

ORKNEY, SHETLAND AND THE NETWORKS OF THE NORTHERN REFORMATION*

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Abstract

This article explores the possible implications of the relationship between Orkney and Shetland and Norway for understanding the spread of the Reformation, focusing on the period between the late 1520s, when Reforming ideas began to be preached in Bergen, and 1560, when the Reformation was introduced into Scotland, including Orkney and Shetland. Draws on a scholarship which has shown the importance for the Reformation of language, trade, migration and urban/rural distinctions it investigates tantalising hints of contact between Orkney and Shetland, Norway (particularly Bergen) and Germany in questions of religion. This article does not seek to revise current understandings of the relationships of Orkney and Shetland to Scotland but seeks to explore what insights into (proto-)Reformation processes in Orkney and Shetland when possible influences from debates the Norwegian context – specifically Bergen – are considered alongside the influence of Scottish debates about religion. It concludes that whilst there is some evidence of contacts between individuals and that these contacts must have had aspects which related to religious practice, both the rural nature of Orkney and Shetland communities, and their relative isolation, meant that Reformation ideas were slow to take hold.

Keywords

Orkney, Shetland, Bergen, Norway, Reformation

Introduction

In 1987 Gordon Donaldson, drawing on an article he had first published in 1959, commented that the Orkney Reformation ‘was not in conformity with the Scottish Reformation as it is usually understood.’ Donaldson suggested that the Reformation in Orkney, although undoubtedly Scottish, because it was introduced by Orkney’s bishop, ‘in some ways more resembles the English Reformation; but the parallel of the Lutheran Reformation in Denmark and Norway may suggest that the racial characteristics of the

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people of Orkney and Shetland made that type of reformation peculiarly acceptable to them' (Donaldson 1959, 95-96; Donaldson 1987, 35). Given the geographical proximity of the Orkney and Shetland islands to Norway, it seems plausible that the similarities identified by Donaldson might be a question not so much of 'racial characteristics' as of actual contacts. Indeed, Donaldson himself, in the same 1987 study, also pointed to the need to explore the implications of the relationship between Orkney, Shetland and Norway:

Orkney's Scandinavian contacts were no longer as close as they had been, but Shetland still looked to the continent for most of its trade and there was still any number of men who were as much at home in Norway as in Shetland. Shetlanders at least, if they had any interest at all in Church affairs, must have come very much under the influence of the reformation which had been an accomplished fact in Denmark and Norway since the 1530s (Donaldson 1987, 20).

Duncan Shaw concurs that 'the continuing close affinities with northern Norway and the close trading connections with Hamburg and other cities into the Baltic ... kept the islanders in touch with communities which were experiencing the Lutheran Reformation' (Shaw 1989, 39). Taking seriously the comments of Donaldson and Shaw, this article explores the possible implications of the relationship between Orkney and Shetland and Norway for understanding the spread of the Reformation. It focuses on the period between the late 1520s, when Reforming ideas began to be preached in Bergen, through the 1530s, when the Reformation was officially implemented in Denmark and Norway, to 1560, when the Reformation was introduced into Scotland, including Orkney and Shetland. Its approach draws on a wide range of studies which have shown the importance for the Reformation of language, trade, migration and urban/rural distinctions to investigate some tantalising hints of contact between Orkney and Shetland, Denmark-Norway and Germany in questions of religion. This article is not making any claims to revise current understandings of the respective relationships of Orkney and Shetland to Scotland (in the sixteenth century undoubtedly the main focus of relationships for Orkney and probably also for Shetland) and Norway. It is simply seeking to explore what insights emerge for our understanding of processes of (proto-)Reformation in Orkney and Shetland when possible influences from debates about religion in the Norwegian context – and specifically Bergen – are considered alongside the influence of Scottish debates about religion. The 1540s and 1550s are a particularly interesting period in this respect, since during these decades reforming ideas were suppressed in Scotland but officially supported in Norway.

Setting the scene: the ecclesiastical context of Orkney and Shetland

Scots tend to see maps of Orkney and Shetland with the Orkney and Shetland archipelagos placed firmly at the extreme Northern edge (or with Shetland in an indented box, and therefore not in its proper place at all). But the fact that the North-West of Scotland is called Sutherland – the Southern Land – is an indication that there are other

perspectives. Whilst the southernmost points of Orkney, Hoy and South Ronaldsay, are only ten miles from the north coast of the Scottish mainland, across the Pentland Firth, Shetland is much further north. As Val Turner points out, ‘most of the islands lie between 60° and 62° north, at the same latitude as Bergen, Helsinki, Siberia and southern Greenland. This places Shetland in the middle of the Atlantic seaways, where the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean meet’ (Turner 1998, 13). For centuries, it also placed Orkney and Shetland in the midst of what Steinar Imsen has described as ‘a (geographically speaking) very extensive, sea-based realm with a shared language, a shared code of law, and uniform bodies of government’ (Imsen 2014, 279). This is clearly apparent from the *Carta Marina* of Olaus Magnus, drawn and printed in 1539 (offered here in a later coloured version from 1572).¹



Carta Marina by Olaus Magnus, drawn and printed in 1539

For much of the medieval period, from around the ninth century until 1468/69, when they were pawned to Scotland as part of the dowry of Margaret of Denmark-Norway on her marriage to James III, Orkney and Shetland belonged to Norway, or, after the Calmar Union in 1397, to Denmark-Norway-Sweden. Nonetheless, from at least the fourteenth century there was strong Scottish influence, both through Orkney’s earls, who from 1379 were members of the Scots-speaking Sinclair family (Ljosland 2012, 67; Thomson 2008, 160-171), but also through the bishop and clergy of the diocese of Orkney, which comprised both Orkney and Shetland.²

¹ Source: Wikimedia Commons: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Carta_Marina.jpeg. Note that St Magnus Cathedral, actually in Kirkwall, Orkney is here erroneously shown in Shetland.

² There were significant differences between Orkney and Shetland, particularly in their relationships to Norway and in their legal systems; these will not be explored in detail in this article. See for instance Crawford 2014, 157-159.

Ecclesiastically the diocese of Orkney fell under the Archbishop of Nidaros (Trondheim) from the creation of that archdiocese in 1154 (Gerhardt and Hubatsch 1963, 93; de Geer 1985, 78).³ However, by at least the fourteenth century, ecclesiastical influences from Scotland were also becoming significant in the islands. There is some evidence that the Scottish calendar was in use in the diocese in Orkney by 1312 (Thomson 2008, 190), and in 1320 a dispute over the payment of Peter's Pence may indicate that Orkney's bishop was following Scottish resistance to payment of this papal tax rather than Norwegian payment of it, although later evidence suggests that that the tax was being paid by Orkney into the sixteenth century.⁴ Moreover, the clergy of Orkney and Shetland were increasingly of Scottish origin. Ronald Cant observes that 'from the 1360s the Archdeacons of both Shetland and Orkney were Scotsmen' (Cant 1995, 109), and William Thomson finds that 'by the fifteenth century, the clergy appear to have been entirely Scots, a situation which probably reflected the great scarcity of clergy in post-Black Death Norway' (Thomson 2008, 190). The potential for tensions in Orkney's ecclesiastical allegiance is illustrated by the series of parallel episcopal appointees during the Western Schism: between 1378 and 1417, bishops were nominated to the See of Orkney both by the Pope in Rome, to whom the Norwegian (and English) kings looked, and by the Pope in Avignon, recognised by the Scottish (and French) kings (Anderson, 2012, 1; Dahlerup 1990, 40-41). At this time, Smith suggests, 'despite complications, it is fairly clear that Rome had the best of it in Orkney and Shetland' (Smith 2012, 173),⁵ and with Rome, Trondheim, although Cowan suggests that 'the proximity of the Orkney diocese to Scotland, along with the increasing Scottish influence in its affairs, placed the Orkney bishops in a medial position between the two contending forces' (Cowan 1989, 29). As part of the resolution of the schism, Thomas Tulloch, almost certainly of Scots origin, was appointed to the See of Orkney in 1418 by Pope Martin V (Cant 1972, 14; Ballantyne 1994, 22-23, 25-26).

In 1472, just a few years after the impignoration, the diocese of Orkney was incorporated into the archdiocese of St Andrews. Thomson argues that this took place at the initiative of Bishop Patrick Graham of St Andrews rather than the Scottish king

³ It had previously belonged for fifty years, with the rest of the Norwegian church, to the Archdiocese of Lund, and before that to Hamburg/Bremen, although there seems to have been a dispute during the eleventh century as to whether it should belong with the Scottish dioceses to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of York, and the earliest known bishops of Orkney seem to have been nominated by Canterbury and York (de Geer 1985, 77, 84).

