on paper the words that were uttered during the trial. The task of recording was challenging.

## Shamanism?

Genette's category 'voice' is used in my analysis as a methodological tool to clarify individual actors' contributions to courtroom discourse. Anders Poulsen's voice is valuable for a discussion of the drum's symbols as well as of the effect of drumming.

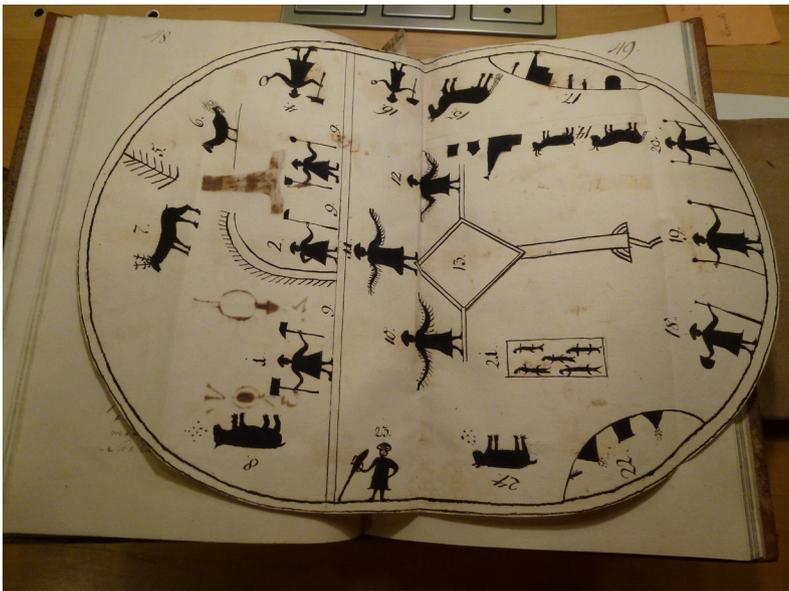
Poulsen's interpretation of the drum's symbols is characterised by a certain ambiguity. Some symbols are interpreted within a Christian frame, like the female symbols of St Anne and Mary, the trinity, God's son the Christ, God the father, and the Holy Spirit. Then, some symbols denote several devils, flames of hell, hell's cauldron, and hell's grave—the darker sides of Christian teachings. Some symbols are related to the Sámi way of life, like the symbols related to nature: the wild reindeer, the sun, and the moon.

Poulsen's confession reveals good and evil effects of the drum. The good effects are related to nature, while the bad effects are related to the devils. Anders Poulsen is reluctant to explain about the devils, but says that if the ring lands in this row: 'God is angry with whoever he is playing for, and that person will have to pray a great deal to God before the ring will go back again, so that God shows him that he is a sinful person'.<sup>64</sup>

Employing a narratological approach in the analysis of court records is fruitful primarily because this method aims at revealing several textual levels present in court records and, in addition, manages to distinguish between the various 'voices' heard in the courtroom. It enables the analysis to come close to the 'voices' of those participating in the trial and to get a grasp of the legal elements and the evaluation of the judiciary. In the trial of Anders Poulsen, it is his voice that gives us insight into the very complex discourse situation that unfolded itself in the courtroom. By scrutinising his voice, we see the contrasting accents that are displayed, demonstrating a situation that is under pressure. Thus, narratology, through its claim to go beyond the textual surface and apply modes of reading other than what we see at first glance, is well suited for examining the content of Anders Poulsen's trial and his confession.

What does the document reveal about shamanism? On the one hand, we see an experienced shaman demonstrating his art

and giving a confession containing elements of the knowledge of a *noaidi*. Also, the document points to what secular authorities asked a shaman about. On the other hand, the reliability of Anders Poulsen's description of the symbols of the drum should be questioned, as the confession was given in a trial with a potentially deadly ending. He explained the symbols using various connotations.<sup>65</sup> In my opinion, Poulsen's confession is reliable when it comes to nature-religious symbols, but not when it comes to the totality of explanations. His confession is not consistent: he deviates from what he first confesses to several times, and doubt can be raised about whether he presents his genuine knowledge before the court. Other descriptions of the symbols of the drum from the time are more reliable because they are given within other contextual frames, where the fear of a death penalty is not present. A drawing of one of these drums, made by Thomas von Westen, depicts for instance three female goddesses of the Sámi religion, not mentioned at all by Anders Poulsen (Fig. 5.2).<sup>66</sup> In my view,



**Figure 5.2.** Depiction of the symbols of a Sámi drum. Thomas von Westen, *Relation anlangende Finlappernes Afguderier*, The Royal Library, Copenhagen, Thott, 1569, 4°. Photo: Liv Helene Willumsen. License: CC BY-NC-ND.

