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Memorials to the Victims of the Witchcraft Trials: Orkney and Finnmark, Norway

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Introduction

Within eight years of each other and on either side of the North Sea, two memorials to the victims of the witchcraft trials have seen the light of day: the Steilneset Memorial in Vardø, Finnmark, Norway and the Orkney Memorial in Kirkwall, Orkney. Both memorials have been built to commemorate painful history. In the following I reflect upon why these memorials have been built, what they represent, and similarities and differences between the memorials in form and content.

Over the last 30 years, a change has taken place within the field of history in how we deal with memories of historical events in the public space, and how they should be remembered today. Previously, victories of wars were remembered, represented by a hero, often a sculpture of a man on a horse, often a king or a military leader. They were heroes, from the upper layers of society, while common people were not written much about in history books. During the recent decades, "memory" and "collective memory" in particular have been acknowledged as two of the leading concepts of cultural studies'.¹ This change goes towards including painful events into the field of memory history, often events of loss and sorrow, and often events affecting common people. Painful history is difficult to handle and has been repressed because it reminds of a society's actions of injustice, among them state sanctioned wrong-doings towards innocent people. The witchcraft trials of the Early Modern period fit very well within this frame.

Persecution of witches took place all over Europe c.1450-1750. Accusations of witchcraft were brought before the courts and treated as criminal cases. In Europe, the population c.1600 was between 92,680,000 and 94,780,000. During the European witchcraft persecution, around 100,000 persons were accused of practicing witchcraft. Of these, around 50,000 persons were executed, most of them sentenced to death by fire at the stake, which means 0.05% executed out of the population.² The most intense witchcraft trials took place in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Poland, Scotland and East Finnmark.³

In Scotland, the period of the witchcraft trials was 1561-1727.⁴ The Scottish witchcraft persecution was extreme, measured in executions relative to the population at the time.⁵ Out of a population of about one million, 3,219 named persons,⁶ or 0.3% of the population, were formally accused of witchcraft, and most likely 2,570, or close to 80% of those accused, were

¹ Tor Einar Fagerland, 'Monuments and Painful History: The Steilneset Memorial. An international perspective', in Reidun Laura Andreassen and Liv Helene Willumsen, *Steilneset Memorial: Art, Architecture, History* (Stamsund, 2014), 77-88, at p.77.

² Liv Helene Willumsen, 'Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Trials in Scotland and Northern Norway' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2008), 54.

³ Julian Goodare, *The European Witch-Hunt* (London, 2016), 28.

⁴ The references to all known source material of Scottish witchcraft trials are found in the Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, an Edinburgh University project led by Julian Goodare, finished in 2003. Willumsen 2008, 39.

⁵ Goodare 2016, 28-9.

⁶ From The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, there were 3,413 cases in total. A combination of Accused persons and Cases, gives 3,212 persons accused of witchcraft in Scotland. Willumsen 2008, 2, 36, 40.

executed.⁷ In Norway as a whole, the period of witchcraft trials was c.1560-1760.⁸ The intensity of the persecution was average. Out of a population of 400,000 c.1600, around 750-800 persons, or 0.2% of the population, were accused of witchcraft, whereof about 310 persons, almost 40% of those accused, were executed.⁹ Norwegian courts started to pass death sentences in witchcraft trials in the late 16th century.

The witch-hunts in Orkney and Finnmark were offshoots of the European witchcraft trials, with the 17th century as the peak period. In Norway, the witch-hunt in Finnmark took place during about the same period as the rest of the country, but with 135 accused and 91 executions among a population of 3,000, it was much more intense than in the rest of Norway proportionate to the population.¹⁰ In Orkney, the witch-hunt took place from 1594-1706, about the same period as on the Scottish mainland. Relative to the population, Orkney suffered from the witchcraft persecution to a greater extent than mainland Scotland.¹¹ However, the period with strong persecution was 1615-1645, which included three linked witchcraft trials.¹² This means that before 1615 and after the mid-1600s, there were very few witchcraft trials in Orkney. This pattern does not coincide with mainland Scotland, where intense persecution took place until 1662. It seems that learned European ideas about witchcraft, resulting in massive linked trials, did not get the same foothold in Orkney – and the same was the case with Shetland – as in Scotland mainland. Learned demonological ideas about witchcraft were present both in Orkney and in Shetland, however strongest in Orkney, which influenced the intensity of witchcraft trials. The administration of justice played an important role here. There was a difference between Scottish laymen and Scottish churchmen when it came to the role they played in official positions in Orkney and Shetland. Governmental influence from central Scottish authorities through administrative officials was stronger in Orkney than in Shetland. This led to harsher persecution of alleged witches in Orkney than in Shetland. However, as for the Northern isles as a whole, the geographical distance from the Scottish mainland and judicial conditions tended to weaken the intensity of the historical witchcraft trials.¹³