⁴ For the argument that Peter's Pence was not being paid in Orkney in 1320, see Crawford 1974, 14-22. For evidence of later payment, see Barrell 1995, 18. A letter from Pope Leo X to Edward, Bishop of Orkney dated 3 April 1520 records that the pope has 'learned from his commissary of indulgences for the fabric of St Peter's in Rome that there are sums ["Peter's pence"] connected therewith still lying in the diocese of Orkney', and commands the bishop 'to see that these sums are paid to the archbishop of Nidaros for transmission to Germany': *Letters of James V* 1954, 74-5. (= *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, 1864, no. 676, p. 711). I am grateful to John Ballantyne for this reference.

⁵ Smith here rejects as 'entirely wrong' (2012, 173 n. 49) his findings relating to the schism as presented in Smith (2003, 161-169), where he suggested (at 164) that 'it might be argued that ... it was the Avignon popes, backed of course by Scotland, who had more success in installing their Shetland officials.' Correspondence relating to bishopric debts indicates that bishops Henry and John, appointed by Rome, 'must have been sufficiently in charge to be able to see to the financial affairs of their bishopric' (Crawford 2003, 151).

(Thomson 2008, 220), while Crawford sees this as an initiative ‘at the instigation of the Scottish King’, intended in part to resolve ‘the anomalous situation ... by which a former councillor of King Christian and a bishop within the Archdiocese of Trondheim [had been] turned into a royal official of the King of Scotland’ (Crawford 2003, 154-155). Either way, it sent a strong message that Orkney and Shetland were now under Scottish control and authority not only politically but also ecclesiastically. In 1486, James III conferred the ownership of St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, Orkney, along with other ‘kirks and prebends’ on the town of Kirkwall as part of the process of its establishment as ‘a full Burgh Royal’; the arrangement was confirmed fifty years later by James V. This represents a clear assertion of the rights of the king of Scotland over ecclesiastical property in Orkney, and Crawford sees it as probably directed at suppressing the power of the earls (Crawford 2012, 177-178, 197). Nonetheless, there is some indication that in Rome, at least, Trondheim’s jurisdiction continued to be recognised for some time. Orkney continued to be listed under Nidaros in the Vatican lists of bishops until 1559, when the diocese is listed as ‘ceasing to exist’ (Eubel 1910, 263),⁶ and in 1520 Pope Leo X required the diocese to send money via Nidaros and Germany to Rome to support the building of St Peter’s.⁷ In 1525 the Archbishop of Trondheim delegated a German priest, Zutpheldus Wardenburg, to discover the authority by which St Andrews was claiming jurisdiction over Orkney, and Wardenburg reported back on the 1472 bull (Thomson 2008, 220). In the early years of the sixteenth century, a similar uncertainty about jurisdiction may have led to a dispute relating to the right of presentation to the Archdeaconry of Shetland: Hans, King of Denmark put forward a Sir Magnus Herwood, but his right to do so was denied by James IV, who successfully nominated Henry Phankouth (Thomson 2008, 220-221).⁸ There were long-established competing patterns of authority and jurisdiction at play here in which both ecclesiastical and political interests played a significant role. However, Brian Smith considers that ‘by 1500 the king of Scotland had consolidated his power in the Northern Isles, particularly at the expense of the Sinclair family, and that he had the support of the archdeacons of Shetland and bishops of Orkney (Smith 2003, 164-166). Wardenburg’s investigations and Phankouth’s appointment served only to confirm Scotland’s ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the Northern Isles. Moreover, within a decade the jurisdictional question had been rendered largely irrelevant by the first moves towards the Reformation in Denmark-Norway.’⁹

⁶ The final entry notes the consecration of Adam Bothwell and the dissolution of the diocese: ‘Adam Boytuel, can. eccl. Glasgou 1559 Aug. 2 illo tempore isto *episcopatus cessat*’. However, the final entry for Nidaros records its demise twenty years earlier: ‘Olavus Engelberti’, appointed on 9 Dec 1523, ‘a. 1537 abeunte et 1538 Mart. 7 Lirae in Belgo defunto iste *cessat aepatus*’ (Eubel 1910, 259).

⁷ See note 4 above.

⁸ See for more detail Smith 1989, 91-105; Smith 2003, 164-166. Smith concludes, and Thomson concurs, that Phankouth was an illegitimate son of Bishop Andrew Pictoris, to whom Pope Alexander VI issued a dispensation to on 24 December 1495 ‘notwithstanding a defect of his birth as the son of a bishop and an unmarried woman’ (Smith 1989, 92; Thomson 2008, 220). Peter Anderson points to a conflict between Phankouth and Sir David Sinclair of Sumburgh, the illegitimate son of Lord Henry Sinclair, over the appointment of Phankouth’s successor as archdeacon, in which Sinclair was probably supported by the king of Denmark (Anderson 1996, 177; compare also *Shetland Documents 1195-1579* 1999, no. 35).

⁹ Steinar Imsen, however, observes that the question of the redemption of the islands remained on the table in Norway until at least the mid-sixteenth century (Imsen 2016, 62).

To see these debates as meaning that individual clergy – or the population of the island – identified themselves as either Norwegian or Scots would probably be both simplistic and anachronistic. As bishops, both Thomas Tulloch (in office 1418-1461) and his nephew and successor William Tulloch (in office 1461-1477) seem to have been acceptable to the kings both of Denmark-Norway and of Scotland and on the most part to have negotiated this double allegiance successfully (Cant 1972, 14-16; Crawford 2003, 151-154; Dahlerup 1990, 43, 45). Their ability to do so is coherent with Brian Smith's assertion that 'Scots immigrants in the islands, lay people and clerics, more often than not entered into the spirit of local arrangements. They became Shetlanders and Orcadians' (Smith 2012, 166).

The languages of Orkney and Shetland

Language is an important – and disputed – factor in understanding the context of Orkney and Shetland. It is undisputed that during the medieval period a variety of Scandinavian Norse, now known as Norn, was the primary language spoken by the people in both island groups, and that this language was later displaced by Scots. There is disagreement about the point at which this happened, but it is clear that the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were a time of transition. The last extant Norn document in Orkney dates to 1426, whilst the last document in Norn – or, more precisely, Norwegian – found in Shetland dates to 1607, although Brian Smith argues that the later Shetland documents surviving in Norn or Norwegian were almost all written in Norway (Smith, 1996, 31).¹⁰ The first Scots document surviving from Orkney is from 1433 and the first Scots document surviving from Shetland dates from 1525. Although legal business on Orkney was already being conducted in Scots in 1438 (Barnes 1991, 446-447). Gordon Donaldson suggested that it would be reasonable to assume 'a time-lag of something like a hundred and fifty years between the point at which the Scots tongue prevailed in Orkney and the point at which it prevailed in Shetland' (Donaldson 1983, 9), and the sixteenth century would lie in that period of transition. Barnes believes that the evidence for Orkney indicates a situation in which 'Norn was the principal language of the islands in the sixteenth century, in the sense that it was the first language of the majority of the population. Scots was however also widely spoken and many understood and used both languages' (Barnes 1991, 447). Ljosland suggests that 'the consolidation of Orkney Scots [i.e. the dialect] is likely to have happened sometime between 1468 (the impignoration) and 1560 (the reformation)' (Ljosland 2012, 70, 77). In Shetland this consolidation stage probably extended into the seventeenth or even the eighteenth century (Barnes 1991, 447-448; Smith 1996, 32-33). The island communities probably had a long tradition of bilingualism, and there is a growing consensus that until at least the later sixteenth century incomers of Scottish descent are likely to have 'mastered the local language', i.e. Norn or Norwegian (Imsen 2014, 280; Manson 1983, 207; Sandnes 2005, 164-175). One prominent example is William Tulloch, Bishop of Orkney 1461-1477, who was clearly fluent both Norwegian

¹⁰ See also Barnes 1998, esp. 12; Wiggen 2012. Thomson observes that 'there are a number of sixteenth century legal documents written in Norwegian (and occasionally in Danish) which record transactions involving land in Shetland made by Shetland people who were resident in Bergen' (Thomson 2008, 240).

and Scots: in 1468 he accompanied Margaret of Denmark to the court of her new husband James III and remained with her there until she was able to communicate in Scots (Thomson 2008, 199). Berit Sandnes concludes that by the early sixteenth century, Scots was probably being used in all central offices in both Orkney and Shetland, and Scottish and Latin were the only written languages, but that the ‘common folk’ still largely spoke Norn (Sandnes 2005, 167). Whilst immigrant Norwegians would have learned Scots, immigrant Scots who became integrated into the island community would have learned Norn (Sandnes 2005, 167). Since, as Robert McColl Millar observes, Norn formed ‘part of a West Norse dialect continuum’ (Millar 2008, 240),¹¹ this would have given Shetlanders and Orcadians a mutually comprehensible spoken language with both Norwegians and Danes, whose languages were very closely related.¹²

