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Published in:

The International Journal of Maritime History

Publication date:

2011

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Citation for published version (APA):

Worthington, D. (2011). A northern Scottish maritime region: the Moray Firth in the seventeenth century. *The International Journal of Maritime History*, 23(2), 181-209.

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A northern Scottish maritime region: the Moray Firth in the seventeenth century
Dr David Worthington

Introduction

According to the historian Sir Robert Gordon (1580-1656), a surprise occurred for the people of Dornoch in the far north-east of Scotland, in 1600, when: ‘fourten great whaills of huge bignes, were casten in by the sea, vpon the sands vnder the toun’.¹ Gordon asserted that some of these animals were ‘90 feett in lenth [length]... ..cam [came] in alive, and were slain immedietlie by the inhabitants, who reaped some commodities thereby’.² However, his is only one of several surviving reports regarding whale strandings along the coast of what will be shown to have been an identifiable maritime region. Some equally striking evidence comes from further south, from the memoirs of James Fraser (1634-1709) minister of the parish of Wardlaw just a few miles to the west of the town of Inverness, today the capital of the Scottish Highlands. The quote below outlines that writer’s recollection of two related events from 1644, each of which took place a short distance away from his home, where:

This spring and summer many prodigious signs, apparitions, spectraes [spectres], strange sights, were seen everywhere, which presaged warr and revolutions... ..there was also two prodigious whales came up this firth with a high spring tide, the one persueing the other, and fastned both uponn the lee shallow sands tuixt Tarridell [Tarradale] and Spittle [Spital], where Rory Mackenzie of Redcastle might pretend a property and sease them, but he permitted the whole countrys on both sids to make pray [prey] of them, and, to my certain knowledge, they were so bigg and high that the people made use of small ladders to reach their top; the like never seen or heard off in the Murray firth. These I saw myselfe, being present about them often. There were also two purposies or spout whailes that ran up the River of Ness and under the bridge, and reacht the Isle a mile above the town, where they were killed. Some vented by conjectur that those two bigg whailes were an emblem of the King and Parliament, persueing one the other; but, alas, those things portended no good.³

¹ ‘...fourteen great whales of a huge size, were casten in by the sea, upon the sands under the toun’. Sir Robert Gordon, *A genealogical history of the earldom of Sutherland: from its origin to the year 1630* (Edinburgh, 1813), 239, 241.

² Ibid.

³ William Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers: the Wardlaw manuscript entitled ‘Polichronicon seu policratica temporum’ or ‘The true genealogy of the Frasers’, 916-1674* (Edinburgh, 1905), 290-1.

The symbolism these two creatures provided of political divisions during the civil wars that ravaged Britain and Ireland from 1638-60 would seem to have been powerful. High politics aside though, this extract, like that from Gordon, makes clear that the people who witnessed the beachings were not simply passive bystanders but involved in the eventual slaughter of the animals and, it seems, free to make use of the carcasses thereafter. Furthermore, in some ways, history would repeat itself with respect to an Inverness case fifteen years later, even if, on this occasion, rights became more contested to the remains of a 'formidable big whale' which had:

...stuck upon the lee shoare be-east Inverness, a mile. It was 70 foot long. I was present at the measuring of her. The debate began whither it was uppon Culloden's March or the Townes; butt the Burgers of Inverness ceased the whale under appretiation, John Forbes of Culloden being then at south. The English offered to buy her at a high rate, and they should have got her be right, for all men concluded the whale to be a presage of the garrison's expiration and translation from Inverness, which happened shortly after.⁴

A close attention to events at sea and along the shoreline is clear in all the abovementioned instances, a focus that was essential for all of those living on this stretch of the eastern Scottish coast. Indeed, though 'the grand culminating point of the European maritime experience' would come only two centuries later, an attempt to adapt to an often uncontrollable and unpredictable offshore and shoreline setting characterises everyday life for people in many coastal regions of Christendom and beyond throughout medieval and early modern times.⁵ This article will argue in favour of such an approach with respect to the seventeenth century history of the specific location to which the above accounts relate, while drawing, of necessity, on a North Sea and Baltic and even broader international context. Cuthbert Graham argued, in 1977, that the term 'Moray Firth' could be defined in many ways, it having 'as many meanings as an onion has skins', this perhaps explaining why, on passing along part of its coastline by train in the early 1980s,

⁴ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 426; John Brand, *A brief description of Orkney, Zetland and Caithness*, (Edinburgh, 1883), 6-7. Further evidence of a legal dispute in relation to beached whales survives with respect to a case from Findhorn in 1661. See William Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland, as seen in the Tain and Balnagown documents*, 2 vols., (Inverness, 1909) I, 228-9.

⁵ David Kirby and Merja-Liisa Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and the North Seas* (London, 2000), 2-3.

the American travel writer, Paul Theroux, stopped to ponder what it was, most especially whether it comprised ‘part of the North Sea’.⁶ On the basis that Scotland is, more generally, ‘cut up by arms of the sea’, however, the firth will be defined here precisely so as to comprise the largest of the country’s saltwater inlets (see Figure 1).⁷ Thus, its geographical range will be assumed to include all of a roughly indented triangle of sea and coastal fringe between a northernmost point of Duncansby Head in Caithness, the mouth of the River Beaully to the south-west, and, to the east, Kinnaird Head, next to the town of Fraserburgh.



Figure 1

⁶ Cuthbert Graham, *Portrait of the Moray Firth* (London, 1977), 11; Paul Theroux, *The Kingdom by the Sea* (London, 1983), 294.

⁷ John Major, *History of Greater Britain* (Edinburgh, 1892), 36.

An environmental unity? the 'Moray Firth', 'Moray' and 'Varar'

One might assume that the 'Moray Firth' would be more difficult to define historically than the much more widely-used term 'Moray'. However, when assessing the latter, recent historians like Donald Omand have described it as a 'debatable land' with W. F. H. Nicolaisen noting that, as regards early modern times, it is far from clear whether one should be surveying a province, diocese, synod or, to take an even more teleological approach, the considerably smaller, modern administrative district of that name that has Elgin as its major population centre. Each of these versions of 'Moray' has a unique past that has been 'different in historical significance or spatial extent' and which suggests a varying balance of 'Lowland' and 'Highland' elements.⁸ Certainly, and despite some historical overlaps that will become apparent, the region outlined in this article was not identical with any of them. The firth, while having neither then nor now comprised a unit of governance, possesses, nevertheless, a geographical and geological unity that has led to it being outlined and highlighted more consistently over time. Put simply, when focusing in on a map covering the area of sea already mentioned and including its numerous sub-inlets - most significantly, the triumvirate of the Beaully, Cromarty and Dornoch Firths (see Figure 2) - it is apparent that it contains a much longer coastline on both its north-eastern and eastern sides, if also a less extensive upland hinterland, than any of the abovementioned versions of 'Moray'.⁹ It will be argued here also that - in seeking to account for the interplay between environmental, commercial, cultural, intellectual and religious factors in the experiences of the people who spent their lives in this setting during the seventeenth century - it is a designation that has great potential for historians.

Its early modern past is surely comparable with other Scottish and British maritime regions: the North Minch Basin in the western Highlands and Islands, that sea-facing part of the 'beggar's mantle' of Fife which caused it to be 'fringed with gold' (in the words of King James VI and I), the Firth of Forth, the Solway Firth, or, south of the

⁸ W. F. H. Nicolaisen, 'Names in the Landscape of the Moray Firth' in W.D.H. Sellar (ed.), *Moray: Province and People* (Edinburgh, 1993), 253; Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch, 'The Scottish State and its Borderlands' in Goodare and Lynch (eds.), *The Reign of James VI*, (Edinburgh, 2000), 192-3.

⁹ The shortest side of the triangle is, in fact, that leading through open water from Kinnaird Head to Duncansby Head. See Charles Rampini, *A History of Moray and Nairn* (Edinburgh 1897), 4.

border into England, the Severn Estuary, the Fenlands or the edge of Cornwall.¹⁰ Furthermore, more detailed research might reveal closer analogies from within that body of Scandinavian and continental locations that, like eastern Scotland, have been associated by Kirby and Hinkkanen and others with a loosely-defined North Sea and Baltic ‘cultural region’.¹¹ For example, the world of coastal traders in the Wadden Sea of the Netherlands and northern Germany at that time exemplified, according to Knottnerus, features of a wider transnational space.¹² In Norway, the Hardangerfjord and wider Hardanger area, are also places that would seem to offer further scope for contextualisation. Clearly, the Norwegian comparison may be more relevant for the purposes of the historian of northern Scotland than the Moray Firth’s straightforward geological, geographical, etymological and linguistic associations with the fjord environment alone would suggest: the expanse of the firth was referred to in the Old Norse of the Vikings as the ‘Breiðafjörðr’ or ‘broad fjord’.¹³ Moreover, from a broader if still admittedly eurocentric perspective, useful analogies might also be found in relation to coastal societies around the Adriatic. In particular, recent historical work on the Uskoks, an ‘amorphous community with several constituents’ provides some telling initial comparisons. The Uskoks had a strong association with the settlement of Senj on the Dalmatian coast, although they were active more widely in the coastal towns of what

¹⁰ Aonghas MacCoinnich, “‘His spirit was given only to warre:’ Conflict and Identity in the Scottish Gàidhealtachd, c. 1580- c. 1630’ in Steve Murdoch and Andrew Mackillop (eds), *Fighting for Identity: Scottish Military Experience, c. 1550-1900* (Leiden, 2002), 133-62; Adrian Green and A.J. Pollard, ‘Introduction: Identifying Regions’ in Green and Pollard, *Regional Identities in North-East England, 1300-2000* (London, 2007), 4. For another potentially significant region for comparison, see William B. Leavenworth, ‘The Changing Landscape of Maritime Resources in Seventeenth-Century New England’, *International Journal of Maritime History*, 20, (2008), 33-62.