The Building of the Memorials

Why do we build memorials commemorating the victims of the witchcraft trials? Louise Bourgeois, the artist behind the art installation at the Steilneset Memorial, has made a confessional chair for a chapel in France, with an inscription above it: 'Resurrection, reparation, redemption, restoration, reconciliation'.¹⁴ These five words could be used about the need to come to terms with witchcraft persecution as well, as they emphasize through the opening syllable 're-' expresses a wish to milder or heal historical injustice through recreating it. The memorials to the victims of the witchcraft trials are closely related to emotions. Shame and guilt on behalf of society have found a medium of expression in an architect's and artist's work. Resurrection, revival, has to do with finding peace, by coming to a point where forgiveness is possible. The work of reparation and redemption is necessary to come to terms with the

⁷ Julian Goodare, 'Witchcraft in Scotland', in Brian P. Levack, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford, 2013), 300-17, at p.302.; Willumsen 2008, 66.

⁸ Hans Eyvind Næss, *Trolldomsprosessene i Norge på 15-1600-tallet* (Oslo, 1982), 21.

⁹ Rune Blix Hagen, 'Witchcraft Criminality and Witchcraft Research in the Nordic Countries', in Levack 2013, 376.

¹⁰ Willumsen 2008, 53-94; Liv Helene Willumsen, *The Witchcraft Trials in Finnmark, Northern Norway* (Bergen, 2010), 11.

¹¹ Liv Helene Willumsen, *Witches of the North: Scotland and Finnmark* (Leiden, 2013a), 149.

¹² Willumsen 2013a, 161.

¹³ Willumsen 2008, 154, 173, 174.

¹⁴ Meg Harris Williams, 'Louise Bourgeois and the Witches: The Complexity of the Feminine in the Art of Louise Bourgeois', in Reidun Laura Andreassen and Liv Helene Willumsen, *Steilneset Memorial: Art, Architecture, History* (Stamsund, 2014), 21-9, at p.28.

sufferings of people from time long past. Restoration is important to give back respect and dignity to people whose fates ended in despair and disgrace. Reconciliation is part of a process towards ending/closing/terminating the sorrow for those human beings who lost their lives during the witchcraft trials, and thus continuing without hatred or revenge. In sum, these five words fathom some fundamental imperatives for the aim and the necessity of building witch memorials today.



Illustration 14

Map of Scandinavia, showing Finnmark and Vardø.
Made by Inger Bjerg Poulsen.