This dialect continuum, however, probably stretched even more widely. This is relevant when considering possible Reformation influences, for Reformation ideas must often have been first shared orally, whether through discussion or through reading texts aloud. As Cohen and Twomey remark (2015, 17), ‘print often had to rely on the oral to promote it.’ Moreover, Reformation ideas spread along trading routes, which in northern Europe were dominated by the Hansa.¹³ The primary language used by the Hansa merchants was Middle Low German, which according to Kurt Braunmüller was probably close enough to Norwegian (and thus to Norn) to make mutual comprehension with the speaker of Middle Low German relatively unproblematic (Braunmüller 1996, 141–154). Hansa merchants were an important factor in spreading Reformation ideas across northern Europe from their German bases: Hamburg was effectively Lutheran some years before the city council officially introduced the Reformation in 1528 (Postel 1986, 243-250; Reitemeier 2017, 84, 110-111); after several years of conflict, Lübeck’s council suppressed the mass on June 1530, and introduced an evangelical church order in May 1531 (Schilling 2015, 45-53; Hauschild 1981, 165-242; *Lübecker Kirchenordnung von Johannes Bugenhagen* 1981, xi-xii); a Lutheran church order was introduced in Bremen in 1534, but Lutheran preachers had been active from 1522 (Moeller 1973, 51-73); and many Danzig merchants were favourable towards the Reformation, although Lutheran worship was not officially permitted there until 1557 (Müller 1997, 41-43). From the 1520s, therefore, many merchants and traders from these cities will have been supporters of – and thus potential purveyors of – Reformation ideas.¹⁴

¹¹ Originally this dialect would probably have been much more widely spoken, covering Norway, Shetland, Orkney, Caithness, the Scottish Western Isles, the Faeroes, Iceland and Greenland (Millar 2008).

¹² Danish had become the administrative language for the Norwegian bishops, particularly those whose Latin was weak, and the Norwegian Reformation was able to draw on Danish translations of the Bible and other ecclesiastical works. See, for instance Valkner 1970, 168.

¹³ Lausten (2008, 33; 2002, 91, 96, 142) points to the importance of trading routes for spreading Reformation ideas in Denmark in the 1520s. Otfried Czajka (2017, 77) similarly identifies the significance of German craftsmen and merchants for the spread of the Reformation in Sweden. The specific situation of Bergen will be discussed below.

¹⁴ As Appel and Fink-Jensen (2011, 5-6) observe, the importance of trade for the supply of book in the Nordic countries, ‘frequently readers would ... bring books home when returning from travel abroad, and books could be imported directly by collectors But in general, only limited selections of books were transported inland, especially where ships could not go’. Similarly Alec Ryrie’s evidence for Reformation ideas in mainland Scotland include a report that ‘Scottish merchants were buying quantities of heretical

The focus here is on the spoken language, for the lack of extant documents indicates that Norn was not a written language; indeed Thomson argues that in Orkney and Shetland the clergy ‘formed the bulk of the literate population’ (Thomson 2008, 190). However, the spread of Reformation ideas in illiterate (albeit urban) populations, not only through preaching but also through the reading aloud or summarising of printed texts is well attested; informal discussions also played an important role (Scribner 1981, 2-3; Körber 2005, 25-29). The prevalence of Norn in the Orkney and Shetland would potentially have made texts written in Danish, Norwegian, and Middle Low German accessible to Shetlanders and Orcadians when read aloud. Jocelynn Rendall imagines ‘trading vessels docking at Kirkwall harbour bringing printed religious books and pamphlets, and Bibles, translated from Latin into the English language’ (Rendall 2009, 67), but to speakers of Norn these Bibles, religious books and pamphlets would not have needed to be in English: they could have been in Danish, Norwegian, and Middle Low German. That is, texts read aloud from the Low German translation of Luther’s Small Catechism, printed in Hamburg in 1529, Johannes Bugenhagen’s translation of the Bible into Low German, printed in Lübeck in 1533/34, Joachim Slüter’s Middle Lower German Rostock Hymnbook (1531), or the Danish translations of the New Testament (1524) and of the Pentateuch (1535),¹⁵ would have been comprehensible to the inhabitants of Orkney and Shetland in a way that they would not have been to their southern neighbours in Scotland. Indeed, linguistically, these texts may well have been more accessible to inhabitants of the Northern Isles than would be the English translations of the Matthew Bible (1535) or Great Bible (1540) when they became available. Körber concludes that around the Baltic the Reformation was much less accessible to ‘the non-Germans’ than to the speakers of one of the German languages (Körber 2005, 33.). As speakers of Norn, Orcadians and Shetlanders should be counted amongst these ‘speakers of one of the German languages’.

German trade with Orkney and Shetland

Contact between Hansa merchants and the local population seems to have differed in Orkney and Shetland, and (exceptionally) more is known about Shetland. Until the late fifteenth century, trade in Shetland fish had been channelled through Bergen, which was part of the Hanseatic network; from the early sixteenth century, although Shetlanders continued to trade with Bergen, especially for timber, German, and probably also Dutch, merchants began to establish direct trading contacts in Shetland. Indeed, Brian Smith argues that in the sixteenth century, ‘the vast majority of Shetland’s trading ties ... were with Germany’ (Smith 2010, 52). Klaus Friedland has found archival evidence for ‘merchants from Danzig in Shetland from 1487 onwards, from Bremen after 1498, from Hamburg after 1547, from Lübeck after 1562, from Rostock after 1599, from Stralsund after 1601, and perhaps also from the so-called Zuider-Zee cities of Kampen and Deventer after 1498’ (Friedland 1983, 90). After the mid-1520s, these contacts provided a potential

books and shipping them to Edinburgh and St Andrews,’ and the inventory of an Edinburgh merchant which included a collection of English evangelical books (Ryrie 2006, 30-31).

¹⁵ For these and other translations into Low German, see Körber (2005, 20-21, 31-32).

means for the transmission of Reformation ideas. However, trading in Shetland was not an urban affair; ships did not congregate in a port, but arrived in Shetland every summer, each anchoring its own *voe* [bay] and communicating with those on land by small boat.¹⁶ Ballantine and Smith remark that as a result of this pattern of trade, ‘Shetland did not develop a strong local mercantile class until the eighteenth century’ (*Shetland Documents 1195-1579* 1999, xiii). This pattern of trade may also not have lent itself to religious debate and exchange in the same way that visiting a port, with potential for visits to local churches, clearly could.¹⁷ Shaw knew of the existence of a ‘very early German communion card’, of the pattern of those issued in Danzig in the mid-sixteenth century, in the possession of Dunrossness church in Shetland, indicating that some contact between German merchants and Shetland residents around Reformation ideas was taking place, and also suggests that Shetland fishermen would have been aware of religious changes in East Friesland after the introduction of evangelical ideas through the 1520s (Shaw 1989, 39-40).

The Bergen Connection

Rendall’s allusion to Reformation ideas arriving in Kirkwall via texts in English, although in theory possible from the 1520s when the first English-language Reformation texts began to be published,¹⁸ downplays the suppression of Reformation ideas in England until the mid-1530s (and even thereafter, depending on Henry VIII’s theological mood) and in Scotland until the 1550s. Although Henry VIII broke from Rome in 1534, the English Reformation was not solidly established, with liturgical expression, until the reign of his son Edward VI (1547-1553). In Scotland, as Alec Ryrie observes, Reformation ideas tended to be transmitted through ‘evangelical works spilling over from England;’ indeed, he suggests, ‘all the earliest evidence of evangelical activity in Scotland ... is linked directly to foreign influence’ naming specifically England and Germany (Ryrie 2006, 30-31). Patrick Hamilton, a Scot who studied in Paris and Leuven, where he seems to have encountered Luther’s ideas, and later in Marburg, was arrested for Lutheran preaching and burned at St Andrews on 29 February 1528 (Ryrie 2006, 31-33).¹⁹ George Wishart, also a student at Leuven, found himself accused of heresy in both Scotland and (having fled thence) England; he was burned, also at St Andrews, on 1 March 1546 (Dawson 2007, 164-167; Ryrie 2006, 65, 77-78). Hamilton and Wishart witness to the presence of Reformation ideas in Scotland during this period, but their deaths, together with those of at least nineteen others executed for heresy between 1528 and 1558 (Dawson 1993, 260 n. 5), testify also to the suppression of Reforming theology. The humanist-inspired reforming initiatives taken by the Earl of Arran in the early 1540s, culminating in 1543

¹⁶ See for instance, *Shetland Documents 1195-1579* 1999, xiii; Irvine 1985, 3-5; Smith 1990, 31-32; Smith 2003, 7-9; Zickermann 2013, 84-85; compare Smith 2003, 7-9.