¹¹ Kirby and Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and the North Seas*. See, for merely a selection of other significant recent publications on North Sea and Baltic history which cover the early modern period, Hanno Brand (ed.), *Trade, diplomacy and cultural exchange: continuity and change in the North Sea area and the Baltic, c. 1350-1750* (Hilversum, 2005); David J. Starkey and Morten Hahn-Pedersen (eds), *Bridging Troubled Waters: Conflict and Co-operation in the North Sea Region since 1550* (Esbjerg, 2005); Patrick Salmon and Tony Barrow (eds), *Britain and the Baltic: studies in commercial, political and cultural relations, 1500-2000* (Sunderland, 2003); David J. Starkey and Morten Hahn-Pedersen (eds), *Concentration and Dependency. The Role of Maritime Activities in North Sea Communities, 1299-1999* (Esbjerg, 2002); Juliette Roding and Lex Heerma van Voss (eds), *The North Sea and Culture (1550-1800)* (Hilversum, 1996); Lewis R. Fischer, Harald Hamre, Poul Holm and Jaap R. Bruijn (eds), *The North Sea: Twelve Essays on Social History of Maritime Labour* (Stavanger, 1992).

¹² O.S. Knottnerus, ‘Structural characteristics of coastal societies: some considerations on the history of the North Sea coastal marshes’, in Roding and Heerma van Voss (eds), *The North Sea and Culture*, 41.

¹³ Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (ed.), *Orkneyinga Saga: the history of the Earls of Orkney* (London, 1981), 249.

is today Croatia, Slovenia and, at times, even Venice, during the latter sixteenth- and first twenty years of the seventeenth-century.¹⁴ According to Philip Longworth's argument, subsequently strengthened by Catherine Bracewell, any understanding of Uskok history must take account of their 'environment and economic predicament', that is, the lack of unified political structures which resulted from their inhabiting such 'an inhospitable environment between mountain and sea'.¹⁵ For Braudel too, despite their political marginality on the coastal fringes of the Venetian, Habsburg and Ottoman states, and their predominantly Slavic ethnicity, the Uskoks, nevertheless, provided 'testimony and proof of the unity of the "gulf", a unity that was as much cultural and economic as it was political'.¹⁶ As shall be seen, the mixed Gaelic- and Scots-speaking 'unfree traders' of the Moray Firth experienced a comparable situation along a very different frontier, that between Highland and Lowland Scotland.

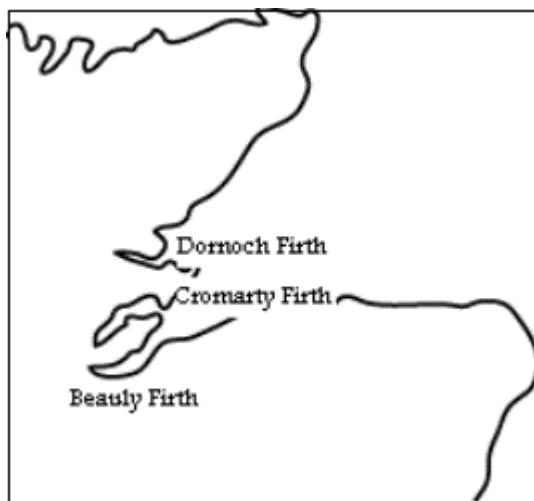


Figure 2

¹⁴ Philip Longworth, 'The Senj Uskoks Reconsidered', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 57(3), (1979), 353, 356; Catherine W. Bracewell, *The Uskoks of Zengg. Piracy, Banditry and Holy War in the Sixteenth Century Adriatic*, (New York, 1992); Mark Cornwall, 'Scots and "Skoks": Exploring the Cultural Interaction of Scotland and Croatia, 1600-1918' in Mark Cornwall and Murray Frame, (eds), *Scotland and the Slavs: Cultures in Contact, 1500-2000* (USA., 2001), 75-101; Gunther E. Rothenberg, 'Venice and the Uskoks of Senj: 1537-1618', *The Journal of Modern History*, 33(2), (1961), 148-156.

¹⁵ Longworth, 'The Senj Uskoks', 349. For a contemporary Scot, William Lithgow, and his comparisons of 'Skoks' and 'Scots', see Cornwall, 'Scots and "Skoks"', 81-2.

¹⁶ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, 2 vols., (Suffolk, 1972), I, 131.

The Vikings are not the only people to have emphasised the part of the sea itself in providing the region with a dominating feature. Ian Mowat has argued that it is the body of water itself which should be seen, as late as the eighteenth century, as having comprised ‘the principal element pulling the north and south shores of the Moray Firth together’.¹⁷ Such statements chime, moreover, not only with Longworth and Bracewell’s account of the role of the eastern Adriatic for the Uskoks, but, arguably, also with a much earlier definition of the firth: Ptolemy’s use of the term ‘*Varar æstuarium*’ (‘estuary of Varar’), in the second century. It may seem curious that an early modern fascination with Ptolemy’s description should force the twenty-first century historian to conclude that the otherwise tenuous association of the ‘Moray Firth’ with ‘Moray’, cannot be completely abandoned. Yet, the ancient Greek’s ‘Varar’ became interpreted from an unusual angle in at least two influential works from the period, the authors of which sought to link ‘Varar’ with an imagined and much more landward location. Indeed, they even sought to promote the idea of ‘Murrayland’ as an environmentally- and, in one case, ethnically-defined ‘greater Moray’, in order to foster a notion of the non-Highland and ‘cultivated’ aspects of Scotland’s far north-eastern coastal fringe.¹⁸ The two histories in question, that of Scotland written by Hector Boece (1465-1536) as well as that, much later, of the earldom of Sutherland, by the previously mentioned Sir Robert Gordon, both assume ‘Varar’ or ‘Vararis’ to have been only partly synonymous with the stretch of water indicated most obviously by Ptolemy’s term (and exaggerated in scale so frequently by cartographers down to the late sixteenth century).¹⁹ On the contrary, to them it comprised something akin to what might have been, in the Adriatic, an imagined, low-lying, **Italian-speaking** Dalmatian coastal strip. ‘Varar’, from their perspective, was a narrow, largely Scots-speaking ‘Lowland’ zone, an entity that they sought to contrast with an ‘uncivil’ Gaelic-speaking ‘Highland’ world beyond. Boece wrote that:

¹⁷ Ian R.M. Mowat, ‘The Moray Firth Province: Trade and Family Links in the Eighteenth Century’ in John R. Baldwin (ed.), *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland*, (Edinburgh, 1986), 80.

¹⁸ Thomas Brochard of the University of Aberdeen’s forthcoming PhD thesis will supplement much previous secondary material on this theme as regards the seventeenth century.

¹⁹ James Gordon of Rothiemay states that Timothy Pont (c.1565-1614) gave the term ‘Varar’ a Roman origin and saw in the term the origins of the contemporary ‘Murray frith’. See Arthur Mitchell and James Toshack Clark (eds), *Geographical collections relating to Scotland made by Walter Macfarlane* (Edinburgh, 1906), 553.

On the yond side of it [Caithness] lyes Murray, sum time namit Vararis. Bot it hes nocht [not] the samin marchis [marches] now as it had than; for all the boundis betwix Spay [Spey] and Nes [Ness] to the Ireland seis, wer namit Murray: bot now it lyes sum time beyound the watter of Spay and Kissok [Kessock], quhil [at times previously] it cum [came] to the Ireland seis [seas].²⁰

Gordon, a committed Protestant and sometime Sutherland-resident, looked further northwards rather than westwards in order to claim additional territory for his ‘Murrayland’. His ‘Vararis’ had been settled from central Europe by a people, the ‘Morrays’, who had come to inhabit not only that area ‘which lyes between Spey and Ness’ which ‘wes then, from this people, called Murrayland, and doth yit reteyn that name vnto this day’, but also ‘all the region lying be-north the river of Spey, evin to the great ocean’.²¹ Others disagreed. George Buchanan (1506-82) had argued that the evidence regarding the landward nature of ‘Varar’ in ancient times was inconclusive but that, if it had ever existed, the region between the Spey and Ness rivers alone had comprised its maximum extent. But, some decades after Gordon even, the previously mentioned James Fraser of Wardlaw, a Gaelic speaker like Buchanan, offered a decidedly narrower definition along the lines that ‘Varar’ had equated solely to the estuary of what is today the River Beauly (the phonetically similar River Farrar being in modern-day terms, a tributary of the aforementioned river).²²

The posited, ancient history of ‘Varar’ that was contested by these writers then, was one which Boece and especially Gordon interpreted in a particularly divergent way. However, the same two writers were less at odds with Buchanan and Fraser in seeking to highlight also the climatic and ecological advantages of their imagined location, asserting that ‘moderating influence of the Moray Firth’ which remains so frequently cited by visitors to the far north-east even today.²³ First, regarding the immediately pre-Reformation successor to ‘Varar’ that Boece outlined, the part adjacent to the coast was:

²⁰ Hector Boece, *The history and chronicles of Scotland*, 2 vols., (Edinburgh, 1821), I, xxxiii.

²¹ David Allan, “‘Ane Ornament to Yow and Your Famelie’”: Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun and the Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 80, (2001), 24-44; Gordon, *A genealogical history*, 13-14.

