

Røst- the outermost island in Lofoten

Røst Ytterst i Lofoten

Einar Starnes, 304 s, Orkana, 2021

Presentation: ParkTime Magazine

1. Cover

Mythical Røst

There is hardly a Norwegian island that is surrounded with more myths than Røst, the outermost island in the Lofoten archipelago. It is the municipality in Norway that lies the farthest from the mainland. If you arrive by boat, the island group can appear as the mystical fairy island *Utrøst*, rising from the ocean. The island is surrounded by steep bird cliffs that rise straight from the sea. But the main island itself is completely flat, it is only when you get close that the roofs of houses and the church tower rise slowly up from the sea/ocean.

It is the rich sea that has created the islands: The dried cod, *tørrfisk*, *stokkfisk* or *stoccafisso* has been the main export for over 1000 years. The *tørrfisk* is created in exactly the same way as in 1432, and before: No artificial additives: just a short dip in fresh sea water before the cod is dried in the wind and sun, with Røst providing ideal conditions for the production, now as then. And the product is ideal for future food production: an ideal food preservation created by nature itself: no need for cooling, easy for transport with its low weight, and the product can be stored for several years: just further maturing, developing the rich umami characteristics of fermented and matured food.

2. Harvesting the tørrfisk

The sea has also created the rich seabird colonies, the fertile soil and the rich, green grazing. The archipelago has a rich and varied history, with old traditions that live on to this day.

The fascination of Røst

Seafarers, traders, writers, artists and other visitors have over the centuries been fascinated by Røst, and the fascination does not seem to diminish. This book tries to explain why.

The book explores different depictions of Røst through the ages. From Querini and Olaus Magnus in the 15th and 16th century to modern-day writers and artists.

3. Olaus Magnus depicted Røst and the Malstroem Røst means turbulent waters

What has captured the minds of so many? Are there some reoccurring/repeated myths? This book tries to describe both the myths and realities, the past and the future of Røst.

4. Kittelsen from Nykerne/Skomvær

Depictions of Røst- From Querini to today

The book starts with a boat trip from the mainland out to the island far out to sea, before the myth of *Utrøst* is presented. The story of the venetian trader and nobleman Pietro Querini, that together with survivors from the crew from the trading vessel *La Querina*, stranded in the islands in 1432. The descriptions from Querini and the crew are unique and interesting historical

sources to a Norwegian coastal community in the Middle Ages. They describe the life and traditions of the inhabitants of Røst, some of the traditions are alive to this day: such as the making of tørrfisk/stocafisso and the keeping of nearly tame eider ducks, ærfugl, that each spring comes ashore to nest close to the houses.

5. *The Querini monument Inaugurated by the Italian Ambassador, Count Alberto de Marsanich, in 1932*

Strong links to Italy

Today, the link to Italy is strong: There is much contact between Italian fishtraders and the producers of stoccafisso in Røst and also with the current Querini / Quirini counts descendants of Pietro. The town of friendship with Røst is Sandrigo in Veneto, with its signature dish baccalà alla vicentina. The dramatic story of Querini and his crew is told in true Italian fashion with the Querini opera, with plans of showing the opera in Venice in 2022. There are also plans of a European cultural route: Via Querinissima.

A further strengthening of the link to Italy was the creation of the *Parco Letterario Pietro Querini* in 2017, with the wishes of Amb. of Italy Giorgio Novello. The story opens the door to understanding how the Røst-society was in 1432, how some traditions have lived on to this day, and also how the society has evolved since then. But the literary park can also give insights to other writers and artists that depicts the nature and culture history of Røst.

6. *Kjell Arne Helgebostad and Stanislao de Marsanich at the inauguration of the Literary Park in 2017*

The story has inspired a wealth of later depictions by writers and artists, many of these are described in the book.

In the chapters on the literature and art the book gives an insight into the varied depictions. Many of the depictions are inspired by the myths of the islands, but there is also a wealth of interesting information and descriptions of the nature, lives, traditions, and the cultural history of Røst.

The cultural heritage

Røst is a unique island community with a long history, where old traditions and crafts lives on in today's modern society. The author has worked with cultural heritage on the islands and wants to showcase the rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the islands.

The book is illustrated throughout with art and new and old photographs.

Fish, birds, growth

The book also describes the long history of the island, with the traces of the first inhabitants on the islands and towards our present day.

In the chapters, *fish, birds* and *growth* the three main elements that form the basis of life on the islands.

7. *Fishingboats approaching the fishing village in march. Skrei cod is the basis of tørrfisk. Typical Røst fisheries Bird mountains in the background*

Behind the myths

Lastly the writer wants to look a bit past the myths. Røst has many resources but is suffering from a decline in the number of inhabitants like many places in the so called «periphery». The

writer points out that Røst in fact is very centrally placed, and always has, central in fisheries and trade for centuries. The question is how the rich resources in and around the islands also can be a resource for future inhabitants.

About the author:

Einar Stamnes (1978-) has family ties to Røst from his fathers side. He has lived there for several years , together with his wife and kids. He has been co-editor in a book about Tørrfisk-Stoccafisso (Orkana 2018) and has been project manager for cultural heritage on Røst. He is a journalist, historian and economist by profession. He is now special advisor at Norwegian Crafts Institute at Maihaugen, Lillehammer.

The book is published from the publisher Orkana and is currently available in norwegian bookstores online.(the book is in norwegian)

<https://www.orkana.no/produkt/rost-ytterst-i-lofoten/>

Captions for some suggested illustrations:

1.Røst – ytterst I Lofoten. Book cover

2.Theodor Kittelsen: Nykerne. We can see the enourmous masses of puffins. The cathing of puffins (fowling) used to be of great importance in Røst..Source: *Fra Lofoten*. Jacob Dybwads Forlag 1890-91. Bjørn Ringstrøms Antikvariat (Faksimileutgave) 1996.

3.Theodor Kittelsen: *Skomvær lighthouse*. *The famous norwegian artist* Theodor Kittelsen got his great artistic breakthrough after his stay in Røst and Skomvær. Source: *Fra Lofoten*. Jacob Dybwads Forlag 1890-91. Bjørn Ringstrøms Antikvariat 1996.

4.Røst is the island of tørrfisk, stocafisso. Gustav Johansen is sorting the stocafisso by quality in the firm Røst Sjømat. His pfeffession, in norwegian vraker or gessell, is an ancient proffession where the craft is transmitted from the bearer of the tradition to the apprentice by practical work, action borne knowledge of intantible cultural heritage.

Coastal fishermen approaching the fishing village in february, in the height of the cod season, or the so called Lofoten-fisheries.