¹⁷ By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English merchants and other travellers to Germany and the Baltic can often be found commenting on the churches they visited (Spicer 2012, 3-5).

¹⁸ Ryrie observes: ‘From its earliest days, the Scottish Reformation was built on English Bibles’ (Ryrie 2006, 31). This is clearly the case for the Borders and the Scottish central belt, but would not pertain in the Gaelic- or Norn-speaking areas.

¹⁹ For the disastrous mismanagement of Hamilton’s burning and its effect in publicising Reformation ideas, compare also Dawson (1993, 260, 264-264).

(Ryrie 2006, 57-67), were also subsequently suppressed. Until the 1550s, therefore, the open preaching or sharing of the teachings of Luther, Zwingli or other Reformers was not generally possible in Scotland. This contrasts markedly with the situation in Norway, and in particular in Bergen, which formed one of the key points for the introduction of Reformation ideas into Norway.

In the early sixteenth century, Bergen was the only town of any size in Norway. By around 1360, it was home to a *Kontor* of the Hanseatic League founded by Lübeck (Helle 1995, 96-98), with its own wharf and enclave, the *Bryggen*, which dominated the town (Grell 2005, 121), and by the mid-fifteenth century, Larson finds, ‘Hansa interests counted for more than the Kingdom of Norway’ (2010, 15). Nearly ninety per cent of ships recorded as visiting Bergen between 1518 and 1521 came from one of the German Hansa cities, the majority from the Eastern Hansa: Lübeck, Rostock, Wismar, Stralsund, and Danzig (Helle 1982, 775; Larson 2010, 70-72, 92). The Hansa enforced a monopoly over the international export trade, and were seeking also to dominate Bergen’s local retail trade. Although the townspeople maintained their involvement in this local trade, resisting the Hanseatic attempts to exclude them, Helle argues that after Christian II was deposed in favour of his uncle Frederick I in 1523 the political climate became more favourable for Hanseatic competitors in Bergen, who ‘steadily strengthened their position’ during over the decade that followed (Helle 1982, 778, 787). One side effect of this, he suggests, was that from the mid-1520s, before there was any official Lutheran preaching in Bergen, knowledge of Luther’s teachings was being conveyed to Bergen specifically, and Norway more generally, ‘partly from Denmark, and partly from the Hansa cities’ (Helle 1982, 882).²⁰

The first identifiable Lutheran preacher in Bergen was a former monk, a German named Antonius, who seems to have arrived in the town in around 1526 (Benedictow 1977, 397; Tuchtenhagen 2009, 59; Helle 1982, 883-884).²¹ By then religious tensions had already arisen in the form of a conflict between the bishop of Bergen, Olav Torkelsson, and Vincens Lunge, the commander of the *Bergenhus*, the town’s royal citadel. Lunge had humanist interests and was sympathetic towards Lutheran ideas; he was also swift to see the economic potential of the dissolution of monasteries (Helle 1982, 882-884).²² Under pressure from Lunge, the bishop moved his residence from the town (Grell 2005, 127-128, 133-134); Lunge took advantage of the bishop’s weak position to dismiss the clergy from the Apostles’ Church and the Black monastery. In 1528, Bergen’s Cistercian

²⁰ In November 1524, King Frederik I passed a decree that forbade ‘heretics’, including Lutherans, ‘to preach or teach against the faith of the Catholic Church, whether openly or in secret’; Helle comments that the Norwegian National Council, including the Norwegian bishops, supported this measure and that this ‘must imply that there were already certain Lutheran tendencies present in the country, probably especially in Bergen’ (Helle 1982, 882).

²¹ Helle comments ‘if Antonius was the first clergyman to engage himself for Lutheranism in Bergen, he must have been there somewhat earlier than 1529’ (Helle 1982, 884).

²² For Vincens Lunge, see Hamre (1998, 228-232, 244-250); compare also Larson 2010, 157-159; Grell 2005, 127; Rian 2009. Larson (2010) recounts how Vincens Lunge, and with him Bergen, became embroiled in the failed Norwegian attempt to achieve independence from Denmark, a story which is closely related to the implementation of the Reformation in Norway. Lunge’s position was not always consistent, however: see note *Rentals of Orkney*, 21; *Records of the Earldom of Orkney*, 366.

convent was secularised, and soon afterwards Lunge took over the building as his personal residence, the *Lungegården* (Hamre 1998, 379-380, 445-446).²³ By this time Lunge's household and that of his mother-in-law were known for eating meat on Fridays and for their singing of Psalms or Lutheran hymns (Grell 2005, 129; Helle 1982, 883; Imsen 2016, 55; Larson 2010, 319).

In 1529, Frederick I licensed two evangelical preachers, the German Herman Fresze und the Dane Jens Viborg (originally from Iceland), providing them with letters of protection for their ministry in Bergen. German preachers replaced the Norwegian priests at the two churches assigned to the German-speaking merchant community (Heininen and Czaika, section 23; Grell 2005, 129-131; Tuchtenhagen 2009, 59-60).²⁴ The Archbishop of Trondheim, Olav Engelbrektsson, received a number of reports of the abandoning of church customs in Bergen and its environs from priests, townsmen, and travellers; these included letters from Lübeck's city council, at that time struggling to contain Reformation tendencies in its own territory, which complained that the preachers were 'seducing the simple people under the appearance of teaching godly and evangelical doctrine' (Larson 2010, 319; Heininen and Czaika 2012, section 23).²⁵ From 1531, however, worship at Bergen's *Korskirken* was consistently Lutheran in form (Helle 1982, 884; Tuchtenhagen 2009, 60). As support for the Reformation consolidated in the Hanseatic cities, the expectation that Lutheran preaching and worship would be provided for the German community in Bergen also grew (Helle 1982, 884-886). Grell believes that by 1533 the Reformation ideas had gained such a hold in Bergen that the town, led by Tord Roed, an associate of Lunge, and supported by the German merchants, remained evangelical in the face of a protest by the Archbishop of Trondheim against the spread of the Reformation (Grell 2005, 132). By 1536, suggests Tuchtenhagen, Bergen had temporarily become 'a Reformation island in Catholic Norway' (Tuchtenhagen 2009, 61). Imsen, in contrast, cautions that 'that a significant number of the German merchants in Bergen may not necessarily have been Lutheran,' citing evidence of a flourishing trade in images of St Olav into the 1560s; he warns also that it is impossible to know how many Bergen citizens had become Lutherans before 1537 (Imsen 2016, 69-70). It seems likely that by the early 1530s Bergen was a place where religious ideas were being discussed and where a variety of religious practices, both Catholic and Lutheran, could be encountered.

Both politically and ecclesiastically, the period between Frederick I's death in 1533 and the confirmation of his eldest son, the Lutheran Christian III, as king in 1536 was a turbulent time for Denmark and Norway, and the Lübeck council was deeply implicated in these events (Lausten 2008, 82-91; Lausten 1995 27-33; Larson 2010, 295-390). The civil war which resulted from the decisions of the Danish council in 1533 – not to elect a

²³ Larson asserts that Lunge's attitude towards church property 'manifested itself in razing buildings, confiscating church treasure and protecting Evangelical agitators' (2010, 191). For a brief summary of Lunge's wider influence, see Imsen (2016, 65-66). For the fate of church property in Bergen, and also the continuities between the Catholic bishopric and the Lutheran superintendency, see Supphellen (1970, 183-201).

²⁴ For the Lübeck council's attempts to prevent evangelical preaching in Bergen, see Hauschild (1981, 177-178).

