Time and Space in Scottish Witch-Hunting, 1563-1736

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Spatial patterns of witch trials are messy….unless….

"Institutional systems do not have boundaries, instead they do boundaries through practices that evolve over time and according to vantage points. If you have access to God, fine, but the rest of us must swear off boundaries and their satellite mirages" (White 2007:199)

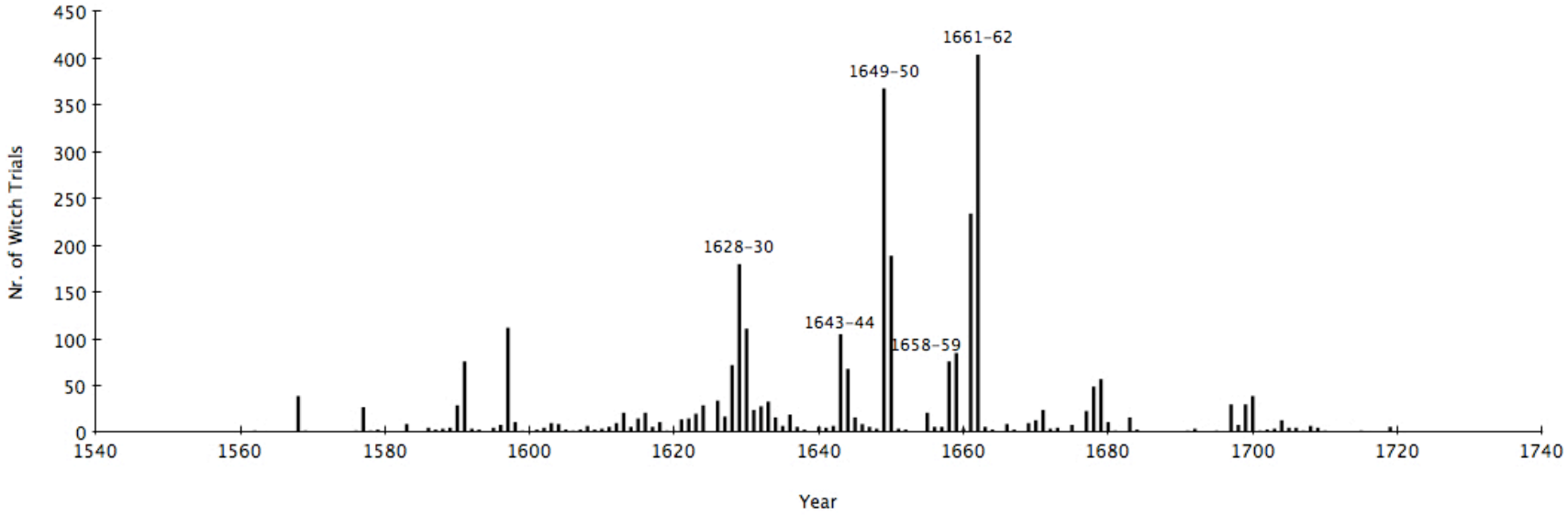
Theories on witchcraft

- Accusations emerge in communities (conflict, scapegoating, moral crisis)
- Accusations are engineered by the ruling class with a view downwards to society (ideology, power)
- My theory: witch-hunts are mostly engineered by people with ambitions to power BUT they are oriented upwards

A couple of things one needs to know about Scottish Witches

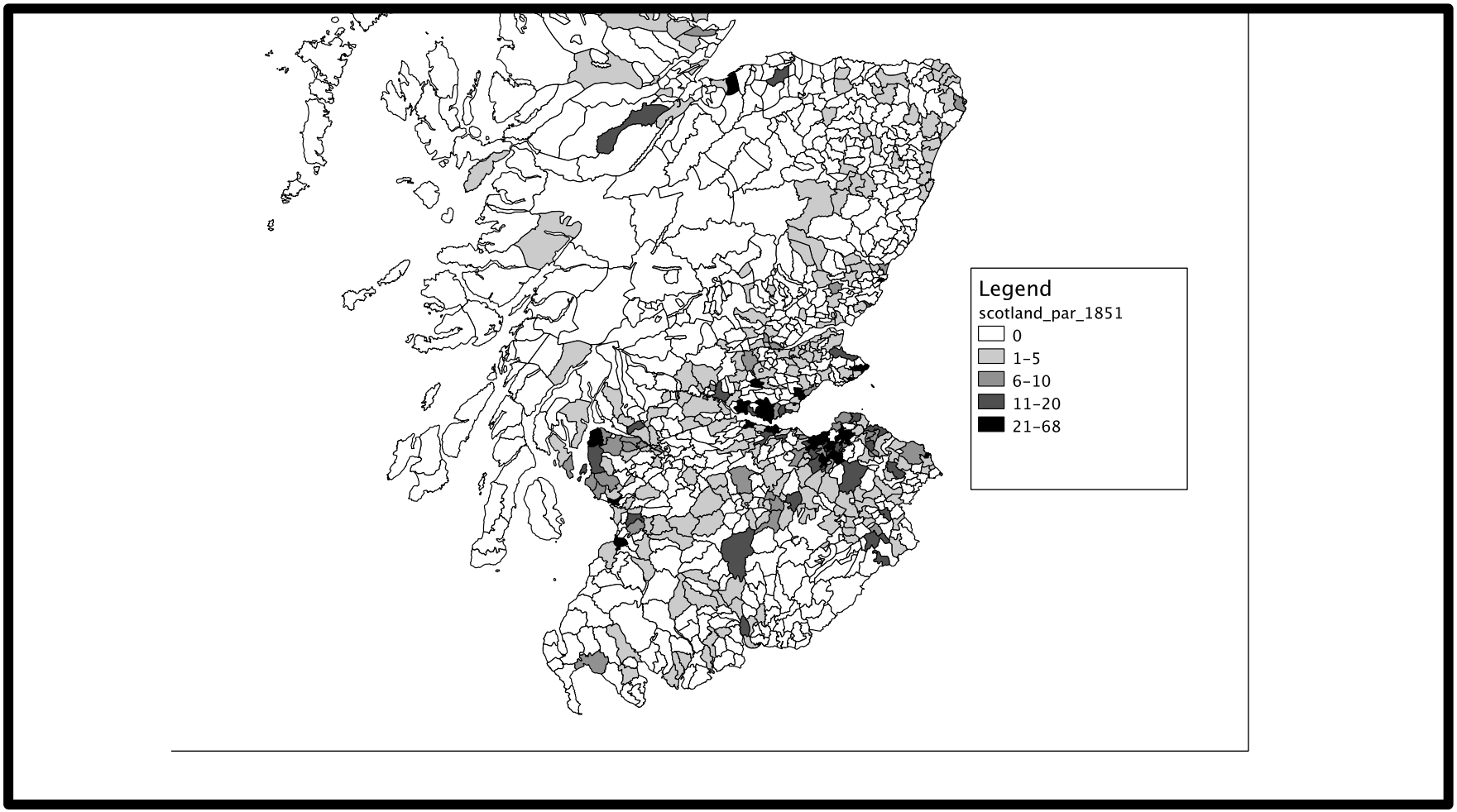
- Survey of Scottish Witchcraft (Goodare et al 2003)
- 3,212 of them
- Most female
- Post Reformation 1563-1736
- Prosecuted by secular authorities
- 1,109 prosecutors