²² George Buchanan, *The History of Scotland*, 4 vols., (Glasgow, 1827); Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 62. See also Major, *History of Greater Britain*, 35; Lachlan Shaw, *The history of the province of Moray* (Edinburgh, 1775), 40.

²³ Ian R.M. Mowat, *Easter Ross, 1750-1850: the double frontier* (Edinburgh, 1981), 3.

‘best manurit fornence the Almane seis: richt plentius baith of gers and corn; for thir hailsum valis, quhare the rivers discendis, makis the herbis richt delicius and nurisand.’²⁴ More widely, he argued, the region was ‘nocht allanerlie gret abundance and fouth of quheit, beir, aitis, and siclik cornis, with gret plente of nutis and appillis, bot in it ar gret fouth of fische, and speciallie salmond’.²⁵ Such notions of the fruitfulness of the land around the shore apply in Gordon’s history too and with respect also to that aforementioned area ‘benorth the Spey’, of unspecified geographical extent, but which could stretch far enough to encompass the village of Dornoch and his castle at Dunrobin on the eastern coast of Sutherland, and even parts of ‘Cattey’ or Caithness. Dunrobin in particular was, in Gordon’s words:

...a house weill seated upon a mote hard by the sea, with fair orchards, wher ther be pleasant gardens, planted with all kinds of froot, hearbs and floors, vused in this kingdome, and abundance of good sapphron, tobacco and rosemarie. The froot heir is excellent and chiefly the pears and cherries...²⁶

Although useful to historians in outlining an influential early modern discourse which highlighted and even exaggerated common environmental features around the firth’s coastline and immediate hinterland, these two accounts can be dismissed as regards their attempts to define a history of an ancient, homogenous and politically unified ‘Murrayland’. James Fraser’s rejection of any idyllic notions of human control over nature in the region and his evocation instead of the stark symbolism that local people attached to the suffocating whales has resonance here: to him, the unfortunate pair of animals given the names of ‘King’ and ‘Parliament’ respectively, represented the failure of governments and occupying armies to establish stability in this linguistically-

²⁴ ‘...best manured on the side of the German Sea: very plentiful both in grass and corn; for their wholesome valleys, from where the rivers descend, make the herbs very delicious and nourishing’. See Boece, *The history and chronicles of Scotland*, I, xxxii; Peter Hume Brown (ed.), *Scotland before 1700, from contemporary documents* (Edinburgh, 1893), 142, 298.

²⁵ ‘...[has] not only great abundance and yields of wheat, bere, oats and such crops, with great plenty of nuts and apples, but in it are great supplies of fish, especially salmon’. See Boece, *The history and chronicles of Scotland*, I, xxxii.

²⁶ Gordon, *A genealogical history*, 1, 14-19. More widely, he asserted that ‘the country or province of Southerland doth abound in corns, grasse, woods, froot, bestiall, all kind of wild fough, deir and roe... and all other commodities, which are usuall in this kingdom of Scotland, or necessarie for man’.

diverse area.²⁷ As Kirby and Hinkannen have noted more generally for the North Sea and Baltic, it is seldom that stretches of water have themselves been major forces in promoting political unity.²⁸ Certainly, in the civil war period which Fraser lived through and during which he began compiling his manuscripts, the tremendously varied and at times ambiguous allegiances and mix of languages to be found among the people who spent their lives on or by the waters of the firth ensured that it remained a frustration for central government and armed forces of all complexions.²⁹ A particular uncertainty becomes apparent in sources from the early spring of 1645, in the run up to the Battle of Auldearn, fought between royalists and ‘covenanters’ - those who continued to support the radical Scottish National Covenant of 1638 - just to the east of the town of Nairn. The nervousness that the royalist James Graham, first marquis of Montrose (1612–1650) experienced as regards allegiances further east in Banff, where he left behind no bloodshed but also ‘no merchant’s goods nor gear’ is even more evident on that stretch of low-lying land between the Gordon lands east of Elgin and the village of Auldearn itself: the marquis left Sir Robert Gordon’s new Gordonstoun property standing but subjected part of the lands nearby (those of Innes, Brodie, Grangehill and Lethen) to a ‘wasting’ on his way towards the eventual battle-site.³⁰ Meanwhile, the decision of his enemy to gather

²⁷ This is not to claim that the environment of the firth did not feature quite strongly in wider national and international thinking at times. It was a potential military arena considered in some depth at the time of the Spanish Armada of 1588, as well as upon the the 1650 royal landing at Speymouth, while its importance in Cromwellian naval strategy until 1660, and during the 1708 rising and subsequent rebellions of the Jacobites, the post-1689 supporters of the exiled House of Stuart, is similarly clear. See David M. Ferguson, *Shipwrecks of North East Scotland, 1444-1990* (Edinburgh, 1992), 6-7; M. J. Yellowlees, ‘*So Strange a Monster as a Jesuite*’: *The Society of Jesus in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (Isle of Colonsay, 2003), 182-3; David Worthington, *Scots in Habsburg Service, 1618-48* (Leiden, 2003), chs. 1-3; John D Grainger, *Cromwell against the Scots* (East Linton, 1997). There were also divisions of longer standing, with language having hindered greater unity, there being suggestions that the population of towns such as Nairn and Inverness was largely monolingual, segregated into Scots and Gaelic-speaking areas to the extent that, in the latter place, according to Thomas Tucker writing in the 1650s, ‘one halfe of the people understand not one another.’ E. Patricia Dennison and Russell Coleman, *Historic Nairn: the archaeological implications of development* (Edinburgh, 1999), 21; *Report by Thomas Tucker upon the settlement of the revenues of excise and customs in Scotland [1655-56]*, (Edinburgh, 1824), 36. This is not much evidence to base broad assertions on though and bilingualism was without doubt commonplace in many coastal areas of the region west and north of the town of Forres.

²⁸ Kirby and Hinkannen, *The Baltic and the North Seas*, 58.

²⁹ Allan Kennedy, ‘“A Heavy Yock Uppon Their Necks”: Covenanting Government in the Northern Highlands, 1638–1651’, *Journal of Scottish Historical Studies*, 29(1), (2010), 93-122; Barry Robertson, ‘The covenanting north of Scotland, 1638–1647’, *Innes Review*, 61, (2009), 24-51. See also E.M. Furgol, ‘The Northern Highland Covenanting Clans, 1639-51’, *Northern Scotland*, 7, (1987), 119-31.

³⁰ Gordon, *A genealogical history*, 523; William Cramond (ed.), *Annals of Banff*, 2 vols., (Aberdeen, 1891), I, 44.

the majority of their local gentry supporters around them in Inverness rather than Nairn (one mile away from Auldearn) suggests a similar insecurity.³¹ Indeed, additional evidence can be found to indicate that the sufferings inflicted on the citizens of Inverness did not incline them to support either side with unanimity at that point, as shown in Fraser's account of Captain George Scott's building and launch from there of what would be a Venice-bound ship. The vessel in question was of 'a prodigious bigness, for bulk and burden, none such ever seen in our north seas' and constructed using 'wood, fir and oak, in Dulcattack [Dalcattaig] woods' in nearby Glen Moriston. It prepared for embarkation at Kessock by Inverness in early May of 1645, from where it:

...set sail the very day before the battle of Aldern and among other passengers that went her south Colonel Fraser and his lady Christina Bailey were there. Hugh Fraser younger of Clunvacky, and Andrew Fraser in Leyes, John and William Fraser in Leys his attendants. The ship rode at Ancer in the river mouth of Narden [Nairn] when the battle was fought in view.³²

The apparent apathy of the spectators on Scott's ship seems curious, although perhaps reflective, like much of Fraser's writings, of his own caution when peering back into the political chasms of earlier times upon completing his manuscript during the Restoration period, that is, once the wars were over.³³ Five years after Auldearn though, a sense of uncertainty or resignation among people on the northern shores of the firth too, featured once again for both Montrose and his opponents after his final capture and incarceration further north and west at Ardvreck in Sutherland. Immediately following this, the marquis was dined by the somewhat-pitying dowager Lady Gray of Skibo Castle to the south-east, as opposing forces gathered in nearby Tain, although, soon after, Leslie's men felt confident enough to take their prisoner from there and parade him along the southern shoreland settlements of the inner firth and then inland on his way to a public execution in Edinburgh.³⁴ In none of this did a maritime arena feature especially prominently. It is

³¹ 19 April 1646, Culduthel, Lachlan Grant to the Laird of Grant, Edinburgh, National Archives of Scotland [NAS], GD248/46/410.

³² James Fraser, 'Triennial travels; account of tour in England, France, Holland, Germany, Italy, 1657-60', MS 2538, 3 vols., Aberdeen, Aberdeen University, Special Libraries and Archives, I, fo. 297.

³³ Richard D. Oram, P. F. Martin, C. A. McKean, T. Neighbour and A. Cathcart, *Historic Tain* (York, 2009).

³⁴ Ronald Williams, *Montrose: Cavalier in Mourning* (Colonsay, 2001), 359-60.

true that the Scottish Privy Council appealed in 1664 to the magistrates of Tain, requesting ‘further supplie’ of able seamen, skippers and masters to serve in the re-established royal fleet.³⁵ Yet, in seeking to account for the level of naval ambitions and skill in the firth down to the end of the century, it is clear that all regimes of the time remained frustrated as much by the region’s political divides, as by the lack of, for example, adequate cranes or sawmilling facilities.³⁶

At sea and along the shoreline

The material presented so far suggests that, although it would be a mistake to consider the seventeenth century Moray Firth as a unified legal, administrative, political, military or linguistic zone, it was, however, like the world populated by the Uskoks, viewed by contemporaries in more subtle ways - albeit some of them conflicting - as an identifiable, and strongly maritime region.³⁷ In recognising the primacy of environmental influences on aspects of everyday life in and around the firth, and the challenges that these raised, Boece and Gordon’s accounts help us understand how wider commercial and other changes developed for the peoples of the North Sea and Baltic in a characteristic way, borne of the connection to the sea. Moreover, in seeking to rely on a broader range of primary sources from the time, the overtly maritime aspect of the Moray Firth suggested at the most straightforward level by Ptolemy’s term can be re-emphasised.