²⁵ For the letter of the Lübeck council, dated 14 May 1529, see *Diplomatarium norvegicum* 1884, No. 522, pp. 583-585; No. 523, pp. 585-587.

king, not to enter an alliance with Lübeck, and to return authority over the Danish church to the bishops (Lausten 2008, 83-86) – set the interests of Lübeck, Copenhagen and Malmö, supporters of the deposed and imprisoned Christian II, against the Norwegian nobility who supported his cousin, the future Christian III (Lausten 2008, 84-85, 89-90). The Archbishop of Trondheim sought to use his contacts to the Burgundian court in Brussels to further the interests of both Norway and of the Catholic church (Larson 2010, 318-321, 348-351, 388-390, 403-405, 408-410). In 1536, Christian III seized power in Copenhagen, arrested the Danish bishops (Larson 2010, 394-399), and declared Norway ‘a member of Denmark’s kingdom and under the crown of Denmark eternally’ (Larson 2010, 422). Bishops were replaced by superintendents in the Danish church order of 1537, and this was approved by the Norwegian Council in the summer of 1539 and imposed in Norway (Imsen 2016, 53; Heininen and Otfried 2012, section 23). In Bergen, bishop Olav Torkelsson had died in 1535. His elected successor was the cathedral canon and archdeacon, Geble Pederssøn, who on the instructions of Christian III was initially appointed administrator of the vacant diocese and subsequently, in 1537, became Bergen’s (and Norway’s) first superintendent, a post he held until his death in 1557 (Larson 2010, 349, 409, 428).²⁶ A high-ranking priest in the diocese who was originally elected to the Catholic bishopric, Pederssøn became known as a dedicated Humanist and worked to establish schools in Bergen and to improve the training of pastors (Imsen 2016, 70-72; Lyby and Grell 1994, 124, 126; Olesen 2003, 81, 83; Fossen 2009). Gina Dahl observes that book salesmen are known to have visited Bergen from the mid sixteenth century onwards, providing an outlet for books printed in Denmark or in the German lands (Dahl 2011, 32). In both Denmark and Norway, ecclesiastically the 1540s and 1550s were a period of consolidation, which saw the enactment of measures against ‘Anabaptists and “Sacramentarians”’ and against Philippists and Crypto-Calvinists intended to impose and maintain a Lutheran orthodoxy (Lyby and Grell 1994, 118-119).

It is against this background that accounts of Orcadians and Shetlanders in Bergen during the first half of the sixteenth century must be placed. It is clear that such encounters continued, even if they were not as close or as frequent as some commentators have suggested (Smith 2010, 52). Indeed, Knut Helle suggests that following significant migration from Orkney and Shetland to Bergen through the later middle ages, during the sixteenth century economic relations were mainly sustained by traders from both Orkney and Shetland, who sold barley and oatmeal, hides, butter, wool, homespun and other woollen products in Norway (Helle 1988, 26). Until 1580, this trade was facilitated by the permissions granted to Orkney and Shetland ships could trade toll-free – that is, as if they were Norwegian ships – in Bergen (Helle 1988, 26).

Although Orcadians and Shetlanders, like other foreigners, had to apply for citizens’ rights, which could be rescinded, Ludvig Daae has shown on the basis of the town records that ‘there was in Bergen a constant influx of young people from the islands and that the Governor of Bergenhus looked after them and disposed of them in a sort of patriarchal manner’ (Daae 1953, 2). Daae finds Shetlanders at court, in trade, and as servants. One of these was Anders Monsson, described as ‘an old servant in the “house of the masters

²⁶ For Pederssøn’s contribution, see also Supphellen 1970, 196-199; Imsen 2016, 66-73; Fossen 2009.

of Lungegården” (Vincens Lunge’s family)’: although the date of his service is unclear, Anders Monsson was a servant in the household which constituted the centre of Norwegian support for the Bergen Reformation. Another Shetland servant, Nils Hjelt (i.e. Neil the Shetlander) was attached to the household of Jens Skjelderup, Pederssøn’s successor, who was superintendent of Bergen from 1557 until his death in 1582 (Roggen 2009).²⁷ In 1569 Nils Hjelt was ordained and later served at Fana (Daae 1953).²⁸ Nils Hjelt lived in Bergen after the introduction of the Reformation in Scotland in 1560, but he may have arrived there earlier. Skjelderup’s support for Nils Hjelt could indicate an interest in Calvinist or Reformed theology: certainly in 1570, the superintendent clashed with Bergen’s town council over his wish to restrict the use of images in the town’s churches (Lyby and Grell 1994, 125).²⁹ Further evidence for contact between Bergen and post-Reformation Scotland is provided by Torleif Grgoriussen, who was sponsored by the Bergan cathedral chapter to study at the University of St Andrews, and was later disciplined for crypto-Calvinism (Lyby and Grell 1994, 125). The example of Gregoriussen shows that Norwegian students were studying in Reformed Scotland, whilst the biography of Nils Hjelt offers a reminder that from the 1560s, Orkney and Shetland might also have served as sources of information about Reformed Protestantism for Lutherans in Norway.

Most intriguing is the case of Jon Thomessøn or Lille Jon, born in Orkney, who was one of a group of ‘Scots’ who immigrated to Bergen and became citizens there in the early sixteenth century (Helle 1988, 24; Daae 1953, 6; Daae 1895, 46; Helle 2009). Thomessøn is mentioned several times in the *Bergenhus* accounts between 1516 and 1522. He had a house and a store near the *Bryggen*, from where he traded in dried fish, oats and wool, and seems to have been a significant merchant, who maintaining trade links both to the North, with Lofoten, and to the South, with Kampen, one of the Zuidersee cities that the Lübeck-dominated Hansa was seeking to exclude from the fishing industry in Bergen. By 1522, Thomessøn had become one of Bergen’s town councillors. His status did not protect him from a brutal assault by German merchants on the night of 8/9 November 1523. The Germans attacked the town hall, and broke into the Scots House, requiring the Scots to agree not to seek legal recourse and to leave Norway. The Germans later claimed that they acted with the agreement of Vincens Lunge, although Lunge denied this.³⁰ Jon Thomessøn was taken by the German attackers to the German enclave; his wife and their child were driven out of their house; her brother (who had been working for Thomessøn) was killed and the Germans seized gold, silver and merchandise that Thomessøn later assessed to amount to nearly 11,000 marks, a sum which indicates his wealth and status. Other Scots were subsequently exiled from Bergen, but Thomessøn remained there. By 1543 he had become one of Bergen’s two mayors, a position which he held until at least 1548 (Grell 2005, 143). Absalon Pederssøn refers to him as

²⁷ Skjelderup had studied in Copenhagen, Wittenberg and Rostock, where he took his doctorate in medicine.

²⁸ For Nils Hjelt see also Imsen 2016; compare <http://www.genealogi.no/prester-i-nordhordland-prosti/>.

²⁹ For Skjelderup’s view on images, which ‘broadly speaking is in line with Luther’s view on images’, see Jürgensen 2013, 359. Compare also Imsen 2016, 70; Lyby and Grell 1994, 125.

³⁰ For this episode, see Larson (2010, 158), who believes that Lunge instigated the violence, but intended it to be directed against the *Bergenhus* fortress; compare also Helle 2009.

‘godfryctig, from’ (god-fearing and pious) (Helle 2009), a description which suggests that in the 1540s Thomessøn was viewed as an upstanding citizen in a town which by then was officially Lutheran.

Shetlanders were also linked to Bergen’s evangelical clergy by marriage in this period. Absalon Pederssøn’s *dagbog* records that on 4 August 1566, Mikkel or Michel Jonson, parish priest of Bergen’s cathedral from 1553 until 1572, married ‘a young girl from Shetland, who is the maternal granddaughter of Mats Tierpis, chaplain at the cathedral; her father’s name is David’ (Daae 1953; Nicolaysen 1858, 315).³¹ Matts Tierpis was chaplain at Bergen cathedral from 1536 until 1558.³² His daughter Katherine married David Sanderson Scott of Reafirth in Shetland,³³ presumably between 1540 and 1550. Katherine may well have had a brother, for another Matts Tierp was chaplain from 1558 until 1571,³⁴ and was a colleague of Michel Jonson at the time when the latter married Katherine and David’s daughter. By 1566, the Scottish Reformation had been introduced into Shetland, but the marriage of Katherine Mathewsdaughter and David Sanderson Scott a generation earlier indicates a link between this Lutheran Bergen clergy family and a Shetland family at a time when Shetland was still nominally Catholic.³⁵

These small pieces of evidence are suggestive of contacts – in this last case over two or three generations – between Orcadians and Shetlanders and supporters of evangelical teaching in Bergen from the 1520s, when Reformation theology first began to be preached there, until after the Reformation was introduced into Orkney and Shetland. It must be emphasised that the evidence of such contacts and influences is scanty: nonetheless, these snippets and hints testify to links between Shetlanders, Orcadians and those responsible for introducing reforming influences to Bergen. They may also offer a reminder that confessional differences can appear clearer to the historian than they did at the time.³⁶ What is important is to note that, as Imsen concludes, because ‘Shetland was in a certain sense still Norwegian ... there was significant traffic between Western Norway – really Bergen – and Scotland,’ that many Scots, or more specifically Shetlanders, settled in the town (Imsen 2016, 108-109); this did not change after 1537. Such contacts and patterns of migration do not witness to the presence of Reformation ideas in either Orkney or Shetland prior to 1560. However, given that contacts between Orkney, Shetland and the Norwegian mainland continued at a time when the new theological ideas were taking hold in Bergen, some communication of these ideas to Orkney and Shetland can be surmised.