Waves of Witch-Hunting



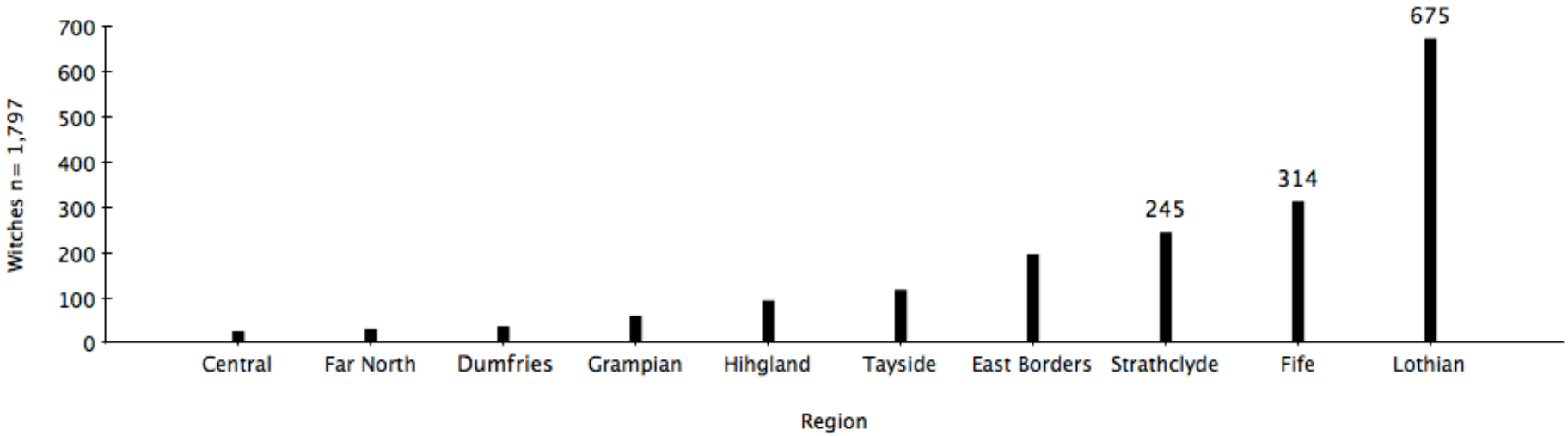
See also Miller and Martin 2008

What about the spatial pattern?