That this was not just a passive maritime involvement is exemplified most immediately by the network of ferry services that operated, especially as regards the

³⁵ Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, 248.

³⁶ Nevertheless, shipbuilding had been attested to in Inverness in 1249. See David Ditchburn, *Scotland and Europe: the Medieval Kingdom and Its Contacts with Christendom, 1214-1560*, (East Linton, 2001), 5, 11; T.C. Smout and R.A. Lambert (eds), *Rothiemurchus: Nature and People on a Highland Estate, 1500-2000* (Dalkeith, 1999), 61.

³⁷ The first and clearest example of this comes in its promotion as the successor to an earlier ‘Varar’, by early modern historians and diarists, some of them contemporaries. As has been shown, in several of such cases this involved reference to those striking topographical features alluded to by Ptolemy and also how these impacted on the everyday lives of people living there. However, the interpretation of Ptolemy was always a partial one, shown in the reimagining of his ‘*Varar æstuarium*’ as representing the internationally-renowned, ancient past of a climatically-favoured ‘greater Moray’, while, in the instance of Gordon, it led further, to the postulating of a unifying ethnic identity embracing this posited region. Their accounts are of more relevance in simply focusing our attentions on people’s relations with a relatively fruitful yet in other ways extremely challenging marine and coastal environment. This is the aspect of Boece and Gordon’s writings that provides the focus for the remainder of the article.

numerous short crossings of less than twenty miles within the inner firth.³⁸ It would seem that the most widely-used of passages for those traversing the region was that between Ardersier, a few miles west of Nairn, and the Chanonry of Ross, to the north. Certainly, this short journey, significant in pre-Reformation times as the penultimate maritime leg for pilgrims on their way northwards to venerate the memory of St Duthac in Tain, attracted more comment and provided more seasonal employment for ferrymen than the equally brief if ‘exceedingly hazardous’ and ‘rugged’ journey across the innermost part of the firth between Inverness and North Kessock (or that between Inverness and Chanonry).³⁹ Indeed, the Ardersier-Chanonry route was sometimes used by people seeking to travel to and from coastal ports as far east as Buchan towards locations such as Dornoch and even Wick, in preference both to risking either a crossing further out into the open sea or else a much longer, winding route further overland via Beaulieu. Prior to taking the Ardersier-Chanonry ferry from the east and south-east, such travellers required assistance in crossing the Deveron, Spey, Findhorn and Nairn rivers. These being early days in attempts to ‘command the waters’, weather could sometimes make these journeys unpleasant or even impossible.⁴⁰ Thomas Kirk from Yorkshire remarked, in the 1670s, on having been ‘left to the mercy of a barbarous country’ when approaching the northbound ferry although, on his return he recorded that ‘we crossed the ferry at Arderseir in a good boat’.⁴¹ On the northern side of the firth, certainly, there is evidence of a complex system of onward transport links connecting overland from Chanonry through the Black Isle. Thereafter, voyagers were ferried over the Cromarty Firth to Easter Ross by means, first, of the Cromarty or Balblair to Inverbreakie routes, and, further north, by embarking on another short sea journey between Portnaculter and Meikle Ferry on the ‘Fyrth of Tain’ (Dornoch Firth), in order to enter Sutherland (see Figure 3).⁴²

³⁸ It was not only armed forces who could seek to move in and around the region by relying on these. They were, as we shall see, crucial in affecting also the economic fortunes as well as the religious and cultural characteristics of a much wider section of the region’s population. See Marie Weir, *Ferries in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1988); Mowat, *Easter Ross*, 83-4.

³⁹ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 63.

⁴⁰ T. C. Smout, *Nature contested: environmental history in Scotland and Northern England since 1600* (Edinburgh, 2000), ch. 4.

⁴¹ Peter Hume Brown ed., *Tours in Scotland, 1677 & 1681*, (Edinburgh, 1892), 26, 87.

⁴² *Ibid.*; Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, 155, 211, 221; C. G. MacDowall, *The Chanonry of Ross* (Inverness, 1963), 41.

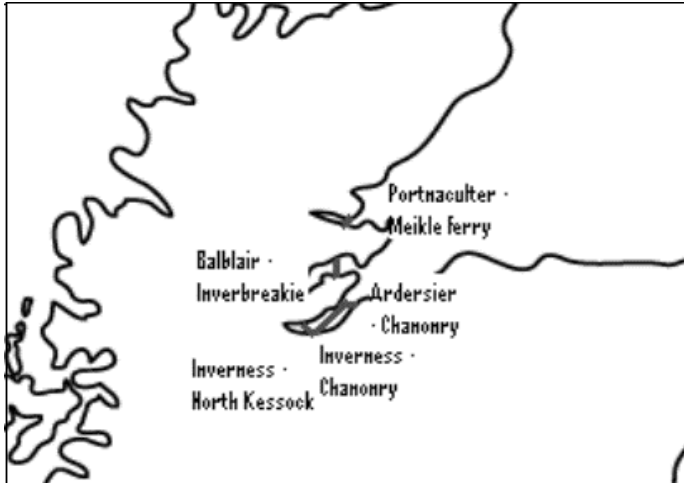


Figure 3

The Uskok comparison aside, the growth of communications and, with it, commerce, in the region, led to increasing efforts throughout northern Europe to formalise laws in relation to the produce of the sea and shoreline. In the firth, whales have already been mentioned and, certainly, fear of the ‘hideous manner’ in which they could be encountered in open waters as well as a lack of adequate technology, limited attempts to capture them, despite the substantial economic value that their oils, ‘shott’ (a substance from the head used as candle oil and credited with medicinal properties) and bone could provide.⁴³ Whales aside though, Robert Gordon and his contemporaries accounted in more depth for fishing, whether that be in open water, along the coastline or in river estuaries and mouths.⁴⁴ Looking at the deeper waters first, a lack of sturdy enough vessels meant that the netting of, for instance, skate, cod and haddock, remained relatively rare, even if Alexander Garden of Troup, east of Banff, could claim, in the 1680s, and perhaps under Dutch influence, that ‘the sea affords white fish here in abundance’.⁴⁵ But, in shallower sections of the firth, much greater catches of ‘gray fish

⁴³ D. Bloch, ‘Whaling in the Faroe Islands, 1584-1994: An Overview’ in P. Holm, D.J. Starkey & J. Thór (eds), *The North Atlantic Fisheries, 1100-1976: National Perspectives on a Common Resource*, (Esbjerg, 1996), 49-62; Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland Circa 1695* (Edinburgh, 1999), 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 5; James R. Coull, *The Sea Fisheries of Scotland: A Historical Geography* (Edinburgh, 1996), 61-2.

⁴⁵ Arthur Mitchell (ed.), *Macfarlane's Geographical Collections*, 3 vols., (Edinburgh, 1907), II, 133-43, 171-2.

[pollack or coalfish]’ and especially herring, took place.⁴⁶ Fraser reported that, in 1649, ‘there were such shoales of herring in our firths that a 100 was sold for two farthings.’ In the Beaully estuary west of Inverness alone, he claimed that, on one occasion, ‘40, 50, boats and more were every day fishing’, the fishermen having:

...wisely made wide nets for the great hearing [herring], as well as the narrow common nets for the small; and these boates, when loaded and full, some would land at Lovat, some at Reedcastell, some at Kessock, some at Bunchrive [Bunchrew] or Clachnihary [Clachnaharry], as the Highlanders flockt with their horses to buy them. Some halfe score of boates set saile for Avoch, Monloch, Chanry, Altirly [Alturlie], Nesse, Petty, or Invernesse, to sell their fish, and back againe next morrow; and this rich tack and shoal of heareing continued without abatement in our Firth from August till March; the lick never heard or known here before, men concluding that it must have been a presage and fatall forerunner of some plague, dearth, mortality, or intestin warr; but no such thing ensued. Men had salted so many barrels of heareing this year as might be provision for many, the Inverness merchants loading ships of them to England, France, Holland, and East Countries, to their great gaine.⁴⁷

In addition to herring, Fraser writes on one occasion, of ‘a monstrous sturgion [sturgeon] fish of ten foot long’ taken near ‘Rindowy [Rhinduie]’ along the shore from Kirkhill, a ‘fish, well dressed and pickled’ in order to provide both ‘meat and medicin’. Its many uses may explain why ‘the English bought it at the rate of 4 pounds sterling, and after bringing it in to the Cittadel, whispered among themselves that it could not be had in England under 10 pounds’.⁴⁸ Moving towards the upper tidal limits, although Gordon remarked, as did many of his contemporaries, that the coastline of Sutherland was abounding in ‘all sorts of fishes’ he, like most of his contemporaries, had in mind ‘especially salmond’.⁴⁹ Records survive from various points in the century regarding the abundance of the species. Indeed, for some, the ‘northern rivers’ - not just those of eastern Sutherland and Invershin, but also the Ness, Nairn, Findhorn, Lossie, Spey and

⁴⁶ William Mackay and H.C. Boyd (eds), *Records of Inverness*, 2 vols., (Aberdeen, 1911), II, 226; David Alston, *My Little Town of Cromarty* (Edinburgh, 2006), 25; Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 494.