³¹ Compare Nicolaysen 1860, 117. For the dates of Mikkel Jonson’s ministry at the cathedral see <http://www.genealogi.no/prester-i-nordhordland-prosti/>.

³² See <http://www.genealogi.no/prester-i-nordhordland-prosti/>.

³³ I am grateful to Brian Smith and John Ballantyne for identifying Katherine Mathewsdaughter and David Sanderson Scott. See now Brian Smith, ‘David Sanderson Scott of Reafirth and his family’, *Coontin Kin* issue 105 (Yule 2017), 4-7

³⁴ See <http://www.genealogi.no/prester-i-nordhordland-prosti/>.

³⁵ David Sanderson Scott’s sister Anna Sandersdotter was married to Hans Fybo or Fønbo, a Bergen citizen. See the conveyance of land signed in Bergen on 16 August 1575, after she was widowed (Nicolaysen 1868, 79).

³⁶ For the tendencies in Reformation history to assume overly defined confessional identities, see Johnson, Luebke, Plummer, and Spohnholz (eds), 2017.

Orkney's 'heretics'

There is very little direct evidence, however, for the reception of Reformation ideas in either Orkney or Shetland in the 1530s and 1540s. The clearest indication consists in the two men of Orkney origin who are listed by Margaret Sanderson in her *Biographical List of Early Scottish Protestants, Heretics and other Religious Dissenters*. The first, one James Kaa, was one of the chaplains at St Magnus' cathedral in Kirkwall. In 1550 he was accused of 'his "tenascite and pertinensitie" in heresy' [i.e. his 'tenacity and obstinacy'] (Donaldson 1959, 85; Donaldson 1987, 20). Donaldson believes that this James Kaa is probably the same person as James Skea, a native of Orkney, who in 1548 had been obliged to flee to England 'for fear of burning for the word of God' (Donaldson 1959, 85 n.1; Donaldson 1987, 20; Thomson, 2008, 257; Ryrie 2006, 76). Sanderson does not mention a James Kaa, but she lists James Skea, whom she places as 'chaplain' in Orkney in 1523. By May 1546, she finds him in Caithness, 'when the Earl of Caithness was ordered by the lords of session to arrest him.' He fled to England in the winter of 1546/47, seeking the Protection of the Duke of Somerset, who in January 1547 became Regent to the young Edward VI, 'saying that he had had to flee to escape death by burning, claiming to have abjured after trial'. The next trace of him is *en route* to Denmark in November 1550, at which point he asked for the protection of the Scottish king, receiving the offer of 'a twenty-year respite in Scotland on condition that he recanted'. He then disappears from the record (Sanderson 2010, 127).³⁷ The evangelical beliefs of Kaa or Skea took him from Orkney to Caithness, into Edward VI's England and finally to Denmark, possibly indicating that he had contacts there, perhaps dating from his earlier period in Orkney.³⁸

Sanderson lists only one other person from the Northern Isles. This is another Orkneyman, Andrew Lawson, who was at Frankfurt-an-der-Oder in 1549. She suggests that Lawson 'is probably the same as Andrew "Guilmus"' (Sanderson 2010, 106), for whom Melancthon sent a testimonial to England on 29 March 1551, affirming that he had been expelled from Orkney by the local bishop 'Robertus Rufus' – i.e. Robert Reid – on account of his evangelical preaching (Melancthon 1997, no. 6035, 144).

As Rendall observes, the case of Skea/Kaa offers evidence that 'Protestant ideas must have been circulating in the islands, while they were still regarded as "heretical", and long before they were imposed by law' (Rendall 2009, 68). Moreover, as Frank Bardgett comments, 'it is unlikely that Kaa was in fact the only Orcadian whose opinions were diverging from Catholic orthodoxy; the normal procedures of the time were to prosecute formers of opinion, leaders of groups' (Bardgett 2000, 55). Skea/Kaa and Lawson/Guilmus offer tantalising hints of an interest in Reformation teaching amongst Orcadians, or at least amongst the Orkney clergy. Skea/Kaa also points to the existence

³⁷ Shaw suggests that Kaa/Skea is the James Cadie who from 1567 to 1574 was reader in Dunsyre where Adam Bothwell held property (Shaw 1989, 42).

³⁸ Moreover, there were other Scottish connections to Denmark: from 1542 the Scot Johannes Macchabæus, or John MacAlpine, a former Dominican who had taken his doctorate in Theology at Wittenberg, was Professor of Theology at the University of Copenhagen. MacAlpine's wife and Miles Coverdale's wife were sisters, and in 1555 MacAlpine was instrumental in securing Coverdale's safe passage to Denmark. See Grell, 2011, 38-39; Grane 1999, 160, 208; Greaves 2004.

of networks which reached into Denmark as well as into Scotland and England, while Lowson/Guilmus had links to Saxony. These links could have been initiated through contacts made in Bergen.

James V's letter to Pope Paul III

In 1541, on the death of Robert Maxwell, Bishop of Orkney, James V wrote to Pope Paul III to request the appointment of Robert Reid as Maxwell's successor.³⁹ He did so having in the summer of 1540 spent nearly six weeks in Orkney, accompanied by a retinue which included Cardinal David Beaton, Archbishop of St Andrews from 1538, and one of the king's most trusted advisors. Whilst in Orkney, James stayed in the Bishop's palace in Kirkwall and consulted with Maxwell and others on the situation in Orkney and Shetland, which was profoundly unstable after more than a decade of disputes amongst the Sinclair family (Thomson 2008, 243-244). As James put it to the pope, however, these instabilities potentially arose from a Reformation influence. The Orkneys, he wrote, were 'islands just under the pole, not far from Norway, Denmark and Germany', in which 'the cause of Catholic faith and law are little observed'.⁴⁰ The clear implication was that the Diocese of Orkney needed a bishop who would be prepared to combat heretical teachings encroaching from Denmark-Norway and Germany. James V's letter is not reliable evidence, for the king was exerting pressure on the pope to allow the appointment of Robert Reid, already Abbot of Kinloss, simultaneously as Bishop of Orkney; he was also seeking the deduction of 800 marks from the diocesan income for the benefit of John Stewart, one of his illegitimate sons (Dae 1953, 14). At the same time, however, James V was seeking to appoint as Bishop of Orkney a man who was known for his humanist credentials and his dedication to learning. At the very least, this letter witnesses to the existence in the King of Scotland's mind – shortly after he had spent several weeks there – of closer links between the diocese of Orkney and Denmark-Norway and Germany than existed elsewhere in his kingdom.

Robert Reid's new constitution for St Magnus's cathedral

Paul III approved the appointment requested by James V, and Robert Reid was duly consecrated Bishop of Orkney in 1541. In December 1542, James V died; the regent for his six-day-old daughter Mary was the Earl of Arran, under whose aegis Reid was appointed also Lord President of the Court of Session in 1543. Keen to secure an alliance with England, Arran conducted a brief but intense flirtation with reforming ideas during 1543 (Ryrie 2006, 57-67), an episode of which Reid was certainly aware. This was the background against which in 1544, Reid introduced a reforming constitution for St Magnus's Cathedral in Kirkwall, at a time when he was also investing significant

³⁹ For Robert Maxwell, see Fraser (1863, 403-411), with an inventory of Maxwell's possessions – including his (remarkably few) books – at his death (406-411). Fraser records that Maxwell hosted the king and his retinue on an earlier visit to Orkney in 1536, in recognition of which King James V granted Kirkwall a royal charter. However, he does not mention the king's visit in 1540. For Robert Reid, see Cuthbert 1998.

⁴⁰ 'Orchades sunt insulae fere sub polo, non longe a Novegia, Daniaa, Germanisque sitae; hae forsane causa Catholicæ fidei legumque minus observantes.' Cited according to Craven 1901, 149; see also Thomson 2008, 249; Dae 1953, 14.

resources into the restoration of church buildings in the diocese.⁴¹ The constitution reordered, enlarged and strengthened the cathedral chapter. As Thomson suggests, Reid seems to have ‘aimed at providing an organisation which could function effectively without his close supervision’, and in order to fund these reforms, rents and other income from local parishes were diverted to support the cathedral’s prebendaries (Thomson 2008, 250-252).⁴² Reid’s constitution gave the chapter of St Magnus a new head, the provost, who was to be a ‘doctor of theology after careful examination, or at least one who has become a bachelor of theology, who shall be a man of good fame, conversation, and name, and (after the bishop) shall be first inquisitor of the whole diocese of heretical pravity’ (*Rentals of Orkney*, 20; Clouston 1914, 364). The provost and the Archdeacon of Orkney were ‘bound to preach four times in the year in the Cathedral Church to the people in the common tongue [*in vulgari*]’ (*Rentals of Orkney*, 20; Clouston 1914, 364, 365). In addition, the subdean ‘shall be a master of arts, a priest well instructed in both testaments, so that he may know how to deal with old and new matters’ (*Rentals of Orkney*, 21; Clouston 1914, 366). The subdean was to preach ‘thrice in the year ... in the cathedral church’, (the language was not specified) (*Rentals of Orkney*, 21; Clouston 1914, 366), and the chancellor was to read a public lecture on canon law every week (*Rentals of Orkney*, 20; Clouston 1914, 365). The constitution also made arrangements for the support of a Latin or grammar school and a song school, both in Kirkwall (there was no such provision for Shetland).