Finnmark and Orkney – background

Despite Finnmark being more sparsely populated than Orkney, these two areas have many features in common with regard to their sociogeographical, historical and administrative background in the 1600s. Finnmark had an area of 48,649 square kilometers and 3,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the 1600s.¹⁵ Orkney had an area of 975 square kilometers and a population of 18,700 at the same time.¹⁶ Both areas were marginally geographically located at a long distance to central authorities. Finnmark is the northernmost and easternmost county in Norway, which was in union with Denmark at the time. The king and the central authorities were in Copenhagen, but Norway kept its own laws during the period of the union with Denmark. With regard to Scotland, the kingdom was joined with England in a regal or personal union in 1603, when James VI of Scotland inherited the crown of England upon the death of his childless cousin Elizabeth I and became James I of England. 'This union did not, however, bring about a union of governments, churches or laws of the two kingdoms, and therefore each kingdom followed different policies in dealing with witches. English policy resulted in relatively few witchcraft executions'.¹⁷ Orkney belonged to the Northern Isles in Scotland, and the central judicial authorities were in Edinburgh.¹⁸ The role of the state was strong for both areas, and there was a system for carrying out state authority by means of men employed in official administrative positions in both areas. The church and the legal field were under state control. After the Reformation in Norway 1537, there was a Protestant Lutheran church, with a hierarchy of ministers for each parish, provost for a larger district, and bishop for an entire bishopric. In the 1600s, the bishop over Finnmark had his seat in Nidaros, Trondheim. After the Reformation in Scotland 1560 the Church of Scotland changed between Episcopalian and Presbyterian direction, and in 1592 the parliament acknowledged a Presbyterian organized system, with kirk sessions consisting of ministers and elders at the lowest level.¹⁹ The court system in Norway had three tiers: local courts, Court of Appeal (Norwegian *lagting*), and highest legal authority in Copenhagen (Norwegian *Herredag* and *Kongens Retterting*). Likewise, the court system in Scotland had three major types of trial: local trials, mixed central-local trials, and central trials, the latter held at the Central Court in Edinburgh. Mixed central-local trials comprise circuit courts and local trials with central representatives. This is the distinction between different types of trials made in the project The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft, led by Julian Goodare. This project was finalized in 2003, and resulted in a comprehensive database.²⁰ In Norway and Finnmark, all witchcraft trials were held at secular courts, local criminal courts. In Orkney, witchcraft trials were held both at clerical courts, church courts, and secular criminal courts. The church courts were the local Kirk Sessions, Presbyteries and the General Assembly in Edinburgh, while the criminal courts were the local Sheriff Courts and the Central Court in Edinburgh. There was a jury of elected men from the local community to decide on guilt in local criminal in local criminal trials in both areas. Local courts had considerable authority in both areas, including the power to pass death sentences. Clerical courts in Orkney could not pass death sentences, therefore a trial initiated at a church court had to be sent on to a secular court to have a sentence of execution passed. In Orkney, the population was mostly rural (dispersed rather than in villages), predominantly engaged in subsistence farming. The population in Finnmark lived mostly in small villages and sustained itself by fishing and small-holding. Orkney

¹⁵ Liv Helene Willumsen, *Dømt til ild og bål* (Stamsund, 2013b), 267.

¹⁶ Willumsen 2013b, 157.

¹⁷ Brian P. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics and Religion* (New York, 2008), 1; Willumsen 2008, 45.

¹⁸ Levack 2008, 19.

¹⁹ Willumsen 2013b, 68.

²⁰ Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman, 'Introduction', The Survey of Scottish witchcraft. <http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/introduction.html>

and Finnmark in the 1600s were societies which had not yet fully embraced literacy, and knowledge and stories thus passed by word-of-mouth. Both Finnmark and Orkney suffered from witchcraft persecution in the 17th century, Finnmark with intense periods of witchcraft trials throughout most of the century, Orkney with most persecutions during the first half of the century.

The Finnmark witchcraft trials

The witchcraft trials of Finnmark took place during the period 1600-1692. Two types of trial in the witch-hunt corresponded to two different concepts of witchcraft. There were isolated trials, with just one suspect, based on the perception of traditional sorcery performed by one person. Such trials pursued solitary traditional sorcery, harmful sorcery, which both early modern courts and modern historians call *maleficium*. The other type of trial was based on a learned European doctrine, demonology, often called by modern witchcraft research 'the cumulative concept of witchcraft', a term encompassing a pact with the devil, witches' meetings with the devil present, night flights, metamorphosis, and collective witchcraft operations.²¹ According to this doctrine, a suspect's ability to do evil was based on transfer of power from the devil through a pact. Confessions of witches' meetings and collective acts of sorcery led to several new suspects being denounced, who then in turn were brought to court. This concept resulted in closely linked witchcraft trials, with intense trial periods lasting between some months and a couple of years, known to modern historians as witchcraft panics. There were three notable panics in Finnmark, in 1620-21, 1652-53, and 1662-63.

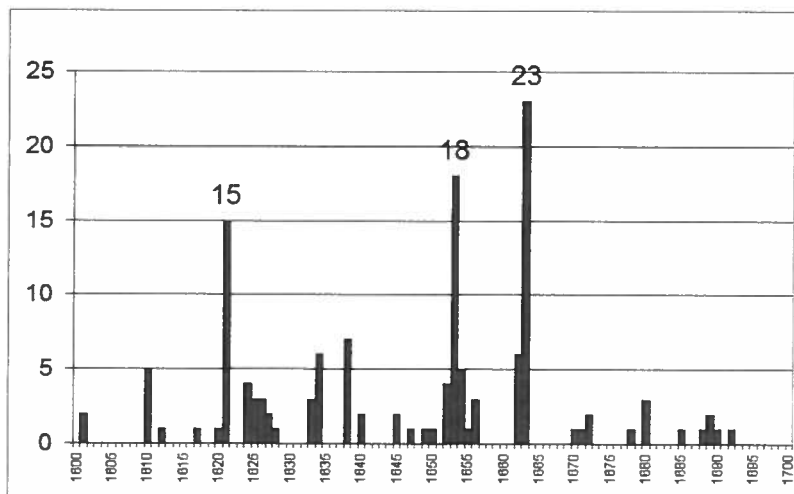


Illustration 15 Frequency witchcraft trials in Finnmark 1600-1692.