Anders Poulsen possessed authentic knowledge about the drum. However, only a part of this came to the fore in his confession, due to his fear that the judiciary would demonise the traditional symbols.

## Notes

1. Regional State Archives of Tromsø (SATØ), The Archives of Finnmark District Magistrate [SF, Sorenskriveren i Finnmark] no. 25, Records of Court Proceedings 1692–1695, fos. 1r–8v; Willumsen 2017: 241–249.
2. Conversation between Jelena Porsanger and Liv Helene Willumsen, 6 September 2021; Porsanger 2020; [www.snl.no/Anders Poulsen](http://www.snl.no/Anders_Poulsen). Read 5 January 2022.
3. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 1r.
4. Niemi 2009.
5. Hagen 2002: 326 f.; Hagen 2005b:16; Hagen 2014: 155.
6. Willumsen 2013b: 336–353; Willumsen 2013b: 298–319.
7. Goodare 2014: 58.
8. Goodare 2014: 59.
9. Willumsen 2013a: 242–262.
10. Willumsen 2014: 31.
11. Willumsen 2008: 54–56.
12. In 1597, there were 561 Norwegian families and 154 Sámi families in Finnmark. With a family size of five, as mentioned in note 2 above, the number of Norwegians would, in the seventeenth century, be 2,805 and the number of Sámis 770. With a hypothetical family size of four, which is also used for estimations of Finnmark populations at this time, the number of Norwegians would be nearly 2,100 and the number of Sámis would be 660 (Aubert 1978: 14).
13. Willumsen 2008: 107.
14. Goodare 2016: 24.
15. Willumsen 2010: 14.
16. Willumsen 2010: 13.

17. Willumsen 2008: 93, 96.
18. Quiwe Baarsen, 1627, and Anders Poulsen, 1692.
19. Magnus 1982.
20. Orig. 'et smal hundrede aarß alder som er fem gange 20 aar'. Ref. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 1v.
21. An inventory of his belongings was drawn up by the deputy bailiff, the Sámi constable, and two jurors, and read before the court. Ref. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 8v.
22. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 1r.
23. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 1r.
24. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 8r.
25. SATØ, SF 25, fos. 10r–15v.
26. Genette (1972) 1980; Genette (1983) 1988; Genette (1991) 1993.
27. Grubbe 2005: 1–16.
28. Niemi 1988: 34; Grubbe 2004: 10; Hagen 2005a: 246–263.
29. Niemi 1983: 219; Willumsen 1994: 57.
30. Hansen & Olsen 2004: 239, 263.
31. Skjelmo & Willumsen 2017.
32. Isaac Olsen quickly learned the Sámi language and started traveling among the Sámi population, particularly in Eastern Finnmark. Isaac Olsen left a handwritten copybook, which is a valuable source when it comes to Sámi religious practice; cf. Skjelmo & Willumsen 2018; Willumsen 2016.
33. Orig. 'dechel' which means 'devil'.
34. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 6r.
35. Orig. 'karelsk'.
36. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 2v.
37. SATØ, SF 25, fos. 2r–2v.
38. Pollan 1997: 24.
39. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 2v.

40. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 2v.

41. Another interpretation might be that he developed his own, quite sophisticated theodicy, where *Diermis* guarantees good as well as evil.

42. In Norwegian *domkirke*, in Swedish *domkyrka*, in German *Domkirche*.

43. This word means ‘angel’ in Norwegian.

44. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 2v.

45. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3r.

46. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3r.

47. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3r.

48. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3r.

49. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3r.

50. *Jul* is the Norwegian word for Christmas.

51. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3v.

52. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3v.

53. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3v.

54. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 3v.

55. In the Scottish witchcraft trials in Aberdeenshire 1597, Andrew Man mentioned the word ‘Christsonday’, which somewhat resembles Anders Poulsen’s rhetoric.

56. SATØ, SF 25, fos. 3v–4r.

57. Orig. *Kirche*.

58. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 4r.

59. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 4v.

60. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 4v.

61. SATØ, SF 25, fos. 4r–4v.

62. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 6r.

63. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 14r.

64. SATØ, SF 25, fo. 5r.

65. Rydving 2004: 99–107.

66. Rydving 1995; Jørkov 2000: 9–17; Willumsen 2013a: 318 f.; Skjelmo & Willumsen 2017: 204–214.

## References

### Primary source

SATØ = Regional State Archives of Tromsø, The Archives of Finnmark District Magistrate [SF, Sorenskriveren i Finnmark] no. 25, Records of Court Proceedings 1692–1695, fos. 1r– 8v.

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