⁴⁷ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 494.

⁴⁸ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 426.

⁴⁸ Leslie, *The historie of Scotland*, 42.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 2.

Deveron - were ‘the riches of the country’ due to the quantities of salmon they produced.⁵⁰ For Robert Gordon of Straloch, the lower reaches of the Spey and its estuary yielded ‘more salmon than any other river in Scotland’.⁵¹ The Englishman Richard Franck’s *Northern Memoirs*, in addition, written in the 1650s, displays his fascination not just as to why ‘porpoises’ tailed his boat into the open water off Inverness but regarding their subsequent swimming away so as to follow the more attractive option of pursuing the ‘king of fish’ nearer to the mouth of the River Ness, a mile inland of which, according to him, was also ‘a little island of wood, upon the river, about which are several little sluices and dams, wherein are many hecks to catch salmon.’⁵²

Regarding shellfish, Bishop Leslie had been effusive with respect to both the numbers and varieties to be found in the region. The shallow waters around the Ross coast in particular, had contained, in his words, ‘mony ostiris [oysters], and mussilis [mussels], and abundance of vthir [other] kyndes and varietie that breidis [breeds] among the stanes [stones] and grauel’. Alexander Garden of Troup backed this up for the region east of the Spey, where: ‘of shell fishes we have the Lobster, Partan or Rodach, the Craib’ and ‘of Buckies or Wilks we have but one kind or two at most, the one being long and large, the other round and lesser both of a greyish coulour, the lempitt and little kind of Musell, the sea burr, the Claim shell amd the great black Cockle.’⁵³ Rights to mussel stocks, in particular, could be contested, as is evident in a case from 1662, when John, sixteenth earl of Sutherland (*bap.* 1661, *d.* 1733) demanded the removal of rudders from some boats belonging to Alexander Sutherland, first Lord Duffus (1621?-74), following their taking of this species from the southern section of the Dornoch Firth.⁵⁴ The potentially serious economic consequences of this are clear, with further evidence from the bishop suggesting that methods were, in general, quite advanced as well as the source of some competition. Certainly, Leslie had been impressed regarding the technology in use in the shallower bays and estuaries, the capture being carried out more generally from

⁵⁰ Ibid. 4; Richard Franck, *Northern memoirs, calculated for the meridian of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1821), 204; *Report by Thomas Tucker*, 35; John Leslie, *The historie of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1888), 47; Dennison and Coleman, *Historic Nairn*, 21; Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, 178-9.

⁵¹ Mitchell (ed.), *Macfarlane's*, 309-11.

⁵² This is today’s Ness Islands. See Franck, *Northern Memoirs*, 204-5; Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 345.

⁵³ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁴ William Fraser (ed.), *The Sutherland Book*, 3 vols., (Edinburgh, 1892), I, 289.

the later sixteenth century, through using new varieties of ‘skep[s] [baskets]’ or ‘kreilis [creels]’ rather than traditional ‘nettis [nets]’.⁵⁵ As regards shore fishing for ‘scakkes [scallops]’, this can be confirmed by accounts relating to Arbol east of Tain.⁵⁶ Equally distinctive by the early seventeenth century, was the capture, at low tide, of sand-eels from the beaches of Easter Ross and also Sutherland, these being used, like many smaller types of shellfish, for bait purposes.⁵⁷

In contrast to the western Highlands and, further afield, the Faroe Isles, little information survives as regards other, potentially more valuable species near or actually on the Moray Firth shore, for example, seal hunting, presumably commonplace, or bird-fowling, suggested by the presence of, most obviously, substantial colonies of nesting species on the region’s sea-cliffs.⁵⁸ Gordon informs his readers briefly of the ‘great quantities of ‘sealghes or seals... ..and dyvers kinds of sea-foull’, that could be found in Sutherland. However, he does not provide any detail of their usage both commercially or in providing food and sustenance.⁵⁹ Garden of Troup is equally cursory, mentioning cormorants, shags, skuas, guillemots, black guillemots, puffins, as well as numerous species of gull, before asserting that the people of the coastal villages there were ‘not in use of eating any of these fowls, tho several of them oftentimes be killed at sport, except the Kitiwak [kittiwake] whilst young, than which there is in many men’s thoughts no better flesh eaten’.⁶⁰

At the less everyday level, a flexibility in legal procedure is apparent again. To the south of the Sutherland Gordons, the lairds of Cromarty claimed vice-admiralty of ‘the seas betwixt Catnes and Innerness’, establishing their own court in order to regulate wider maritime issues further from there. It seems to have debated cases over rights of salvage, flotsam, jetsam or goods left on board wrecked ships more than anything else, giving substance to Kirby and Hinkkanen’s claim that early modern northern European seafarers ‘dreaded, and with good reason, the prospect of being shipwrecked’.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Leslie, *The historie of Scotland*, 141.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*; Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, II, 83-4.

⁵⁷ Gordon, *A genealogical history*, 5.

⁵⁸ Martin Martin, *A Description*, 46-48.

⁵⁹ Gordon, *A genealogical history*, 2.

⁶⁰ Mitchell (ed.), *Macfarlane’s*, 134.

⁶¹ Kirby and Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and the North Seas*, 70. See also Jaap R. Bruijn, ‘Seafarers in Early Modern and Modern Times: Change and Continuity’, *International Journal of Maritime History*,

However, the privileges of the Cromarty court were subordinate to those of the hereditary Lord High Admiral at a national level, while both these authorities seem to have been ignored in individual cases in favour of major local landholders, such as, once again, the earl of Sutherland.⁶² Controversy arose over at least one wreck in the firth during the Cromwellian period, although in other cases, and again as with respect to the whales, it seems that local people generally took what they could without fear of reprisal.⁶³ Humanity could be apparent when encountering potential loss of life, according to James Fraser. When, for example, the ‘painted great cockboat’ of the Londoner, Captain Phineas Petts, ran aground on the shore at Phopachy, west of Inverness, Fraser himself ‘happened to be there and some friends with me, and hearing the cry we run out and rescued the boat’. The minister does not seem to have claimed anything from on board, although as a token of thanks he was ‘given of a booke or two, papers, of mace, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves, ginger’, to the value of ‘7 lbs sterling worth of spicies from that gentleman’.⁶⁴ Moreover, he recorded another case, the capsizing of an overloaded ferry off Dingwall in February 1667, following which, although ‘those upon the shoare could not reach to recover them’, by ‘casting out their plaids, others long poles’ they pulled some of the victims on to dry land. Indeed, Fraser’s own brother-in-law had been ‘uppon the bank, and rescued 6 persones by casting out roapes and plaids which they laid hold on and were draggd ashoare.’⁶⁵

In the ports

With the deeper waters still somewhat mysterious, and the coastal- and even shoreline-based activities of most of the peoples around the coast still so difficult for vice-admiralty or admiralty courts to oversee, it is unsurprising that the more oligarchic of the sea-facing royal burghs in the region made more determined attempts to control the commerce of the

XVII (2004), 1-16; *The Works of Sir Thomas Urquhart of Cromarty* (Edinburgh, 1834), 294; Alston, *My little town*, 19; Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, 228-9; Steve Murdoch, *The Terror of the Seas? Scottish Maritime Warfare, 1513 - 1713* (Leiden, 2010), 267; Edda Frankot, ‘Maritime Law and Practice in Late Medieval Aberdeen’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 89(2), (2010), 136-52; A.R.G. McMillan, ‘The Admiral of Scotland’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 20 (1923), 11-18.

⁶² Gordon, *A genealogical history*, 493.

⁶³ Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, 228-9.

⁶⁴ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 485, 495.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 472-3.

firth during the period, even if it took some time for Inverness to develop as the Moray Firth's equivalent of Venice or Dubrovnik (Ragusa). Accusations of piracy aside, burghal legislation of this type usually targeted more specifically those 'unfree' coastal traders who the town councils considered to have been engaged illegally in commerce while on land, as reflected in various reports regarding 'thieves, sorners and robbers' having arrived by sea to compete in their markets. In 1667, the town council of Inverness was particularly exercised by the presence of Mr William Leslie of Aikenwall, 'the King's rebell', who, although he 'liveth within the Shyr [shire] of Banff', had 'loup [leapt] in ower all the Shyres'.⁶⁶ Moreover, the burgesses of some of the other larger towns, such as Elgin or even Tain, deported 'unfree traders' regularly too, only, in some cases, for them to reappear quickly elsewhere.⁶⁷ A 1637 case from the latter burgh survives relating to Andrew Steill in 'Burghesea', who was 'accusit [accused] for transporting his fisches to Cathenes, Ros or Sutherland and selling these to marchands and their factors to be maid and transportit furth of the cuntrey'. Moving in the other direction, there are records of the trial of Alexander Doull of Wick, accused, in 1640, of bringing illegally into Elgin 'fourtie bollis beir, aucht bollis meal'.⁶⁸ Certainly, the council in the Moray burgh remained troubled not only by the entrepreneurial buying and selling of fish and crops by the likes of the itinerant (and almost certainly impoverished) Doull, but also as regards the 'bying and barking of roch [coarse] hydes' by visiting 'unfreemen' from there and elsewhere in the north.⁶⁹

Ecological factors had, of course, to be reckoned with on an everyday basis by even the wealthiest of burgesses. Regarding the links between the shoreline, the ports, the burghs and the immediate rural hinterland, erosion and drifting sands were major obstacles limiting attempts to create a stronger infrastructure at Tain, Nairn, Findhorn and Spynie, even if such problems did not occur in the firth to the same extent as in the

⁶⁶ Mackay and Boyd (eds.), *Records of Inverness*, II, 233.