Donaldson highlights the weaknesses of Reid’s constitution, remarking that ‘the new chapter was to be financed only by further stripping the parishes of revenues that would have been better applied to the maintenance of competent parish priests able to instruct the people in the faith; and lecturing in Kirkwall on canon law was not the way to cope with imminent revolution’ (Donaldson 1961, 34; compare Donaldson 1987, 20). Smith suggests that as a result of the omission of the Archdeacon of Shetland from the new cathedral chapter, the ‘ecclesiastical polities of Orkney and Shetland finally drifted apart’ (Smith 2003, 166). These strictures notwithstanding, the constitution also shows a striking awareness of the need to engage with ‘old and new matters’ on the basis of scripture, a concern about the possible presence of heresy in the diocese, and an instruction that preaching should take place in the ‘common tongue’. The ‘old and new matters’ are not more closely specified, but could plausibly be read as referring to scholastic theology and philosophy, the ‘old matters’; and humanism and the threat of evangelical theology, the ‘new matters’. Neither is it clear which ‘common tongue’ was intended. Given the imposition of legal Scots in Orkney at around this time, Scots may have been meant, although Rendall, writing of the post Reformation period, doubts whether this qualifies as a ‘common tongue’: ‘biblical English read by a Scots minister was hardly the

⁴¹ For the Latin text, see: Peterkin 1820, Appendix, 18-25. An English translation is found in: “Foundation and election...” 1914. For a consideration of the constitution, see Cant 1995 105-121. It is summarised also by Cuthbert 1998, 79-84, and Shaw 1989, 43-47. Shaw’s suggestion that Reid’s reorganisation was ‘inspired by the spirit of the Council of Trent’ and ‘in accordance with’ the Council’s decisions cannot be correct since the Council of Trent did not meet for its first session until 1545.

⁴² Thomson believes that ‘a higher proportion of the income was diverted than in any other Scottish diocese’ (2008, 251-252).

vernacular of sixteenth-century Orcadians, who were still speaking a dialect strongly influenced by Norse, and one wonders if it was much more accessible to them than Latin' (Rendall 2009, 72). However, the argument for bilingualism may serve to mitigate Rendall's objection.

The concern to ensure orthodox teaching, to suppress heresy and (at least theoretically) to provide accessible preaching which can be seen in the 1544 constitution for St Magnus cathedral chapter were probably not specific to the situation of Orkney and Shetland. Shaw sees the countering of heresy as one of Reid's key concerns even before he was made bishop (Shaw 1989, 42). Such concerns were mirrored in a petition of the Scottish clergy to Arran in 1547 which complained that 'Scotland had previously been infected with the "pestilential heresies of Luther", but that because they these had gone unpunished, "divers of them are become sacramentaries, and specially against the blessed sacrament of the altar" (Ryrie 2006, 132; citing the *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, vol. 1, 63). A preaching canon was also provided for the chapter of the cathedral in Aberdeen (Ryrie 2006, 105), but this seems not to have been framed explicitly against heresy; nor was the 1549 Constitution of Glasgow's Collegiate Church, the only other similar contemporary Scottish constitution I have so far seen.⁴³ Reid's concern to suppress heresy in the diocese of Orkney reflects the tenor of his earlier Humanist reforms as Abbot of Kinloss, which, Ryrie suggests, had in the 1530s 'helped to turn Kinloss Abbey into something like a university' (Ryrie 2006, 105). Reid was also known for his view that denial of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was 'a horrible heresy' (Ryrie 2006, 103, 132). The terms of Reid's constitution for the St Magnus chapter may also indicate a concern to check or control the new theological ideas which were now well-established in Bergen and which had gained traction in Scotland as a result of Arran's policies in 1543. It is possible that, like James V, Reid believed that Orkney and Shetland were particularly exposed to these ideas through the islanders' contacts with Norway. The constitution certainly shows an awareness that theological conflict was an issue that needed to be dealt with. It is presumably no coincidence that it was during Reid's episcopate that James Skea/Kaa and Andrew Lawson/Guilmus were accused of heresy and fled Orkney.

Resisting the Reformation

Evidence from the period after the Reformation suggests, however, that the traditions of (somewhat superstitious) Catholicism remained well-established in both Orkney and Shetland for a century or more after the official introduction of the Reformation in Scotland – and with it the diocese of Orkney – in 1560. Robert Reid died in 1558 and was succeeded by Adam Bothwell, a lawyer but also a notable scholar of Hebrew. In early 1560, Bothwell put in train a reforming visitation in Orkney and Shetland, as Thomas Randolph reported to William Cecil in a letter of 5 March 1561: 'The Bishop of Orkney

⁴³ The 1549 constitution of Glasgow's collegiate church seems only to have directed that the prebendaries be 'eruditi instructi et sufficienter qualificati': *Liber Collegii Nostre Domine registrum Ecclesie...* 1846, 20 (online at: <https://archive.org/details/libercollegiino00annegoog>, accessed 27.03.2018). I am grateful to Roger Edwards for this link.

begins to reform his diocese, and preaches himself.’⁴⁴ Bothwell offered an account of the process and the difficulties he had encountered in a letter of 5 February to his brother-in-law, Sir Archibald Napier, Laird of Merchiston, in Edinburgh, Reporting that he had referred his decision to introduce the Reformation to the *hirdmanstevne*, the local court, where he received the assurance that they ‘would be content with the mutation of religion.’ However, as he lay ill in the bishop’s palace in Kirkwall, in an adjoining chapel the opponents to Reform ‘caused mass to be said and certain couples to be married, in the old manner’, proceedings which, he complained, he could not have prevented, ‘unless I would have committed slaughter’ (Craven 1897, 6-7). Certainly the resistance to Bothwell’s reforms does not suggest a groundswell of Reforming enthusiasm in either Orkney or Shetland, but rather the opposite. This became the prevailing view of the diocese: by 1588, Orkney was described as ‘a district where “the Jesuits and papists chiefly resort”,’ and in 1592 Sir Michael Balfour, of Noltland Castle in Westray, and Robert, Earl of Orkney, were viewed as ‘the “best affected gentlemen” to put in force against the Jesuits within the bounds of Orkney’ (Gray 2000, 22).

Moreover, evidence up until the turn of the eighteenth century suggests that images and processions continued to be important to the islanders’ religious life. Jo Ben described the islanders undertaking pilgrimages to the chapel at Deerness and offering prayers and incantations using water and stones. He concluded that ‘they do not worship God purely here’.⁴⁵ The condemnation of this kind of ritual as ‘superstitious’ was common to late medieval Catholicism as well as post-Reformation Protestantism (Scribner 1981, 95-96), and it is quite possible that these or similar rituals were being practised – and condemned as superstitious – long before the Reformation. Pilgrimages to holy places, some, such as Deerness, associated with springs, and the use of chapels for prayer clearly continued in Orkney, and quite possibly also in Shetland, well into the seventeenth century, or even into the eighteenth.⁴⁶ Thus, in 1584, the minister of South Ronaldsay complained that Lady Day, All Hallows Day, Lammas, Holy Week, Easter, St Colm’s Day, St James’s Day were ‘all duly revered’. Women were reported to visit ruined chapels to give thanks after childbirth, and older burial customs continued. In Westray, the cult of St Tredwell or Treduana was still strong; James Annand, minister of Sanday, North

⁴⁴ Cited according to *Calendar of State Papers Foreign – Elizabeth 1866*, no. 15, p. 9; see also Craven 1897, 5.