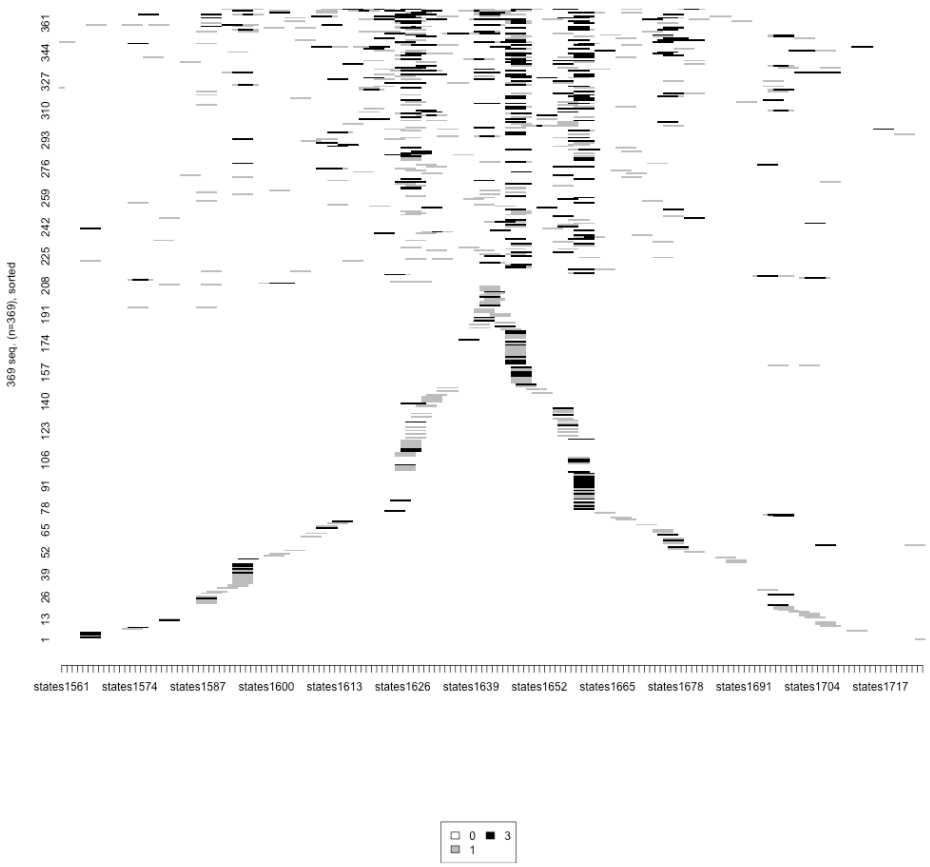
Ukborders Boundary Data

The Regional Approach



Regions as used by Martin 2008

The Raw Data – from frenetic hunting to occasional witches



*white = 0 witches, gray = 1 witch, black = more than 1 (n=369 parishes)

The Problem

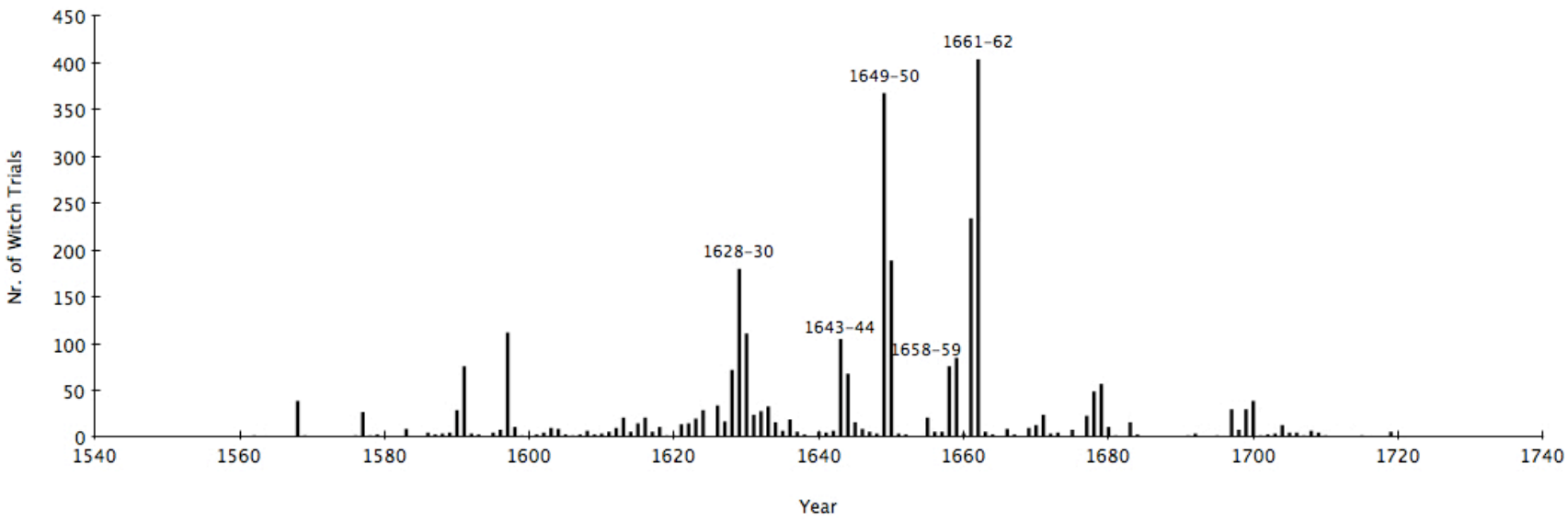
- Witch-hunts don't adhere to administrative boundaries

- Boundaries around a "case" of witch-hunting are socially constructed

- Before one can determine the space, one needs to know who is defining it…who are the central actors in witch-craft?

Another piece of the puzzle

- Disproportionate engagement of gentry from outside of the official hierarchy
- Witch-hunts coincide with times of office vacancies



What is the mechanism behind witch waves?