⁶⁷ Tain, Tain Museum, Balnagown Castle manuscripts, fo. 63.

⁶⁸ Jane E. Thomas, 'The Burgh of Elgin in Early Modern Times', (Unpublished MLitt thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1990) 40-3.

⁶⁹ William Cramond (ed.), *The Records of Elgin*, 2 vols., (Aberdeen, 1903), I, 255, 265-7; Mackay and Boyd (eds.), *Records of Inverness*, I, 288.

aforementioned Wadden Sea region, parts of Jutland, or the Vistula basin.⁷⁰ As in many other regions of the North Sea and Baltic though, the prevailing belief was, presumably, that the firth replenished itself by means of subterranean channels and that little could be done to harness its sometimes devastating power. Nevertheless, Robert Gordon and his kin sought to demonstrate more control over it, claiming east Sutherland to have significant anchorages both at ‘Holmisdell [Helmsdale]’ and, a few miles to the south, at the mouth of the River Brora, from where, besides fish, ‘sea coale’ and, after 1598, limited amounts of salt from the Inverbroray works - pioneered by Lady Jean Gordon, Countess of Sutherland (c.1546-1629) - were shipped out. Gordon also asserted the growing potential of the silver, slate, limestone and iron industries there, while cattle hides, wool, tallow, butter, cheese, plaids and pearls were amongst other items he could have claimed with authority as being dispatched by sea from local beaches. From 1620, this caused some tension as Dornoch further south began to take prominence for the earls in terms of commerce, as well as competing with Tain in Easter Ross.⁷¹ Indeed, the village developed to the extent that, in 1626, the Bishop of Caithness, John Abernethy, provided John, fourteenth earl of Sutherland (1609–1679), with a charter giving him the right to construct ‘wynd-mylnes’ there, while, within two years of that it had become a royal burgh.⁷² Gordon might also have mentioned grain and timber as more general features of the east Sutherland economy. The increased movement of the former around and beyond the firth is evidenced by the numbers and size of ‘girnals’ (grain stores) in the area, while contemporary accounts show trees to have been transported down the River Carron to the village of Bonar [Bonar Bridge] from where, it seems, they were shipped in slightly larger vessels.⁷³

⁷⁰ Oram et. al., *Historic Tain*, 50; Robert G. Cochrane (ed.), *Findhorn: A Scottish Village* (Findhorn, 1985); Dennison and Coleman, *Historic Nairn*, 21; Knottnerus, ‘Structural characteristics’; Kirby and Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and the North Seas*, 24-5.

⁷¹ Gordon, *A genealogical history*, 6; Reverend Charles D. Bentinck, *Dornoch Cathedral and Parish* (Inverness, 1926), 162-3, 232; Mike Hook, *A History of the Royal Burgh of Dornoch* (Dornoch, 2005).

⁷² Bentinck, *Dornoch Cathedral*, 217.

⁷³ T.C. Smout, Alan R. MacDonald and Fiona Watson, *A history of the native woodlands of Scotland, 1500-1920* (Edinburgh, 2007), 319-39; Elizabeth Beaton, ‘Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Estate Girnals in Easter Ross and South-East Sutherland in Baldwin (ed.), *Firthlands of Ross and Sutherland*, 133-45; Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, II, 77, 186-7. Although exports continued, the far north suffered especially badly from grain scarcity in the 1690s famine. See Karen J. Cullen, *Famine in Scotland: The ‘Ill Years’ of the 1690s* (Edinburgh, 2010), 86-92.

More substantial than east Sutherland in terms of showing evidence of a growing if fragile command over the water for the purpose of opening up the economy of the region is the development of a number of ports both to north and south. The merchants of Wick and Thurso in Caithness sent out ‘good store of beefe, hides, and tallowe’ according to the generally sceptical Tucker. Further southwards and eastwards down the coast, ports regarding which there was some expansion included, by the end of the century: Portmahomack, Cromarty (‘sa famous in sa sure a havin for schipis’), Chanonry, Avoch, Nairn, Findhorn, Burghead, Garmouth, Cullen, Portsoy, Banff (where, at mid-century, ‘something now and then is brought in from Norway’), Rosehearty and Fraserburgh (see Figure 4).⁷⁴ As a general rule, it is only in the latter half of the century that this growth can be seen to take off, and even then in fits and starts. In 1655, a group of Aberdeen traders ‘importit in ane boot from Caetnes [Caithness] 1900 sklaets [slates] gotten for them’ while records survive from the same city regarding goods ‘importit by George Bruce, master of ane barke of Caetnes, with sklaitis 3000’ in July 1662.⁷⁵ For the majority who remained within the firth though, and especially following the Cromwellian period, ‘free’ trade acted increasingly to rival the ‘unfree’ variety, and to link all the abovementioned places in a more formalised way.⁷⁶ For example, the burgesses of Elgin - using the nearby harbours at Findhorn or Cullen - strengthened and regulated connections through the cattle trade with towns to east, west and north.⁷⁷ Portmahomack was a particular beneficiary of this, even if reports from the Moray town’s council from as late as 1696, outlined also ‘the abuses our merchants and traidsmen meet in the mercats of Tain, Dornoch and Dingwall’ as well as a new rash of complaints against ‘unfree traders’ from Wick.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Report by Thomas Tucker*, 36-7; William Mackay (ed.), *Life in Inverness in the Sixteenth Century* (Aberdeen, 1911), 5, 33; Franck, *Northern memoirs*, 202.

⁷⁵ Aberdeen, Aberdeen Council Archives, Registers of Deeds, 1st Series and Propinquity Books, i (1637-1732), fos. 170, 179, ii (1733-1765), fo. 44.

⁷⁶ Cramond (ed.), *Annals of Banff*, I, 66; Mowat, *Easter Ross*, 1, 3, 5, 7, 79; Mowat, ‘The Moray Firth Province’, 69-70, 85.

⁷⁷ 2 July 1692, ?, GD305/1/147/35; Cramond (ed.), *Records of Inverness*, I, 210, 286, 288, 257; II, 222, 226, 233, 268, 285, 292.

⁷⁸ Jane Thomas, ‘The Craftsmen of Elgin, 1540-1660’ in Terry Brotherstone and David Ditchburn (eds), *Freedom and Authority: Scotland, c.1050 - c.1650: Historical and Historiographical Essays presented to Grant G. Simpson* (East Linton, 2000), 153-54; Cramond (ed.), *The Records of Elgin*, I, 238, 358.



Figure 4

Regarding Inverness, its rise to dominance was slow. Thomas Tucker dismissed it in a typical manner, for having ‘onely a coast trade’, although he accepted that it had ‘for its district all the harbours and creekes of the shires of Murray, Rosse, Southerland, and Caithnesse, with the Isles of Orkney’. Richard Franck commented similarly on the town being ‘commodiously situated for Highland trade’.⁷⁹ Some of the truth in this became apparent as the century progressed. The Customs Books contained within the Exchequer Records in the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh indicate that Inverness began to head a veritable ‘customs precinct’ for all of the region outlined by Tucker except Orkney, and give a snapshot of the commercial development of the firth at that point, within not only a regional, but also a national and international context.⁸⁰

Fraser had noted earlier how nearby Glenstrathfarrar had provided the aforementioned Captain Phineas Petts with timber for masts, thereafter sent south to larger shipyards.⁸¹ Nonetheless, in one Customs Book account for the Inverness ‘precinct’ from 1665-7, timber was barely mentioned, salmon, oats, bere, barley, goat skins, hides, wool and haberdashery comprising the major exports listed. As the century

⁷⁹ *Report by Thomas Tucker*, 36.

⁸⁰ For Inverness, see James Miller, *Inverness* (Edinburgh, 2004) chs. 5, 6. See also NAS, E73/9 Exchequer Records: Customs Accounts, Inverness, 1 September 1642; E71/26/1, Exchequer Records: Customs Books, First Series, 1620-1, Spey and Findhorn, 8 April 1642; E72/11/1-19, Exchequer Records: Customs Books, Second Series, 1668-96. More on burgh life at the time can be found in: Inverness, Highland Council Archives [HCA], Burgh Court Book, 1602-1621, B1/1/1/3 and Burgh Council Minutes, 1619-1655, B1/1/1/3A. Much of this material is printed in Mackay and Boyd (eds.), *Records of Inverness*.