⁴⁵ *A description of the Orkadian Islands, by me Jo. Ben* 2012, 41. Ben gives the year he stayed in Orkney as 1529, but this is clearly incorrect since he refers to a number of events which took place later. James M. Irvine argues that the text is more likely to date to 1592 (2012, 52-54), and that Jo Ben was actually John Bonar, some time minister in North Ronaldsay (2012, 54-57). As Irvine suggests, Ben’s complaint that the people of North Ronaldsay ‘are quite ignorant of the Divine Word: because they are rarely or never taught’ (*Description of the Orkadian Islands* 2012, 36) is consistent with a post-Reformation dating. Ben’s admonition to a woman who was ‘troubled by a sea spirit’ that she should ‘pray, give alms and fast’ (*Description of the Orkadian Islands* 2012, 37) has resonances with late medieval piety, but it is also consistent with Reformed spiritual disciplines. For practices of fasting in post-Reformation Scotland, see Hazlett 1998, 176-198; Ryrie 2013, 89-108, especially 101-102, 104-105.

⁴⁶ For the continuing attraction of holy springs elsewhere in post-Reformation Scotland, see Walsham, 2008, 213-214. Margo Todd observes that in post-Reformation Scotland, ‘it was possible, in practice, for multiple and mutually contradictory cosmologies to exist simultaneously in a world of uncertainty and subjection to the arbitrary forces of nature’ (Todd 2008, 208).

Ronaldsay and Westray from 1561 until 1584, is said to have allowed the people to attend church after they had first prayed at St Tredwell's chapel.⁴⁷ In 1643, the Presbytery ordered the parish of Parish of South Ronaldsay and Burray to burn a statue of St Peter, still present and being venerated in St Peter's Church (Picken 1972, 28; Rendall 2009, 75). In 1700, James Wallace, the son of an Orkney minister, complained that the islanders were still 'much given to Superstition, as appears by the many Chapels that are here and there dispersed through the Country' (Wallace 1700, 69). Wallace described the regular pilgrimages undertaken by the islanders, especially to 'the Chapels of the *Brough of Birsá*, and to the Chapel at the *Mulehead* in *Deirness*,' and reported that they also continued the custom of keeping the patronal festivals of their churches and chapels: 'The day that is dedicated to the Memory of the Saint who is Patron of the chief Church, where Sermon is made, is kept Holy by the common People of the whole Parish; so that they will not Work on that day; And those that live next to the smaller Chapels do moreover keep holy that Day, that is dedicated to the Memory of that Saint, that the Chapel is denominated by' (Wallace 1700, 69-70).⁴⁸

Conclusions and interpretative factors

This study has considered the potential contacts of Orkney and Shetland to Reformation influences from the German Hansa cities, Norway, and more specifically Bergen, and Scotland from the mid-1530s to the late-1550s. It cannot offer any firm conclusions. There are certainly indications that Lutheran ideas may have been communicated to Orcadians and Shetlanders during the period in which the Reformation had become established in Bergen but had not yet been introduced in the Northern Isles, for there is evidence for Orcadians and Shetlanders being associated with strongly evangelical or clerical families in Bergen. However, other than the two Orcadians condemned as heretics, there is no evidence for the reception of Lutheran ideas in either Orkney or Shetland, and it is far from clear whether Shea and Lowson were influenced by ideas coming west from Norway or the Baltic, or north from Scotland. That the last sign of Skea is in Denmark might suggest the former in his case. In sum, it is clear that contacts existed, but it is not clear that Lutheran ideas spread through those contacts to the Northern Isles. This is in contrast to, for instance, Iceland, whither contacts to Hamburg brought Reformation ideas in the 1530s, and whence students went to study in Wittenberg and other German Protestant universities, later forming an influential evangelical group (Oleson 2005, 114-115).⁴⁹ These findings are similar to the pattern found in the islands that made up the Danish diocese of Funen, where, Grell suggests, 'the absence of an evangelical movement' might have been related to the islands' 'relative isolation in geographical terms, situated away from any major trade route' (Grell 2011, 53-55;

⁴⁷ For these practices, see Gray 2000, 22. Gray names Annand as 'superintendent'; however, Donaldson has him as 'commissioner in Orkney' for the collection of the ecclesiastical income due to the crown (Donaldson (ed.) 1949, 204-205). Shaw records that Annand was appointed chancellor of the diocese at around the time of Adam Bothwell's arrival in Orkney in 1560 (Shaw 1989, 53; Donaldson, 1959, 90).

⁴⁸ Wallace's account here coheres closely with the testimony of Jo Ben.

⁴⁹ Despite the existence of this group, the Reformation in Iceland took a long time to become accepted (Oleson 2005, 116-117).

quotation at 55). Orkney and Shetland in this period may offer a practical example of the importance of Esther-Beate Körber's distinction between information and teaching: Luther's theology, she suggests, 'required of its recipients that they make it their own, that they engage with it and that they see themselves and their world in a new light' (Körber 2005, 16). This kind of deep communication clearly could and did take place amongst Orcadians and Shetlanders who emigrated to Bergen, but opportunities were much more limited amongst islanders who remained at home. Neither Shetland nor Orkney had a significant merchant trading class in this period. Whilst Reformation ideas undoubtedly spread via trading routes, the evidence of Orkney and Shetland suggests that more thought needs to be given to the question of what kind of contacts might foster evangelical conversion. An invitation to a visiting merchant to attend a host's church, for instance, or hearing passages and stories read from a host's vernacular Bible, or attending family prayers, or seeing and discussing a Reformation broadsheet in a local tavern would probably have had more impact than a short encounter on a ship anchored in an isolated *voe*. Unless they travelled to Bergen or to one of the Hansa cities, Orcadians and Shetlanders would have had no opportunity to visit Lutheran churches or experience Lutheran worship. However, from the late 1520s, migrants to Bergen would be confronted with precisely the kind of Reformation milieu that the Scottish authorities were seeking to suppress.

Orkney and Shetland were primarily rural societies, and there is a great deal of evidence which suggests that Reformation ideas took longer to gain a foothold in rural communities.⁵⁰ Grell suggests that 'the overwhelmingly rural character of early modern Norway, even when compared with Denmark, may well explain why the evangelical movement seems to have made little or no impact at the popular level before the Reformation was introduced as a *fait accompli* by Christian III in 1537' (Grell 2016, 55). Outside Bergen, Norway was slow to accept the Reformation (Grell 2005, 141-143; Imsen, 2016). In Norway the urban/rural divide was additionally complicated by the way that Catholicism came to be associated with Norwegian attempts to assert their independence over against the Danes (Lausten 1995, 27-29, 32-33).⁵¹ This complex of factors, with the additional layer of Scottish interests, could also have played a role for the inhabitants of Orkney and Shetland.

Grell identifies another significant factor in the slow diffusion of evangelical ideas in Norway: the lack of either a university or a printing press in the country (2005, 127).⁵²

⁵⁰ Lausten concludes for Denmark, for instance, that the Reformation 'was a typical market-town phenomenon' (2002, 101). The suggestion that the Reformation was an urban phenomenon was exemplified by the focus of (for instance) A. G. Dickens on the spread of Reformation to cities (1974, 135-199). This thesis has been widely discussed, and convincing arguments for the Reformation as a rural and communal movement have also been offered. However, it remains the consensus that the cultural possibilities offered by towns and cities tended to be more conducive to the spread of reforming ideas, particularly when combined with a political interest in securing the town's independence. For useful explorations of the literature (all now somewhat dated), see Müller 1981; von Greyerz 1985, 6-63; Scott 1991, 183-192.

⁵¹ Allegiances were not always cut-and-dried, however: Larson (2010), shows the way in which Vincens Lunge several times changed sides on the question of Norwegian subjection to the Danes.

⁵² Compare also the useful summary of 'the political situation and its repercussions for the book trade' offered by Dahl 2013, 188-190, and her discussion of the book trade in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Norway (Dahl 2011).

Körber points out that evangelical ideas spread around the Baltic orally as well as through print, but she observes that the dissemination of Lutheran theology and practice was rendered considerably more difficult by the absence of a written language (2005, 22-25). It is clear that Luther's ideas initially came to be known outside the Early High German language area through his Latin writings, which could be – and were – read by churchmen and scholars across Europe. Orkney and Shetland, however, had no Latin school, let alone a university; Norn, unlike Scots, was in general not a written language, although Norwegian was. In many contexts where the Reformation took hold, the most important demographic group for the reception of the educated laity of the middling sort, of whom there can only have been very few in either Orkney or Shetland. The persistence of traditional rites into the seventeenth century suggests that Orkney and Shetland, despite being exposed to Reformation influences from Bergen as well as from Scotland, and like many other rural communities, religious practices long proved resistant to change.

Nonetheless, this article demonstrates the importance of looking beyond modern national boundaries in considering the impact of the Reformation. Early modern Orkney and Shetland existed in a complex network of relationships which linked them to the German Hanseatic cities on the Baltic and to Norway and Denmark as well as to Scotland. This article has shown that however tantalising the results, the attempt better to understand the ways that Reformation ideas were – and were not – transmitted through those networks can be a fruitful one.

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