State offices as viable careers

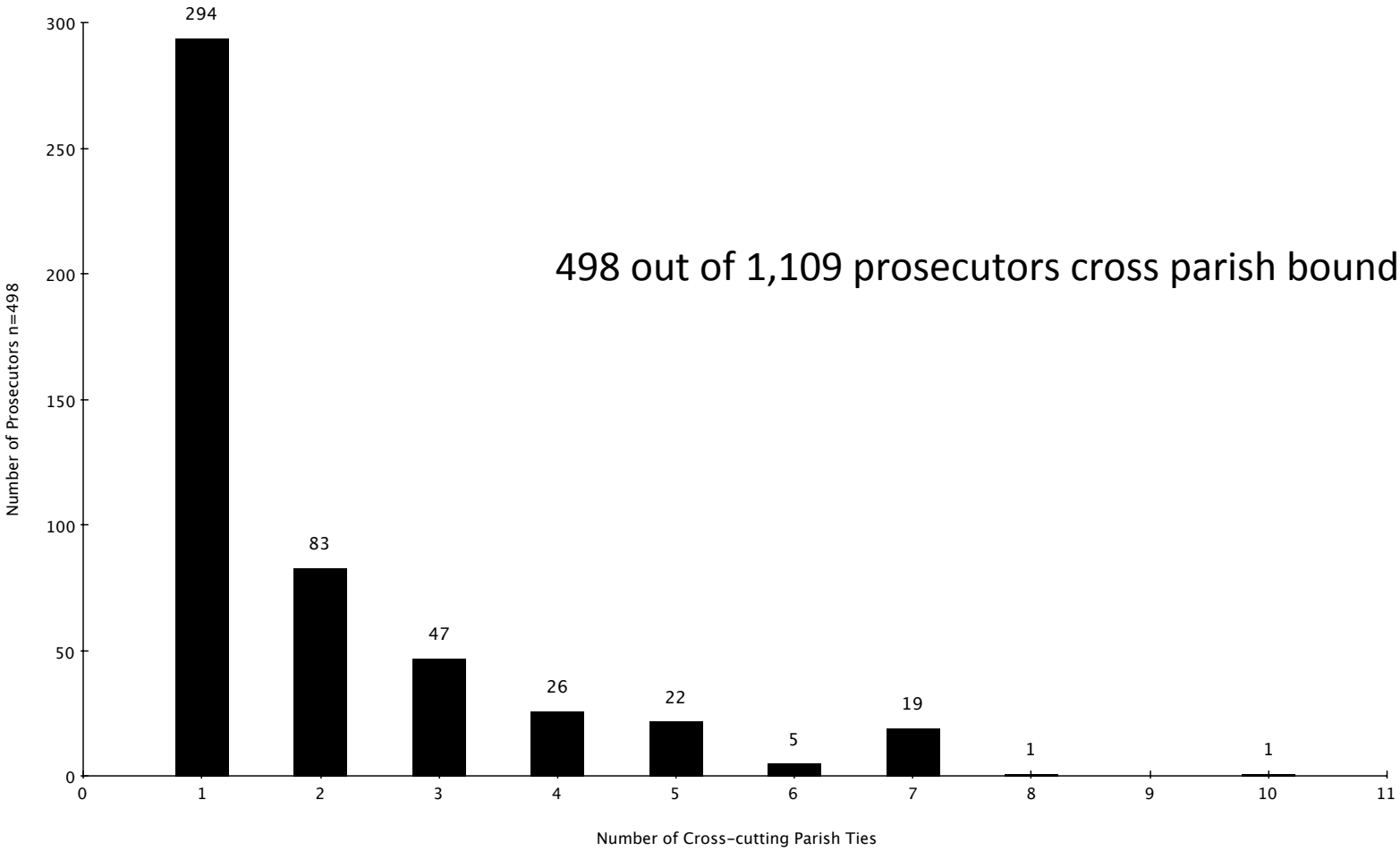
Gentry – upward mobility

Witch-hunters feed on witchcraft as a moral movement in order to become visible

Windows of opportunity

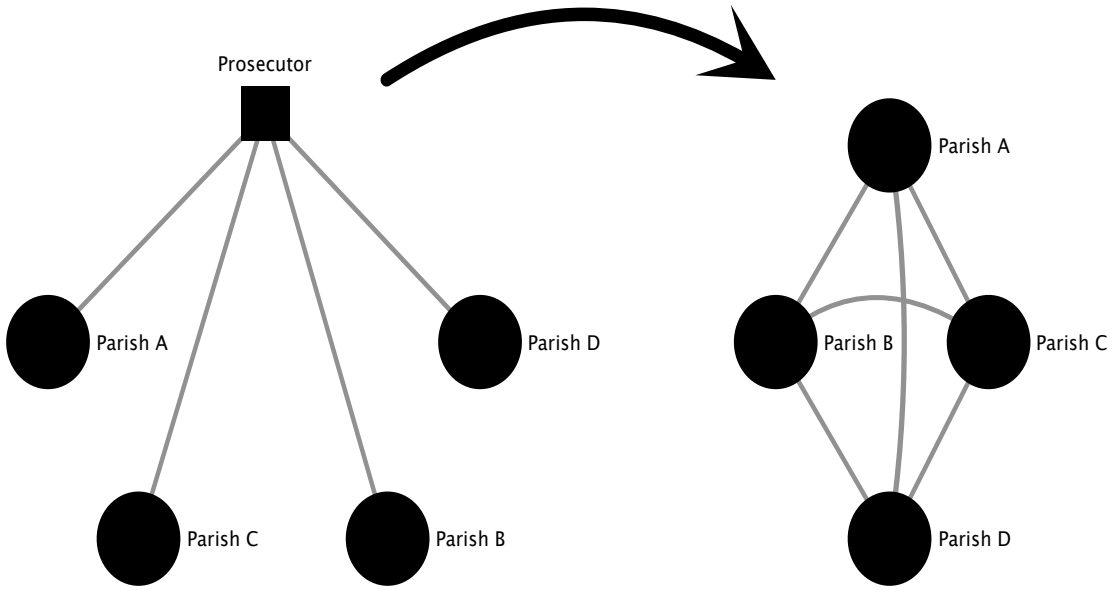
Commissions for witchcraft

The geographical scope of witch-hunters

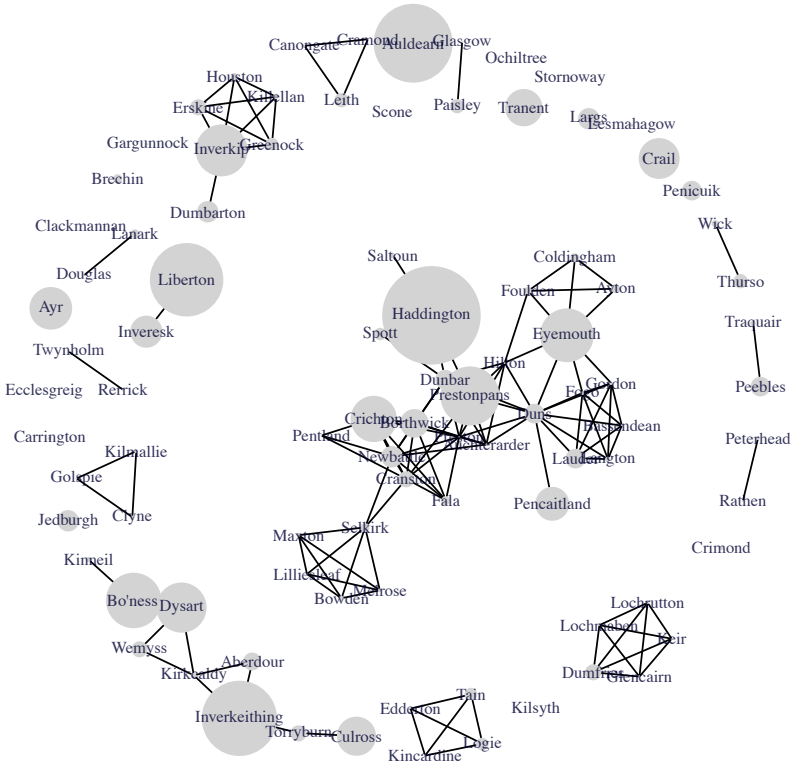


498 out of 1,109 prosecutors cross parish boundaries

Letting the actors draw the boundaries