⁸¹ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 485.

went on, beef, tallow, plaids, wheat, malt, ‘oxen hydes’, ‘cowhyds’, ‘harihydes [hare hides]’, lambskins, ‘kidskins’, and ‘whaleshott’ left similarly, in boats such as *The Amitie*, a vessel chartered frequently by the bigger local merchants such as Thomas Hosack. They sent these products out in return for an even wider range of imports brought directly from the likes of London, Rotterdam or ‘Norraway’, such as writing and printing paper, barrel staves, gunpowder, woad, iron pots and pans, steel, salt, hops, onions, wine, combs, whistles, rattles and buttons, as well as more exclusive items like looking glasses, ‘Dantzick [Danzig] window glasse’, drinking glasses, furniture, portraits, and ‘Coniberk hats’. More exotic items can be found on the list too: silk, satin ribbons, nutmeg, whalebone, brazil wood, tobacco and ‘tobacco pypes’, indigo, wormseed, vinegar, liquorice, sugar, ginger, cinnamon, aniseed, oranges, walnuts, chestnuts and currants being amongst them. Moreover, a strikingly large proportion of the contracts mentioned in the accounts covering the ‘precinct’ involved formerly rival Elgin merchants such as John Grant, John Dunbar and John Main, sometimes exporting and importing from Banff or Cullen, but more usually doing so from Findhorn, in vessels such as *The William* or later, with the involvement of the Gordons of Gordonstoun, *The Ludovick and William*.⁸²

Cultural, intellectual and religious life

As Kirby and Hinkannen have affirmed, long before the days of the seaside resort, maritime highways aided the spread around the North Sea and Baltic not only of commodities but also of ideas, coastal regions frequently having had ‘a wider and more vibrant range of contacts with each other than with the hinterland’ as a result.⁸³ The

⁸² 1 November 1665 to 12 October 1667, E72/11/1; 1 November 1668 to 1 November 1669, E72/11/2; 1 November 1672 to 1 November 1673, E72/11/3; 1 November 1681 to 1 November 1682, imports, E72/11/4; 1 November 1681 to 1 November 1682, exports, E72/11/5; ‘Copie of the Book of Importatione of Invernesse, 1 November 1681 to 1 November 1682’, E72/11/6; 1 November 1682 to 1 November 1683, E72/11/7; November 1683 to February 1684, E72/11/8; March 1684 to October 1684, E72/11/9-11; 1 November 1684 to 1 November 1685, imports, E72/11/10; 1 November 1684 to 1 November 1685, exports, E72/11/11; 1 November 1685 to 1 November 1686, imports, E72/11/12; 1 November 1685 to 1 November 1686, exports, E72/11/13; 1 November 1688 to 1 November 1689, E72/11/14-15; 1 November 1689 to 1 March 1690, E72/11/16; 1 March 1690 to 1 November 1690, E72/11/17; 1 November 1690 to 1 November 1691, imports, E72/11/18; 1 November 1690 to 1 November 1691, E72/11/19.

⁸³ Kirby and Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and the North Seas*, 2-3.

question must thus be posed regarding the extent to which growing access to a wide range of products, some of them luxuries, provided ‘cultural capital’, that is, whether ferries and trade served the needs of individuals and families with links on both sides of the firth in aspects beyond the purely commercial.⁸⁴ Evidence for this is most readily available as regards richer members of the coastal community.⁸⁵ Just eighteen miles by sea from the Ross seat at Balnagown - although around four times that distance if the journey was made overland - William Ross of Roseisle (fl. c.1640-1670) to the west of the Moray village of Burghead, was one who was acutely aware of the geographical dispersal of his surname across both sides of the firth. As a student at Marischal College in Aberdeen, Ross must have known of the staff at that emerging institution’s commitment to ensuring that ‘the dark Cymmerian corners in that North part of Scotland might be illightened by the torches kindled in that schole’ and their attempts to implement this through the establishment of benefactions and ‘mortifications’ (charitable endowments in perpetual trust).⁸⁶ Indeed, he made his own donation in the form of bursaries for those of the Ross surname. Candidates for these should, he suggested, dispute for them before an audience including the baron of Balnagown and other prominent family members from within the firth region and perhaps beyond.⁸⁷ If not, it seems, large numbers of books, the growth of the ‘precinct’ certainly brought new fashions, sights and smells across the sea to the Rosses of Balnagown: an account from 1642 lists the baron of the time’s demands for ‘grienische spainis clothe [greenish Spanish cloth], silver pleatit [pleated] buttons’ and ‘a fine silver hatt band... ..of the newest fashion’ to be used in his own outfit, and, for his wife, ‘sueit [suede?] gloves, black pinkit satin’ as well as ‘ells of balen [whalebone], blew Spanis talfatie [taffeta]’.⁸⁸ Some revealing personal correspondence survives also from later in the century in the writings of Lady Anne Stewart, a daughter of the Earl of Moray, who crossed the firth to become the wife of the twelfth baron, David Ross. These include letters written by her as

⁸⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, ‘The Forms of Capital’ in A. Halsey, H. Lauder, P. Brown and A. Stuarts Wells (eds), *Education: Culture, Economy and Society*, (Oxford, 1997), 46-58.

⁸⁵ Keith M. Brown, *Noble Society in Scotland: Wealth, Family and Culture, from Reformation to Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2000).

⁸⁶ Shona Vance, ‘Mortifications for Education in Aberdeen, 1593-1660, and their implementation in the seventeenth century’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 2000), 296.

⁸⁷ Vance, ‘Mortifications for Education’, 139.

⁸⁸ Balnagown Castle manuscripts, fos. 38, 71, 176; Macgill (ed.), *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, 142-3.

a young woman from Darnaway, west of Forres, and also, many years into the marriage, long accounts written in terms of great affection, to her husband. Besides the potential loss of the Balnagown seat upon their deaths - the marriage being childless - and other, commercial matters, the manuscripts indicate also her reliance on the 'Chanri [Chanonry] post' for the delivery, by sea, of various of the luxury imports noted already, such as lemons as well as a personal favourite type of chestnuts.⁸⁹

It is arguable that, in the case of the Urquharts of Cromarty as well as larger groups of kin affiliated to the Gordons or Frasers, the power of the firth in acting as a conduit for intellectual and cultural life is even clearer. Although the former family became entangled in local rivalries with the Leslies of Findrassie, Sir Thomas Urquhart (1611-60) could still develop his own plans to attract people to the town from further south, towards which he sought to promote it as a centre for sport and higher education.⁹⁰ However, Robert Gordon sought to parallel his coastal competitor in encouraging the growth of east Sutherland and specifically Dornoch as a rival to the the Easter Ross port in its 'civility'. Again, this would be achieved not only by means of burghal trade. Sport and leisure were again to the fore, with Dornoch's seaside links considered to be as well suited as any other in Scotland 'for archery, goffing [golfing], ryding, and all other exercise'. Most crucially, however, the village would rise through education, regarding which he advised his nephew, on the latter's being elevated to the earldom, to both build a library and establish his 'chief scooles for learning' there, presumably by bringing in suitably qualified schoolmasters from amongst his network of kin on the south side of the firth.⁹¹ Nonetheless, early in 1643, a significant setback to this occurred, when Gordon brought his immediate family and, it seems, much of his extensive library, across the water in the opposite direction instead, to Moray, to the lands that would from then

⁸⁹ 12 July ?, Darnaway, Lady Anne Stewart to David Ross, Balnagown Castle manuscripts, fo. 115; ? 1686, Balnagown, the same to the same, Balnagown Castle manuscripts, fo. 117; 7 Jun 1686, Balnagown, the same to the same, Balnagown Castle manuscripts, fos. 175-6.

⁹⁰ 12 June 1646, Rothes, Marie Ogilvie, Lady Grant, to the Laird of Grant, her son, GD248/46/4; Alston, *My Little Town*, 30, 33, 41; 10 April 1689, 'Contract between the Toune of Elgin and Mr John McKean, Present schoolmaster at Cromarty' in Cramond (ed.), *The Records of Elgin*, II, 402.

⁹¹ Fraser (ed.), *The Sutherland Book*, II, 359.

onwards become known as the barony of Gordonstoun.⁹² Finally, regarding the Fraser family, the general approach was similar. James Fraser of Wardlaw, for example, followed a tradition in 1669, by marrying into another family within the region, in his case, Margaret Symmer, a minister's daughter from Duffus, just a few miles from Gordonstoun.⁹³ By that time though, there had already risen and fallen a Fraser intellectual circle within the Moray Firth and forged very much through maritime connections. It was most obviously represented through the figure of Sir Alexander Fraser of Philorth (1537?-1623). In 1592, Fraser of Philorth had received a charter allowing him to establish the first higher education foundation in the region, just to the west of Kinnaird Head. Ties linking that institution with the other side of the firth had been apparent in a case from 1606, when Charles Ferme, minister of Philorth and a candidate for principal, had been imprisoned in Tain Castle for several months, for reasons that remain mysterious.⁹⁴

Religious practises and affiliations may have been at play in this latter case. Certainly, they were affected, not altogether positively, by the various attempts to make the coastal environment and sea less of a desolate or even 'nightmarish' location. The aftermath of the Scottish Reformation of 1560 brought about frequent fluctuation at state level between either a presbyterian or an episcopalian Protestant structure, all the way down to 1689.⁹⁵ For one, the Frasers and their kin around the Beaully Firth tended towards episcopalian practise at this point, and continued to seek connections from amongst those of this persuasion along both northern and southern shores of the firth.⁹⁶ James Fraser regarded Hugh Fraser, eighth Lord Lovat (1643-70) as being at the centre of a veritable network in this respect, which, by his definition, extended beyond family and kin to a wider orbit of 'friends and neighbours'. Evidence of this survives with respect to

⁹² David Stevenson, 'Gordon, Sir Robert, of Gordonstoun, first baronet (1580-1656)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11075>, accessed 20 November 2010].

⁹³ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, xviii.

⁹⁴ Oram et al., *Historic Tain*, 43.

⁹⁵ Kirby and Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and the North Seas*, 44.

