

## **Avaldsnes – A Sea-Kings' Manor in First-Millennium Western Scandinavia**

# **Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde – Ergänzungsbände**



Herausgegeben von  
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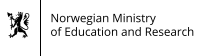
# **Avaldsnes – A Sea-Kings' Manor in First-Millennium Western Scandinavia**

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Dagfinn Skre

## Preface

Avaldsnes (Old Norse *Qgvaldsnes* – Qgvaldr's headland), situated on the island of Kormt off the south-western coast of Norway, is mentioned frequently in the Old Norse literature as the setting for dramatic and decisive events involving the first Norwegian kings. The first King of Norway, Haraldr hárfagri, is supposedly buried in the vicinity. For these reasons, since the 16th century, the site has captivated the interest of artists, antiquarians, and historians (Skre, Chs. 2, 23).

However, except for the rich finds in the Flaghaug grave mound excavated 1834–5, archaeologists have paid the site only limited attention. This changed following the accidental discovery of a subterranean passageway, excavated in 1985–6. The find raised considerable interest locally and among researchers at the regional Archaeological Museum in Stavanger.

The increased popular interest in Avaldsnes' history resonated among local politicians. Development of roads and housing in the Avaldsnes area prompted them to initiate an overall plan for the area, and Marit Synnøve Vea of Karmøy Municipality's Culture Section was assigned the task of drafting the strategy. In 1993 she completed the report 'Proposal on the Avaldsnes Project' (Framlegg om Avaldsnesprosjektet).

The report proposed as the plan's aims three main goals: protection of cultural heritage, promotion of understanding of the past, and development of tourism. To those ends, the report called for construction of a visitors' centre and establishment of a research programme to produce new knowledge regarding Avaldsnes. The latter would require the involvement of scholarly institutions – universities, museums, and colleges (Vea 1993:7–10).

The plan was approved by the municipal council, and Vea was appointed director of the municipality's Avaldsnes Project. The Archaeological Museum in Stavanger was designated as the project's point of contact with the archaeological community. In 1993 professor of archaeology Bjørn Myhre became the museum's director and main contact for the project. In 1994 the municipality invited the museum to produce a research plan for Avaldsnes. A group of 11 specialists – most employed at the museum, with research interests spanning the Stone Age to the Medieval Period – were assembled to design the plan, which was published the following year (Lillehammer 1995).

Although the proposed four-year project was never launched as planned, several archaeological surveys were conducted by the Archaeological Museum in Stavanger in the following years (Bauer and Østmo, Ch. 5). Additionally, the municipality organised several geophysical surveys (Stamnes and Bauer, Ch. 16). These efforts were funded by the museum, Karmøy Municipality, and the local benefactor Sigurd Steen Aase.

In 2004 the municipality decided to extend its contacts within the archaeological community. They invited a group of Scandinavian specialists to form a steering com-

mittee together with representatives from the municipality and from the Archaeological Museum in Stavanger. The group assigned top priority to finding the Viking Age royal-manor farmyard. The museum conducted survey excavations for this purpose in 2005 and 2006; in the second year settlement remains from the Viking Period were identified under the car park just south of the St Óláfr's Church (Bauer and Østmo, Figs. 5.1–2)

Following the discovery, the municipality invited the editor of the present volume to organise an excavation and research project at the University of Oslo. There, the Avaldsnes Royal Manor (ARM) Project was first hosted by the Institute of Archaeology, Conservation Studies and History and since 2010 by the Museum of Cultural History. The project's funding, in total 34 million NOK, was supplied by Karmøy Municipality, which in turn received considerable contributions from Rogaland County Council and from the regional businesses enumerated in this book's colophon page. As these words are being written, preparations are underway for the excavation in the coming summer of the remains of a late 13th- or early 14th-century masonry building discovered in 2012, made possible by a NOK 5.4-million grant from the Norwegian government.

The ARM Project's research and excavation plans (Skre, Ch. 4; Bauer and Østmo, Ch. 5) were developed in the 2007–9 pilot project, which also collected and analysed documentary and archaeological evidence. Excavation took place 2011–12 in close collaboration regarding facilities and logistics with the municipality, and regarding artefactual finds with the Archaeological Museum, which by that time had become a part of the University of Stavanger. Post-excavation work continued into early 2013, when the publication phase started. Two volumes are planned from the project in addition to several papers in academic journals.