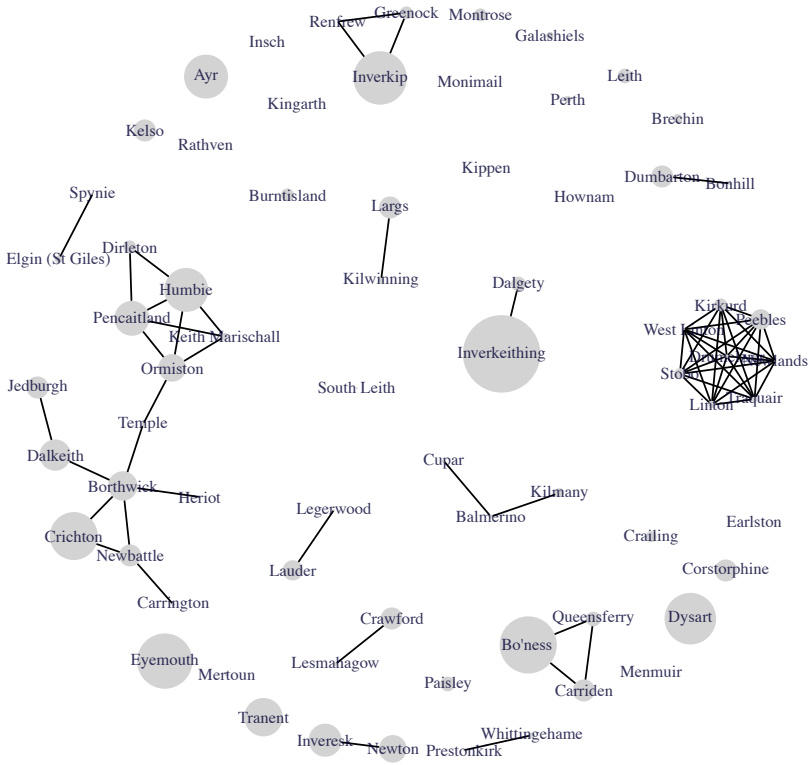
1620–1640



parish

Prosecutor crossing

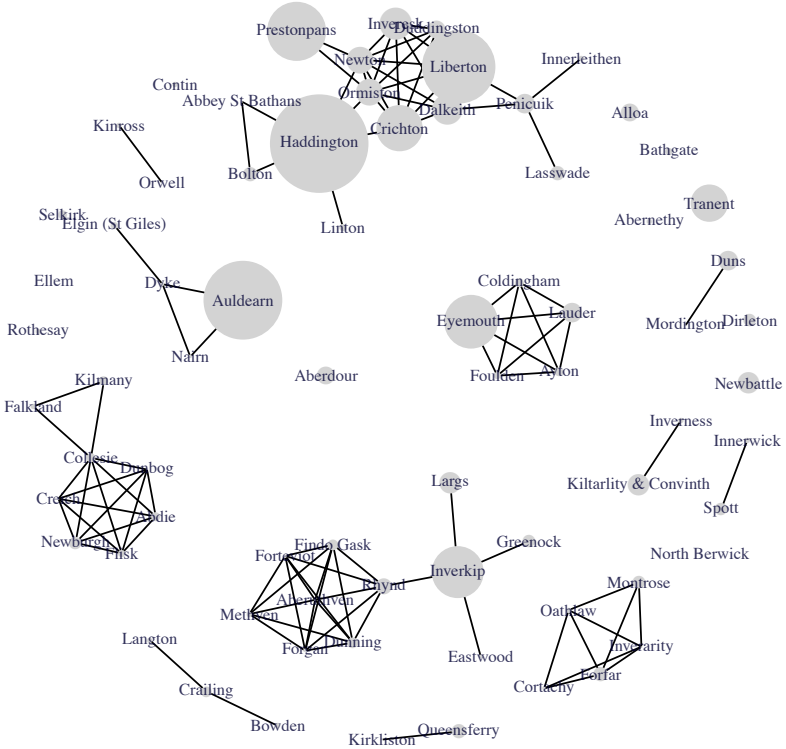
1646–1653



parish

Prosecutor crossing

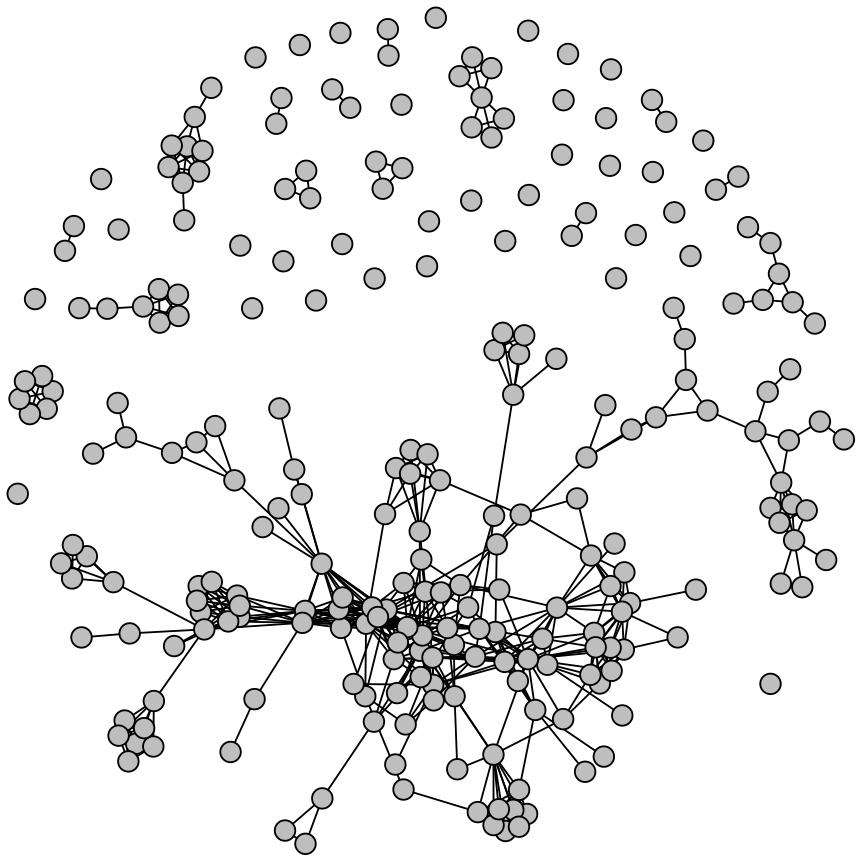
1660–1663



parish

Prosecutor crossing

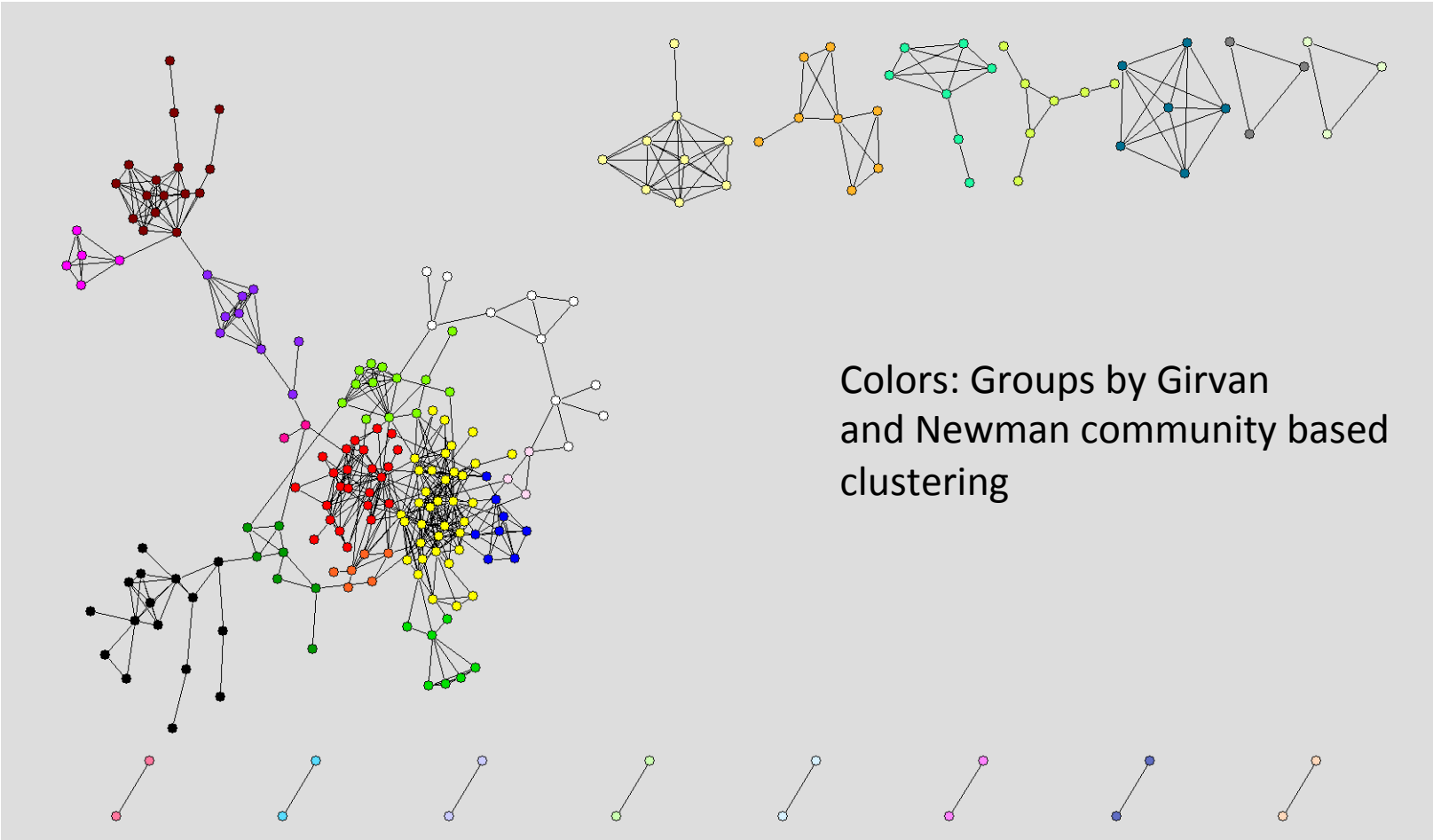
Parishes 1563–1736



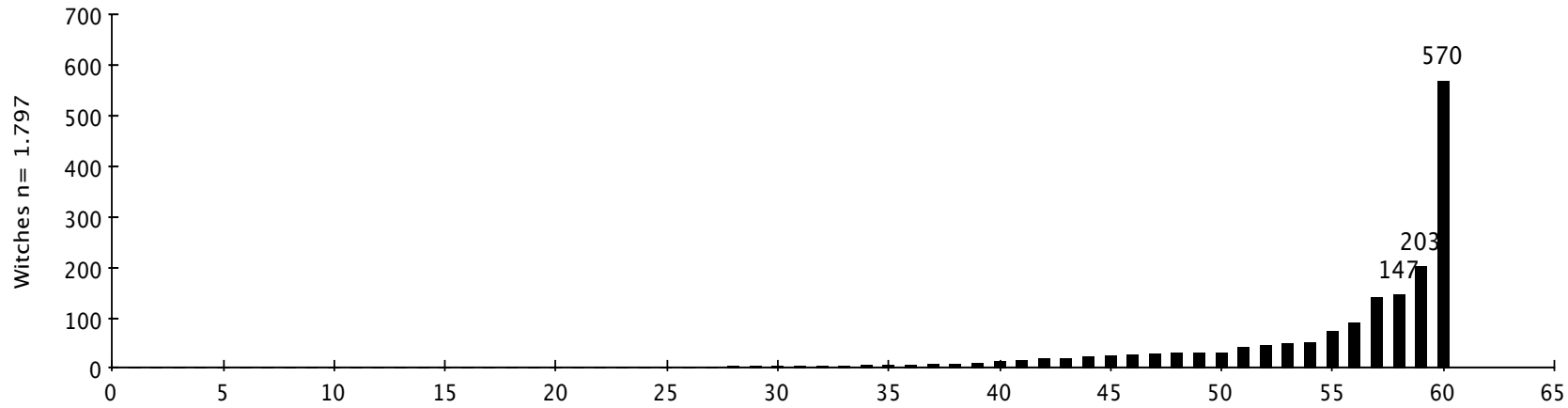
parish

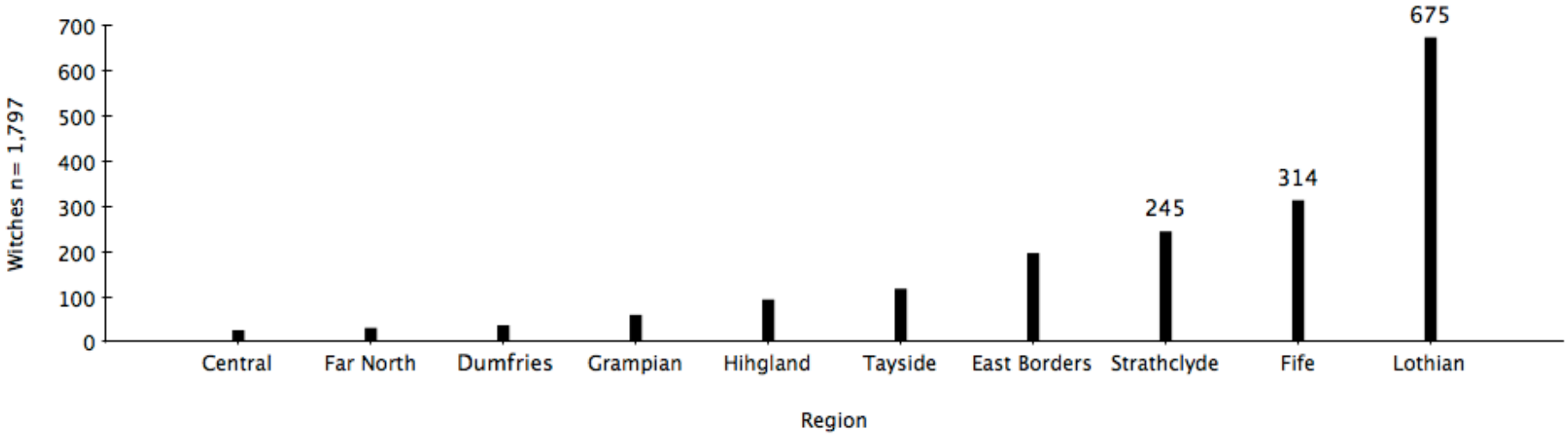
Prosecutor crossing