The execution rate in Finnmark was 67%, which is high when compared to similar trials elsewhere in Europe.²² The majority of the death sentences were passed in Vardø in East Finnmark, and the executions took place at Steilneset, the execution site in Vardø. The rate of death sentences resembles that in parts of Europe where witches were persecuted particularly rigorously. When we assess the extent of the persecution in Finnmark, we also have to take into account the size of the population. In the 17th century, the population of Finnmark was around 3,000, which was 0.8% of the total population of Norway. Nevertheless, 16% of all Norwegian witchcraft trials took place in Finnmark, and around one-third of all death sentences in Norwegian witchcraft trials were passed here. These figures indicate heavy persecution in the

²¹ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*, 3rd edn. (London, 2006), 32-51.

²² Willumsen 2008, 54-6.

district of Finnmark. In addition to sentences of execution, persons accused of witchcraft were outlawed, subjected to public whipping or fined.

The accused came from the village of Vardø, where Vardøhus Castle was situated, the neighbouring village of Vadsø, and the immediate surrounding areas. About four fifths of the accused in Finnmark were women, a distribution common in Europe.²³ Of the 91 executed in Finnmark, 77 were women and 14 men. Thus, given that there were four women for each man accused, the demographic effects of the witch-hunt in this thinly populated district were tremendous. Very few families were untouched by the trials and few women were spared some sort of involvement.²⁴ Notably, most of the women were accused in the six years of the panics.

Ethnicity was a salient factor. Around four-fifths of the accused were Norwegian, the rest Sami.²⁵ This rate is proportional; Norwegians made up around four fifths of the population. The gender distribution of the accused varied with ethnicity. Among the women accused, the majority were Norwegian. Among the men accused, most were Sami.²⁶ Sami men were well versed in sorcery, as European readers might learn from Olaus Magnus's *History of the Nordic Peoples*.²⁷ Sami sorcery was targeted at the very beginning and the very end of the Finnmark witch-hunt.²⁸ During the middle period, the time of panics, from 1620 until 1663, however, most of the accused and persecuted were Norwegian women.²⁹

As witchcraft was a crime impossible to prove, circumstantial evidence was used to press forth confessions. The outcome of the water ordeal was often used as evidence, as it was held to be God's judgment. The procedure consisted of throwing the accused person into the sea with his or her hands and feet tied. Water, which was considered a sacred element, was thought to repel evil, so the suspect's rising to the surface and floating was an indication of guilt. Sinking was a sign of innocence. The water ordeal was not defined as torture by the judicial authorities. Fifty per cent of the water ordeals during the Finnmark witchcraft trials were carried out in Vardø. One-third of all who were executed in connection with the witchcraft trials in Finnmark, but only two of the men, were subjected to the water ordeal, and every one of them floated.

The Orkney witchcraft trials

During the Orkney witchcraft trials, 72 persons were accused of witchcraft, nine-tenths were women and one-tenth men.³⁰ The major trials took place in the course of 30 years between 1615 and 1645, and included three witchcraft panics, 1615-16, 1633, and 1643-45. Demonological ideas were known in Orkney around 1615, when the first witchcraft panic was in progress³¹ However, demonological ideas did not get a foothold in Orkney, as they did in Finnmark, and so the witchcraft panics became less intense. Most of the early and late witchcraft trials were single trials, few and scattered, and dealt with *maleficium*. Like the Finnmark trials, the confessions in Orkney witchcraft trials were rich in details of ideas about witchcraft as well as folkloric ideas. For a more detailed presentation of the Orkney witchcraft trials, see the article by Helen Woodsford-Dean and Ragnhild Ljosland in this volume.

²³ Willumsen 2008, 93, 96.

²⁴ Willumsen 2013b, 267.

²⁵ Willumsen 2008, 107.

²⁶ Willumsen 2008, 106-8.

²⁷ Olaus Magnus, *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* (Rome, 1555).