⁹⁶ Such a pan-diocesan focus fitted with the historiographical approach of the Reverend J. B. Craven, who in his 1889 publication, *History of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Moray*, covered those connections which embraced Ross and Cromarty. See Reverend J.B. Craven, *History of the Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Moray* (London, 1889).

several of the ‘progresses’ by ferry that Lovat made around the far north-east.⁹⁷ Also illustrative of Lovat’s influence on both sides of the firth though, and perhaps also of how a common favouring for episcopal forms of worship could bring people on both sides of the water together at times, are the funeral guests upon the death of his wife, Anna Mackenzie, in 1667, which included ‘all Ross and Murray gentlemen, and their two bishops present.’⁹⁸ The Moray Firth was by no means exclusively episcopalian, however. Roman Catholicism retained some support in eastern and far-northern parts of the region, while one can assume that the distinct traditions that John Brand (1669-1738) referred to after taking part in ‘religious exercises with the mariners’ on spending the day ‘passing through the Murray Firth’ at the end of the century, were quite different again, as must have been those ‘customs and fashions of our white fishers’ mentioned by Garden of Troup along the southern firth shoreline, where ‘every place hath its own way’.⁹⁹ Information survives also of a significant presbyterian network.¹⁰⁰ Subsequent to the signing of the Scottish National Covenant in 1638, some of the aforementioned Rosses and Urquharts, as well as numerous Mackenzies, Munros, Inneses and others, rejected the teachings of the episcopate.¹⁰¹ Indeed, amongst more recent historians, the Reverend Murdoch MacDonald found enough evidence of this to offer an historiographical model in his book, *The Covenanters in Moray and Ross*, published in 1875.¹⁰² MacDonald stated that: ‘By Moray I mean specially the province so designated, the district of country between the Bogie and the Beauly’. He also added Ross and Sutherland to this, ‘regarding myself at liberty to roam around the three-horned head of the Frith, from the mouth of the Spey on the south to the Ord of Caithness on the North’, on the basis that the ‘close connection, social and ecclesiastical, which subsisted, during the period under review, between Moray proper and the neighbouring counties to the north’ justified it.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 264, 470-2, 481, 490, 492.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 492.

⁹⁹ Brand, *Brief description*, 6-7; Mitchell (ed.), *Macfarlane's*, 141.

¹⁰⁰ Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 261.

¹⁰¹ Alex Sutherland, *The Brahan Seer: The Making of a Legend* (Oxford, 2009), ch. 3.

¹⁰² Reverend Murdoch MacDonald, *The Covenanters in Moray and Ross*, (Nairn, 1875).

¹⁰³ Recent articles by Robertson and Kennedy, although focused on politics, have further questioned the notion of the dominance of a conservative, episcopalian royalism in the north at the time, although have yet to explore the part the sea played in this. See Kennedy, ‘A Heavy Yock’; Robertson, ‘The Covenanting north’. James Gordon, *History of Scots affairs, from 1637 to 1641*, 3 vols., (Aberdeen, 1841), II, 218. Other indications of contemporary presbyterian thought around the firth come by means of an anonymous,

As has been suggested, to view religious attachments in the Moray Firth region in terms of binary opposites is overly simplistic, especially in the period prior to the ‘Glorious Revolution’. However, the common dependence on the surrounding sea of peoples from both episcopalian and presbyterian traditions, and thus the contested nature of this maritime region in confessional terms, is apparent. It is further emphasised in the historical and historiographical controversies surrounding a specific case from the outset of the mid-century wars: the fleeing of the Bishop of Ross, John Maxwell (d.1647) from the cathedral at the Chanonry of Ross.¹⁰⁴ According to one writer, Gordon of Rothiemay, and due to his efforts to impose Charles I’s new Prayer Book on his congregation, Maxwell ‘was growne mor hatefull almost then any of the rest of the Bishoppes’ by early 1638 and so ‘about this tyme made a retreat, little better than a chase and flight, from his Bishoppes Sea’. According to this same account, ‘the cold climat of Rosse’ having ‘enflamed’ them ‘with such ane heate... ..the people tore in peeces such copyes of the Service Booke as he had established for publicke use in the Chanonrie church of Rosse, and threw the leaves thereof into the sea, which, by the wynde, flotted after the passage boat (where the Bishop was) upon the top of the water’.¹⁰⁵ It would seem, furthermore, that the bishop’s voyage by boat to Ardersier allowed for only a temporary respite from

surviving diary from the 1630s written by a repentant, if spiritually-tormented woman resident in the Dunrobin area. See 14 August 1633, ?, GD237/21/64. Another important source for a similar theological outlook, at least from the 1650s, is the diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie (1617-80), west of Forres, very much ‘a current commonwealthman’ in the words of James Fraser. See Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 6; *The diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie, MDCLII-MDCLXXX., and of his son, James Brodie of Brodie, MDCLXXX-MDCLXXXV.* (Aberdeen, 1863), 29-30, 123-126, 141, 244-6, 282-4, 310-11, 389, 400, 411, 558. There were also figures such as Katherine Ross [née Collace] (c.1635–1697), memoirist and schoolteacher, who, although born in Edinburgh, spent much of her adult life in Tain and then west Moray, influenced by the strongly Calvinist minister, Thomas Hog (1628–1692). Hog was a Tain-born and Marischal College educated chaplain to the earldom of Sutherland from 1654, later minister of the coastal parish of Kiltearn east of Dingwall, and active similarly thereafter in western parts of Moray. See L. A. Yeoman, ‘Ross, Katherine (c.1635–1697)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004), [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45821>, accessed 29 December 2010]; Thomas Hamilton, ‘Hog, Thomas (1628–1692)’, rev. Ginny Gardner, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13461>, accessed 29 December 2010].

¹⁰⁴ Hume Brown, *Scotland before 1700*, 45; MacDowall, *The Chanonry of Ross*, 70.

¹⁰⁵ Gordon, *History of Scots affairs*, I, 61. Murdoch MacDonald described him, in his 1875 book, as ‘a man of undoubted ability, but haughty, intriguing and greedy of power’. See MacDonald, *The Covenanters in Moray and Ross*, 2. A comparison can be made here with the account given by the royalist, John Spalding (1624?-69), according to whom: ‘certain scholars came pertly in to the kirk, and took up their hail service books, and carried them down to the Ness, with ane coal of ffyre [fire], ther to have them brunt [burnt] altogether: but ther fell out such ane sudden shouer, that ther before they could win to the Ness, the coal was drowned out.’ See John Spalding, *Memorialls of the trubles in Scotland and in England, AD 1624 – AD 1645*, 2 vols., (Aberdeen 1850), I, 53.

the political and religious divisions on land: he would die nine years later as the Anglican Archbishop of Tuam in Ireland.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

Whether the cinders of the burning prayer books were still aflame or put out by a rain shower prior to landing on the open waters of the Moray Firth is surely a moot point. The firth had proven pivotal, whatever interpretation of Bishop Maxwell's flight we choose to believe. The tensions caused by this case aside though, the wider interaction of all those people who lived in this maritime region have been shown to have had many common features, whether a given person lived in Wick or Fraserburgh or anywhere else along the indented coastline in between. In conclusion then, it must be hoped that this article has demonstrated how important the sea was with respect to a particular northern European maritime region's commerce, as well as its cultural, intellectual and religious life. Yet, the Moray Firth of early modern times, has, like many other sea-facing regions of Europe, remained understudied, an unacceptable state of affairs if scholars are to pursue a more comprehensive approach to the study of the region's past. International comparisons can help address the most pertinent issues. As has been shown, the Uskoks of the Adriatic comprised a group whose situation was analogous in many ways to that facing those 'unfree traders' who perturbed the burgesses of Elgin and Inverness. Even more so when looking elsewhere within the more immediate North Sea and Baltic world, we can see that coastal trade was based, in the firth as elsewhere, on 'often anonymous and unregulated' ties which created 'alternative networks by which communities often considered "marginal" in a "terrestrial" context could be linked into an extended maritime community'.¹⁰⁷ Finally, David Kirby has noted that: 'as former centres of maritime activity have fallen redundant and been converted into leisure centres or housing developments, and as air travel has displaced the sea crossing, our direct

¹⁰⁶ MacDowall, *The Chanonry of Ross*, 73. The bishop left his wife, Elizabeth Innes, and several children behind. It seems that they sought refuge with Elizabeth's brother, Alexander Innes, minister of Rothiemay, before joining him in England, and, it seems, then Ireland. However, one of his daughters later became a schoolmistress in Chanonry. Some reports also suggest that stones from the cathedral there were used to build the Cromwellian citadel in Inverness in the 1650s. See A. S. Wayne Pearce, 'Maxwell, John (d. 1647)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/18406>, accessed 29 December 2010].

¹⁰⁷ Kirby and Hinkkanen, *The Baltic and the North Seas*, 148-9.

experience of the sea has declined.’ What historians must be most wary of, argues Kirby, is, first, that we allow these transformations to ‘obscure the richness and variety of transmarine connections’ that once existed, and second, that we resign ourselves to accepting that we might never grasp more fully a sense of ‘the ideas, techniques, tricks and hints exchanged or picked up on the quays and in the boatyards, the words and phrases that have flitted into and out of the word-stores of the peoples of the northern European lands, the fashions that have flown and taken root, or fallen on stony ground.’¹⁰⁸ All of this applies if we are to understand and come to terms with the challenging setting of the Moray Firth during the seventeenth century, a stretch of water and coastline which was not alone in providing, for better or worse, a backdrop to the lives of the diverse body of people who lived around it.

ILLUSTRATIONS

4 x Figures

1 x Map:

‘Extimae Scotie [Scotland] Septentrionalis ora, ubi Provinciae sunt Rossia [Ross], Sutherlandia [Sutherland], Cathenesia [Caithness], Strath-Naverniae [Strathnaver] cum vicinis regiunculus quae eis subsunt, etiamque Moravia’.

Plate 8 of J.G. Bartholomew's 'Survey Atlas of Scotland', 1912

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¹⁰⁸ David Kirby, ‘Locating the Baltic’ in Salmon and Barrow (eds), *Britain and the Baltic* (Sunderland, 2003), xxiv.