To my knowledge, Karmøy is the only municipality in Norway ever to set up an archaeological research agenda. They have demonstrated untiring dedication in realising the visionary ideas first articulated by Veia twenty-five years ago. Of the many who have contributed to making this possible, three were instrumental: the director of the municipality's Avaldsnes Project Marit Synnøve Veia, the benefactor Sigurd Steen Aase, and Kjell Arvid Svendsen, mayor of Karmøy 1996–2011. It was my utter good fortune in 2004 to have met by chance this trio who devoted themselves to the task of generating funding and support for the ARM Project. They imposed but one expectation on the ARM Project's results: an adherence to the highest professional standards, an inspiration throughout. The two subsequent mayors, Aase Simonsen (2011–15) and Jarle Nilsen (2015–present) have embraced the project with enthusiasm, generating funding for the publication phase and the coming excavation of the masonry building.

A number of people employed in Karmøy Municipality and Karmøy Kulturopplevelser – I cannot possibly mention all of them – have contributed in every possible way to the excavation's success. Cooperation with the local representatives of the Church of Norway and the owner of the Avaldsnes manor, Opplysningsvesenets fond, as well as

their tenant, has been smooth and amiable. Support from Rogaland County Council, both financial and political, has been substantial. Throughout the excavations and publication phases, cooperation with the Directorate for Cultural Heritage (Riksantikvaren) and the Archaeological Museum, University of Stavanger, has been entirely positive and productive.

The ARM Project has included a Project Council and an Advisory Board. Members of both bodies are listed in Appendix I; one of whom merits particular mention: Professor Knut Helle. Until he passed away in 2015 he offered strong support and substantial scholarly contributions to the project. Uncompromising in seeking quality, he was always open to discuss new ideas and perspectives. I dedicate this book to his memory.

The research efforts presented in this volume enable the delineation of Avaldsnes' history into three phases. During the first phase, sea kings used Avaldsnes as a base for dominating the islands and waters along the coastal sailing route. Around AD 900, one of the sea kings rose to become a land king, the first King of Norway, ushering in the second phase. The third phase began around AD 1400, when the manor became the rectory for the vicar of St Óláfr Church, as it has since remained. With the Karmøy Municipality's heavy investments in research and dissemination at Avaldsnes, a fourth phase is immanent. The site's history, significant far beyond the local, regional, and national levels, is reclaiming Qgvaldr's headland.