²⁸ Willumsen 2010, 13.

²⁹ Liv Helene Willumsen, *Steilneset: Memorial to the Victims of the Finnmark Witchcraft Trials* (Oslo, 2011), 20-98.

³⁰ Willumsen 2008, 150.

³¹ Willumsen, 2013a, 161.

The Steilneset Memorial

The Steilneset Memorial was built to commemorate the victims of the Finnmark witchcraft trials in the 17th century. The memorial was opened in June 2011 by Her Royal Majesty Queen Sonja of Norway. The idea of building a memorial to the victims of the Finnmark witchcraft trials arose in connection with the Millennium celebration, when Vardø was chosen as Finnmark County Council's Millennium site. As the severe persecution of alleged witches in the 17th century was a significant historical event in the county, it was decided that the victims of the witch-hunt in Finnmark should be commemorated by building a memorial at Steilneset. It took time to realise this project, and it was not until funding was made available from The National Tourist Routes of Norway, which is under the auspices of the Norwegian Government and the Norwegian National Assembly, that the project developed rapidly. The remit of The Norwegian Public Roads Administration is to ensure that a total of 18 roads, running from north to south through beautiful and ever-changing scenery, attract international attention. The staff of National Tourist Routes proposed engaging the Swiss architect Peter Zumthor and the French/American artist and sculptor Louise Bourgeois in the work to create the memorial. These ideas eventually led to a collaboration between Peter Zumthor and Louise Bourgeois.

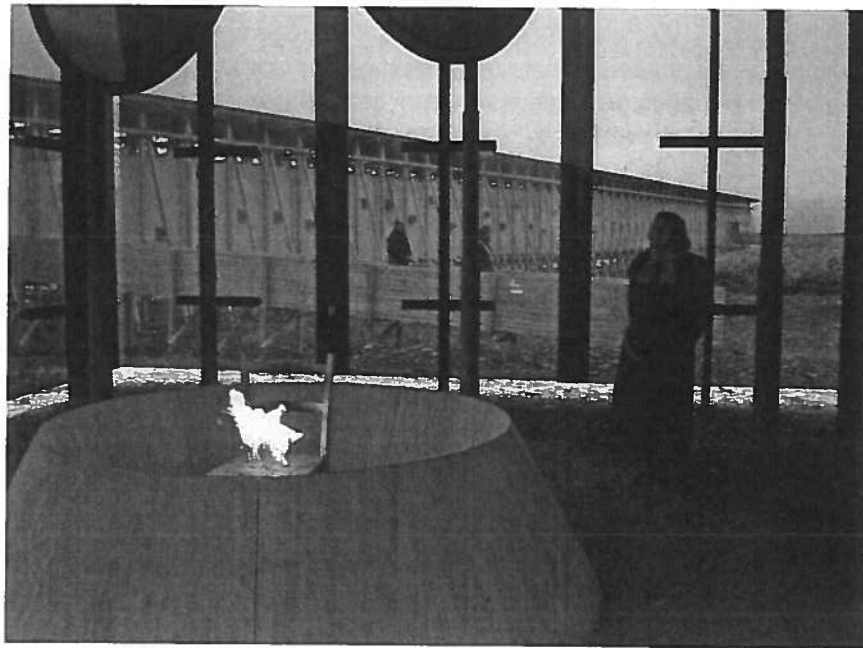


Illustration 16 Steilneset Memorial, art installation made by Louise Bourgeois.
Photo: Tomas Willumsen Vassdal.

The Steilneset Memorial consists of two buildings made by Peter Zumthor. One of the buildings is a glass pavilion, which contains a piece of installation made by Louise Bourgeois, entitled *The Damned, the Possessed and the Beloved*. The installation consists of a chair with five flames in the middle, and with seven mirrors constructed above. The mirrors reflect the chair. However, each mirror is placed at a different angle towards the chair, so that the reflected images of the chair all become different. When the visitor walks around the chair, he or she is also reflected in the mirrors, and in this way drawn into the art installation. Meg Harris Williams says: 'The mirrors looking down on the conflagration are the eyes of the voyers – but if we catch our own reflection we can see the Medusa within'.³²

³² Williams 2014, 29.