Communities – the social construction of space

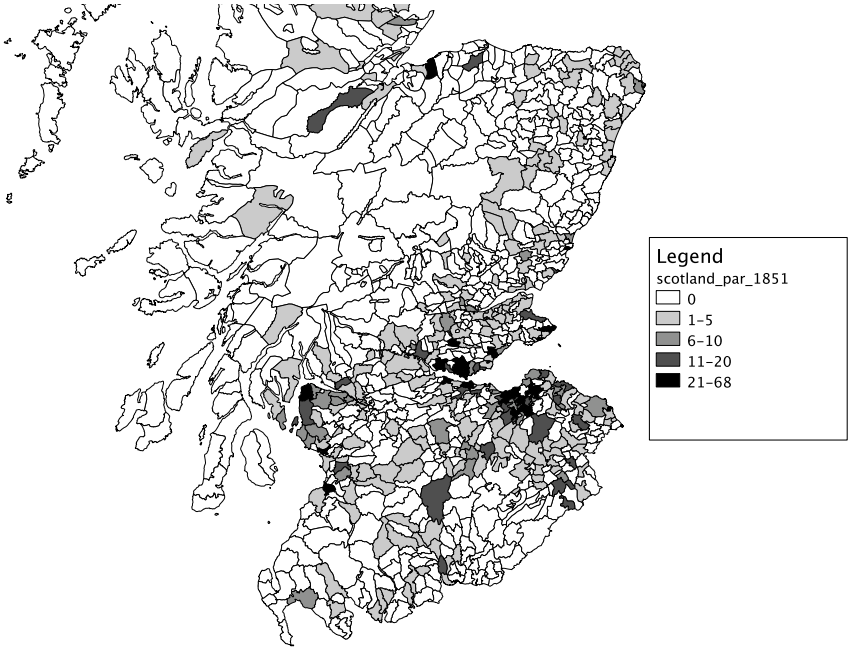


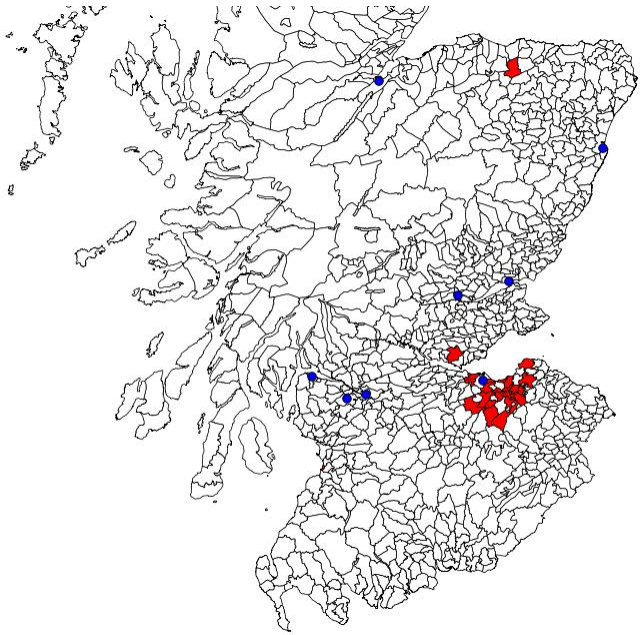
Cluster Contribution to Total Number of Witches





The biggest Cluster…is in the vicinity of Edinburgh





GIS Data: ERSC UK Data Service

Substantial Conclusions

- Witch-hunts differ in the degree of “localness”
- Only seen through socially constructed boundaries does the spatial pattern make sense
- Witch-hunting exceeds localness where things are visible to the center
    - Orientation towards people in power
    - Actual witch searches in different places
    - a distinction between emergent witch accusations and engineered ones?

- References in the presentation
- Goodare, Julian, Maring, Lauren, Miller, Joyce, and Yeoman, Louise. 2003. “Survey of Scottish Witchcraft.” Retrieved (http://www.arts.ed.ac.uk/witches/).
- Martin, Lauren. „Scottish Witchcraft Panics Re-examined“. In *Witchcraft and belief in early modern Scotland*, edited by von Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, und Joyce Miller, 119–143. Palgrave historical studies in witchcraft and magic. Basingstoke [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- “Censusparishes 1851”, Scottish Historic Boundaries [ESRI Shape File], ERSC UK Data Service, <http://edina.ac.uk/census/>, 2011