Dagfinn Skre  
Oslo, March 2017





# Table of content

Preface — V

Abbreviations — XIII

## Section A Scholarly Background

Dagfinn Skre

**1 Rethinking Avaldsnes and Kormt — 3**

Dagfinn Skre

**2 Exploring Avaldsnes 1540–2005 — 11**

Else Mundal

**3 Avaldsnes and Kormt in Old Norse Written Sources — 35**

Dagfinn Skre

**4 The Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project's Research Plan  
and Excavation Objectives — 53**

## Section B Excavation Results 2011–12

Egil Lindhart Bauer and Mari Arentz Østmo

**5 Excavations and Surveys 1985–2012 — 65**

Mari Arentz Østmo and Egil Lindhart Bauer

**6 Site Periods and Key Contexts — 83**

Mari Arentz Østmo and Egil Lindhart Bauer

**7 The Prehistoric Settlement and Buildings — 103**

Egil Lindhart Bauer and Mari Arentz Østmo

**8 Prehistoric Agriculture — 137**

Mari Arentz Østmo

**9 The Production Area — 157**

Egil Lindhart Bauer

**10 Two Iron Age Boathouses — 183**

Mari Arentz Østmo

**11 A Late Iron Age Palisade Facing the Karmsund Strait — 209**

Mari Arentz Østmo and Egil Lindhart Bauer

**12 Grave Monuments at Avaldsnes — 227**

Egil Lindhart Bauer

**13 Political and Ritual Aspects of Cooking Pits — 253**

Egil Lindhart Bauer

**14 The High Medieval Royal Manor — 277**

Egil Lindhart Bauer

**15 The Post-Medieval Rectory — 309**

**Section C Scientific Analyses 2011–12**

Arne Anderson Stamnes and Egil Lindhart Bauer

**16 Geophysical Surveys — 327**

Richard I. Macphail and Johan Linderholm

**17 Microstratigraphy (Soil Micromorphology and Microchemistry, Soil Chemistry, and Magnetic Susceptibility) — 379**

Rebecca J. S. Cannell, Paul N. Cheetham and Kate Welham

**18 Geochemical analysis using portable X-ray fluorescence — 421**

Rachel Ballantyne, Stella Macheridis, Emma Lightfoot,  
and Alice Williams

**19 Biological Remains — 455**

**Section D Specialist Studies**

Mari Arentz Østmo

**20 Artefacts from the 2011–12 Excavations — 513**

Elna Siv Kristoffersen and Åsa Dahlin Hauken

**21 Migration Period Pottery from Avaldsnes: A Study of Shards from Bucket-shaped Pots — 527**

Frans-Arne H. Stylegar and Håkon Reiersen

**22 The Flaghaug Burials — 551**

Dagfinn Skre

**23 The Raised Stones — 639**

Stefan Brink

**24 Avaldsnes, Kormt and Rogaland. A Toponymy and Landscape Survey — 665**

Torun Zachrisson

**25 Depositional Traditions in Iron Age Kormt — 687**

Frode Iversen

**26 Emerging Kingship in the 8th Century? New Datings of three Courtyard Sites in Rogaland — 721**

**Section E Avaldsnes: a Sea-Kings' Manor**

Dagfinn Skre

**27 Aristocratic Presence along the Karmsund Strait 2000 BC–AD 1368 — 749**

Dagfinn Skre

**28 The Warrior Manor — 765**

Dagfinn Skre

**29 Sea Kings on the Norðvegr — 781**

**References**

**Appendices**

**References — 803**

**Appendix I: The ARM Project Council, Advisory Group, Staff, and Authors — 861**

**Appendix II: Radiocarbon dates — 867**



# Abbreviations

A-ID [number] = Inventory number in the Norwegian archaeological site database Askeladden:

<https://askeladden.ra.no/>

AM, AmS = Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

ARM Project = Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

B[number] = Inventory number, University Museum of Bergen

Ber. RGK = *Bericht der Römisch-Germanischen Kommission*. Philipp von Zabern. Mainz am Rhein.

Beta-[number] = AMS radiocarbon dating, Beta Analytic, Florida, USA

C[number] = Inventory number, Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo

DI = *Diplomatarium Islandicum*, 1–16. 1857–1976. Bókmentafélag. Kaupmannahöfn. [NB! Number (e. g. DI 2:543) always indicates the document number, not page.]

DN = *Diplomatarium Norvegicum. Oldbreve til Kundskab om Norges indre og ydre Forhold, Sprog, Slægter, Sæder, Lovgivning og Rettergang i Middelalderen*, 1–22. 1847–1995. Kristiania. [NB! Number (e. g. DN I:543) always indicates the document number, not page.]

FAO = World Soil Resources: [www.fao.org/ag/agl/agll/wrb/soilres.stm#down](http://www.fao.org/ag/agl/agll/wrb/soilres.stm#down).

ID = A-ID

ISKF = Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning. Oslo.

KHM = Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo.

KLNM = *Kulturhistorisk Leksikon for Nordisk Middelalder fra vikingtid til reformasjonstid*, 1–22. 1956–1978. Copenhagen.

MCH = KHM

NF = Nicolaysen 1862–6

NG = Oluf Rygh 1897–1924: *Norske Gaardnavne*, 1–17. Kristiania

NGL = *Norges gamle Love indtil 1387*, 1–4. 1846–95. Kristiana.

NGU = Geological Survey of Norway.

NIKU = Norsk institutt for kulturminneforskning.

NRJ = H.J. Huitfeldt-Kaas and A.O. Johnsen (eds.) 1885–1906: *Norske Regnskaber og Jordebøger fra det 16de Aarhundrede (1514–1570)*, 1–4. Kjeldeskriftfondet. Kristiana.

NSL = J. Sandnes and O. Stemshaug (eds.) 1997: *Norsk stadnamleksikon*, 4th edn., Oslo.