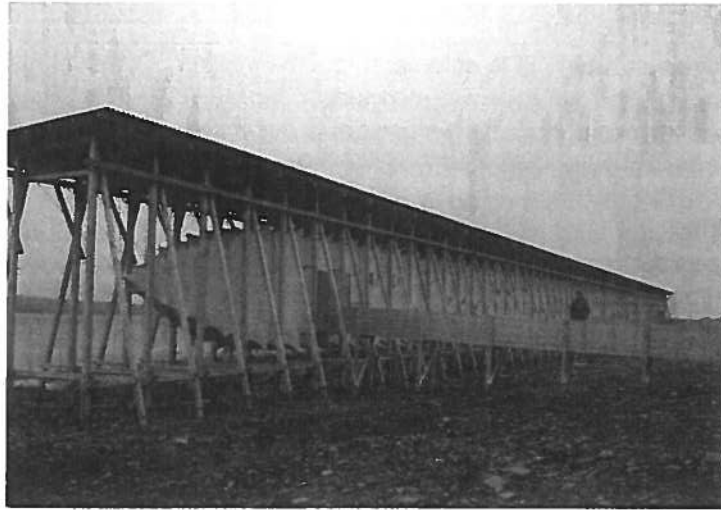


Illustration 17 Steilneset Memorial, long building. Architect: Peter Zumthor.
Photo: Liv Helene Willumsen.

The other building is 135m long, constructed as a narrow corridor. The walls are made of a fabric which gives the building a soft and warm appearance. Inside the building, 91 small windows and 91 light bulbs symbolize the victims of the trials along with 91 text panels. The panels contain texts about each of the victims of the Finnmark witchcraft trials, with the name of the victim at the top, details from the development of the trial given, and with the voice of each person rendered as it emerged in the confession. All panels are written by the historian Liv Helene Willumsen, giving each of the 91 victims executed during the Finnmark witchcraft trials an individual remembrance.



Illustration 18 Steilneset Memorial, text exhibition made by Liv Helene Willumsen.
Photo: Tomas Willumsen Vassdal.

The Steilneset Memorial is part of the history of Finnmark and Vardø, but also a symbol of the oppression which took place some four hundred years ago at this site. The fundamental idea of the memorial project is to honour the women and men who lost their lives during the witchcraft trials, which haunted Norway and primarily Finnmark. The memorial is based upon the historical facts found in court records dating back several centuries, which tell a story of systematic brutality and oppression due to ideological persecution. The accused were ordinary people who

lived in the villages, in small settlements where suspicion and envy were an intrinsic part of everyday life. Women in these settlements were particularly vulnerable to witchcraft accusations.

The Orkney Memorial

The Orkney Memorial in Kirkwall was unveiled in 2019. It consists of a stone carved by Colin Watson, a retired stonemason of St Magnus Cathedral. For the background and content of the memorial see the article by Helen Woodsford-Dean and Ragnhild Ljosland on pages 2-18 above.

The two Memorials

There are similarities as well as differences between the two memorials. An important similarity lies in the open invitation they both extend to the public. Both memorials are located in the open public space, reaching out to visitors day and night. A visible location in the landscape is a predominant feature of these memorials, whether, as in Kirkwall, it is placed in a landscape overlooking the sea and framed by the houses of the town, or, as in Vardø, at an island's shore, somewhat withdrawn from the houses of the village. In both cases they are accessible to visitors coming by at any time.

Both memorials are built on 17th century execution sites. The landscapes around the Steilneset Memorial and the Orkney Memorial that we see today are the same landscapes as the victims of the witchcraft trials last saw before they were executed: in Finnmark, Steilneset place of execution in Vardø, in Orkney, the Gallow Ha in Kirkwall. In the long building at Steilneset, the boundaries are blurred between inside and outside, as the grass is growing through the planks of the floor in summer. The small windows in the long corridor represent an opening out to the sea, the sky, and the field. In Orkney, the old Gallow Ha is today a small green, where grass and flowers grow next to the memorial. The sites where the convicted persons ended their lives, are locations that bring us close to the historical event. Each site complements the emotional impact of the memorial itself and establishes a tie between the 1600s and today.

Other bridging elements across the centuries are firstly the image of the sun-dial at the gravestone of Patrick Prince in St Magnus Cathedral, and secondly the original court records of the 17th century witchcraft trials underlying the panel texts at Steilneset. The image of the sun-dial is used in the carving of the Orkney Memorial stone. The primary historical sources of the Finnmark witchcraft trials are documents dating back to the 1600s, and give information not only about what happened during the witchcraft trials, but also first-hand information of courtroom discourse. These elements create genuine historical rooting as well as continuity.

Both memorials are artistic works of high esthetic quality. Although the scales of the memorials differ, both are built of exquisite materials, and the form is clean and simple. Simplicity, in the sense that everything unnecessary is peeled away, removed, is a characteristic feature for both memorials. The simplicity is a predominant quality of Peter Zumthor's long building at Steilneset, where the symbolism to support the text panels inside the long corridor consists of one small window and one bulb for each victim. The balance between the text panels and the architectural features is perfect. The entire room is dedicated commemoration of the victims, and nothing is there to compete with this or draw attention away from this. The Orkney Memorial is similarly very simple in its form, and made of stone material, wonderfully carved by the stonemason Colin Watson. Beautiful material, coming from nature, reflecting nature, strong and lasting. The image of the sun-dial is simple, but still expressive, and the meaning condensed. The balance between the text, the image, and the entire memorial, is working well.

Precision is another keyword with regard to the two memorials. Beate Hølmebakk, in her article on the Steilneset Memorial, quotes Robbe-Grillet's writing on the work of Franz Kafka on this

point: 'The hallucinatory effect derives from the extraordinary clarity and not from mystery or mist. Nothing is more fantastic ultimately than precision.'³³ This assertion, which to many is surprising, comes from Robbe-Grillet's writing on the work of Franz Kafka.³⁴ The quote is an appropriate key for entering the realm of witchcraft and architecture. 'To most people the term precision, in the context of architecture, relates to architectural details and craftsmanship. Sharp edges, smooth transitions and meetings of materials that are well thought out and beautifully made. Nothing arbitrary and nothing left unresolved.'³⁵ The same words could be used about the Orkney Memorial. The artist has carved a stone with the uttermost precision and perseverance. Every detail has been attended to, every line deliberately cut in order to complete the memorial. The ambition to create a piece of art, be that through carving, architecture, installation, is the same for the professionals who have been working with the two memorials.

Moving on from the elements of form and esthetic qualities related to form, when it comes to content the text of a memorial is central: the words are used to reach out to unknown visitors, to explain the agony of the victims of the witchcraft trials. Also with regards to this, in principle we see clear similarities between the Steilneset Memorial and the Orkney Memorial. The emphasis is on lived life, life brought too early to an end. For both, the text signifies that the victims of the witchcraft trials were common people, like you and me. They were caught up in a severe persecution of alleged witch people, and convicted for a 'crime' that only existed in the minds of the authorities.

At the Steilneset Memorial, 91 panels emphasize this point, that the victims of the witchcraft trials were ordinary people living in the fishing villages. At the Orkney Memorial, one sentence states the same: 'They were just folk.', in the Orcadian language: '*They Wur Cheust Folk*.'³⁶ To carry forth this message in a strong way is important when working with witchcraft trials, as many competing interpretations exist when it comes to presenting the witchcraft trials and the persons accused of witchcraft in the 17th century.

The Orkney Memorial has one sentence in addition to the one mentioned above: 'In Memory of Those Accused of Witchcraft.' For visitors this is necessary information, as many of them would not know in advance that witchcraft trials took place in Orkney. However, also this sentence is neutral and simple. As for the Steilneset Memorial, all panels consist of texts which are condensed and 'peeled' with regard to superfluous words and language elements. However, the meaning is preserved. The fundamental text expression at both memorials is withdrawal rather than sensation, modest words rather than big words, neutrality rather than speculation, historical correctness rather than exaggerated inventions. This linguistic mode is a way of showing respect for the victims, a way to honor those people who got such a harsh fate some 400 years ago. The way the texts are formed, the way the message is conveyed, is down-to-earth, quiet, careful, and rinsed for sentimentality.

The scale is different of the two memorials. As for the Steilneset Memorial, the scale made it possible to use a large amount of words in the text exhibition. The source material was court records from the 1600s, written in Danish, which was the official language in Denmark-Norway in the 17th century, and with a style suitable for legal documents. After the union with Denmark

³³ Beate Hølmebakk, 'What architecture can do – Peter Zumthor's Memorial at Steilneset', in Reidun Laura Andreassen & Liv Helene Willumsen, *Steilneset Memorial: Art, Architecture, History* (Stamsund, 2014), 49-56, at p.53. Ref. A. Robbe-Grillet, *For a New Novel: Essays on Fiction* (Evanston, Ill., 1989), 165.