NTNU = Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim.

OAS = *Oslo arkeologiske serie*, 2003–10. Unipub. Oslo.

ON = Old Norse

ONP = Ordliste over det norrønne prosasprog, [http://onp.ku.dk/adgang\\_til\\_ordliste\\_etc/ordliste\\_og\\_citater/](http://onp.ku.dk/adgang_til_ordliste_etc/ordliste_og_citater/)

OPIA = *Occasional Papers in Archaeology*, 1989–. Societas Archaeologica Upsaliensis, Uppsala.

R[number] = Illustration in Oluf Rygh 1885: *Norske Oldsager*. Cammermeyer. Kristiana.

RGA = *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*, 1–37. 2nd edn. 1973–2008. De Gruyter. Berlin/New York.

RGAE = *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde – Ergänzungsbände*. De Gruyter. Berlin/New York and Berlin/Boston.

RN = *Regesta Norvegica*. 1–10, 1989–2015. Riksarkivet, Kjeldeskriftavdelingen. Oslo. [NB! Number (e. g. RN 2:543) always indicates the document number, not page.]

S[number] = Inventory number, Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger

SHM[number] = Inventory number, The Swedish History Museum, Stockholm

T-[number] = Conventional radiocarbon datings, NTNU, Trondheim

T[number] = Inventory number, NTNU, Museum of Natural History and Archaeology, Trondheim

TRa-[number] = AMS radiocarbon datings, NTNU, Trondheim.

TUa-[number] = AMS radiocarbon dating samples prepared at NTNU and dated at Uppsala University

#### **XIV** — Abbreviations

Ua-[number] = AMS radiocarbon datings, Uppsala University

UMB = University Museum, University of Bergen

UOÅ = Universitetets Oldsaksamling, Årbok

WCD = *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*.  
Merriam-Webster. Springfield, Mass.

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## Section A **Scholarly Background**





Dagfinn Skre

# 1 Rethinking Avaldsnes and Kormt

Avaldsnes is among a select group of Scandinavian sites to feature repeatedly in the Old Norse literature (Fig. 1.1; Mundal, Ch. 3; Brink, Ch. 22). Upon closer examination, such sites tend to be rich in archaeological monuments and finds dating to the time periods referred to in the saga accounts and skaldic verses. Further back in time, fewer such sites show up, and more often the accounts take on the cast of legends.

For instance, it is fairly easy to connect the urban topography revealed through more than 150 years of archaeological excavations in high-medieval Oslo with the sites, streets, and buildings mentioned in, for example, the early 13th-century King Sverris saga, written only a few years after the events. Less obvious is the correspondence between Snorri's statements regarding the founding of Oslo by King Haraldr harðráði in the mid-11th century and the archaeology of the urban remains there dating back to around AD 1000. What can be made of the account in Egill Skallagrímsson's saga of Egill's sacking of Lund in Skåne in the mid-10th century, at which time the town Lund did not exist? Was 'Lund' at the time of Egill's visit the name of the site that is now called Uppåkra, a huge 1st–10th-century aristocratic settlement some 4 kilometres south of the town (Andrén 1998)? Skiringssalr in Othere's account from c. 890 is securely identified as the 9th-century town Kaupang in Vestfold (Skre 2007c), and Lejre mentioned repeatedly in Beowulf is evidently the site near Roskilde in Sjælland where several hall buildings from the 7th–10th centuries have been excavated (Christensen 2015). Uppsala, mentioned in *Ynglingatal* and by Saxo Grammaticus, is securely identified as Old Uppsala with its huge 7th-century mounds, several raised platforms with remains of hall buildings, and the recently discovered one-kilometre row of posts (Ljungkvist et al. 2011; Jörpeland et al. 2013). However, it remains an uncertain endeavour to establish a connection between these unique and highly impressive monuments and the row of twenty kings that according to *Ynglingatal* ruled there, the first of whom was purportedly a son of the god Frey.