³⁴ Robbe-Grillet 1989, 165.

³⁵ Hølmebakk 2014, 53.

³⁶ I refer to the article on pages 2-18 above written by Helen Woodsford-Dean and Ragnhild Ljosland, including pictures of the sketch of the Memorial and the finished Memorial.

was ended in 1814, Norway got its own language. The new text panels are written in Norwegian. When working with the writing of the text panels, it was imperative to cut down the amount of words to enable each case to be read, but also to change the style in order to make it accessible for today's visitors. This meant cutting down and compressing the language. However, equally important for me when working with the texts was that I wanted to give each person a voice, I wanted to show them as individuals, not as a number in a row. The part of the trial where the voice of each accused person comes clearly to the fore, is the confession. In order for the legal apparatus to sentence a person to death, this person must have given a confession. This confession was given during interrogation, often in response to leading questions. When working with the court records, I tried to 'listen out' for the voice of the accused person, listen to their words and the accent of their voice. Each person's confession thus became the foundation for a personalised part of the individual text panel. Through the confessions, it is possible to get a glimpse of ideas of witchcraft, demonological ideas as well as *maleficium*. Thus, the confessions display features of the mentality at the time; common people's view and knowledge and understanding of the world. This is rare to get hold of for the 1600s, a time when common people were not written much about.

In which way do we think about Memorials? What should a memorial display? How can a society through the raising of a memorial show a sense of repentance? How should a memorial approach the visitors? The Steilneset Memorial shows two ways of understanding and working with painful history: one way expressing fury and anger, and one way expressing reflection and thoughtfulness.

As for the Steilneset memorial, the art installation made by Louise Bourgeois is the component of the Memorial which expresses sorrow and feelings in a strong and wild way. She said: 'I have faith in the symbolic action'.³⁷ As an artist working with traumas, Bourgeois sees the symbolic action as opposite to the literal action: 'In the service of art, the artist is a kind of mediator who is used by their own inspiration on behalf of society'.³⁸ The artist is a helper in the process of healing a wound. Meg Harris Williams says about the flame of the art installation at Steilneset: 'The flame is both the spirit of the dead and the life of the future, which is full of potentiality if it can be remembered constructively by visitors.' The art installation at Steilneset is to a certain extent fierce and aggressive, for all the injustice done, but it has in it an openness for learning and change towards a novel epoch.

Then there are the other components of the Steilneset Memorial: architecture and history. These components complement the fierce flames of the art installation. The architectural and textual simplicity of Steilneset is a counterpart to the art installation, but in its own language, the same symbolism of healing is emphasized: what is expressed through architecture and panel texts will be a help for remembrance in a respectful way. At this point, the long building of Steilneset appears as a parallel to the Orkney Memorial, where the solid stone with the beautiful carving has an expression of sorrow and grief, but also, through the exact lines and the beauty, the esthetic expression gives signals of hope and faith. To build a memorial for the victims of the witchcraft trials is a symbolic action, an outcry for injustice and misuse of power, but also a hope for healing and continuance – for a whole society and beyond.

Connecting to the world of today

Both memorials are based on historical events. They have historical sources as a fundament, a core of the interpretation. Thus, the memorials point backwards in time and the component of painful history is marked. Still, the memorials also point forwards, to events going on today.

³⁷ Williams 2014, 29.

³⁸ Williams 2014, 28.

The content of the memorials emphasise mechanisms coming to the fore during the witchcraft persecution of the 1600s. The contents also emphasise that the victims were ordinary people, not dangerous witches. The memorials are also reminders of similar persecutions still taking place elsewhere in the world, and thus connect to parallel assaults today. Persecution of alleged witches still takes place several places in the world, on the African continent and in the Far East, and always with women as the more vulnerable gender.³⁹ The content of the memorials, particularly Steilneset, also points in direction of human rights issues, for instance the use of torture to force confessions. The Steilneset Memorial and the Orkney Memorial are warnings about persecution of innocent people, statements about what we should not tolerate. By raising these memorials in the public space, their contents attract attention and increase our consciousness and alertness about painful history, at the same time as they become a kind of exclamation marks for future historical events that we do not want to happen.

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³⁹ Randi Rønning Balsvik, 'Religious Beliefs and Witches in Contemporary Africa', in Reidun Laura Andreassen and Liv Helene Willumsen, *Steilneset Memorial: Art, Architecture, History* (Stamsund, 2014), 89-99.