Although connections between monuments and more or less legendary accounts in sagas and poems necessarily remain obscure, they are the rule rather than the exception. Uppsala is but one example; others are the locations where Odin and his following, according to Snorri's *Ynglingasaga*, resided on their way through Scandinavia to Uppsala, namely Fornsigtuna and Fyn. In Fornsigtuna two large hall buildings on raised platforms (Hedman 1991) have been found, and in Gudme on Fyn an early Iron Age aristocratic settlement with prestigious finds and large central hall building have been excavated (Nielsen et al. 1994). Thus, the written evidence should not be dismissed as untrustworthy, but rather be involved in careful attempts to connect the two types of evidence. Fruitful results have emerged from such undertakings (e.g., regarding Uppsala, see Sundqvist 2002).



**Fig. 1.1:** Avaldsnes, Old Norse Qgvaldsnes ('Qgvaldr's headland'), seen towards the south-south-east. The archaeological evidence retrieved by the ARM Project 2011–12 is found near the St Óláfr Church, commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson c. 1250. The sheltered sailing route along the western Scandinavian coast, the Norðveg, here protected from the ocean in the west by the island of Kormt, Old Norse Kqrmt ('low protective wall', to the right in the photo), runs just past the site. The route continues southwards past the conspicuous mountain seen in the distance. Its name, Bokn, meaning 'sign, signal' and related to the English 'beacon', most probably owes to its visible appearance in the flat coastal landscape (Skre, Ch. 29:782–4), which made for a useful navigational mark (Brink, Ch. 24:668). Photo: KIB media.

Avaldsnes is one of the sites connected in sagas and poems to prominent persons and their activities. Accounts that involve historical persons that occurred only a century or two before the time when they were written down can be treated as relatively historically reliable. For example, the tale of Ásbjörn selsbani (Mundal, Ch. 3), despite Snorri's literary embellishment, appears to be based on the actual murder of one of King Óláfr inn helgi's men at Avaldsnes committed by Ásbjörn, a relative of the prominent men Þórir hundr and Erlingr Skjálǫgsson. Detailed analyses of the texts are necessary to identify trustworthy elements (Mundal, Ch. 3; Skre, Ch. 27:761–4).

Less trustworthy are those saga accounts that have a legendary or folkloric form, contain elements borrowed from other literary works, or occur in a less precisely defined distant past, apparently at least 5–6 centuries before they were written down. To this category belongs the tale of King Qgvaldr and his cow that always accompanied him – the story contains all the elements of a legend.

As Mundal points out (Ch 3:45–6), traditions regarding significant persons of a



**Fig. 1.2:** Prominent aristocratic sites in first-millennium Scandinavia mentioned in Chapters 1, 4, and 28. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

distant past are often ‘drawn’ to sites that are coincidentally known to have been prominent in a more recent past. Avaldsnes’ status as a royal manor from the 10th century onwards may have inspired saga writers of the 13th–14th centuries to set their stories about a more distant past at Avaldsnes. However, the likelihood of such tales reflecting a historical reality increases in light of the archaeological evidence of an aristocratic presence there from the 3rd century onwards, although not necessarily continuously (Skre, Ch. 27). Moreover, it appears that Avaldsnes had achieved a mythical status well before the 10th century (Mundal, Ch. 3:36–7; Skre, Ch. 28:777–8). As such, the sequence of causality in the explanation above may be inverted: the site’s mythical status, probably established in the site’s first heyday in the 3rd–4th centuries, may itself have drawn men of power and ambition to settle there and to bury their predecessors nearby.



**Fig. 1.3:** In this book, Avaldsnes and the surrounding land in northern Kormt and on both sides of the Karmsund Strait constitute the primary area of study. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

These are but some of the deliberations developed in this volume. Although Avaldsnes has more than 450 years of research history (Skre, Ch. 2), the multifaceted scholarly challenges and possibilities in reconsidering Avaldsnes and Kormt have been the primary impetus for initiating the Avaldsnes Royal Manor (ARM) Project. In bringing to light a substantial corpus of archaeological material from the site, initiating a wide scope of scholarly research efforts, and revitalising the existing archaeological and written evidence, the project seeks to produce new insights into the history of Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait. This research is presented in the present volume. In the second volume, this knowledge will be used as a springboard to address some classic research questions in northern European history: the transformation through the first millennium AD of the Germanic tribal societies and the emergence of kingship. The details of the project's objectives and research plan are described in Chapter 4.

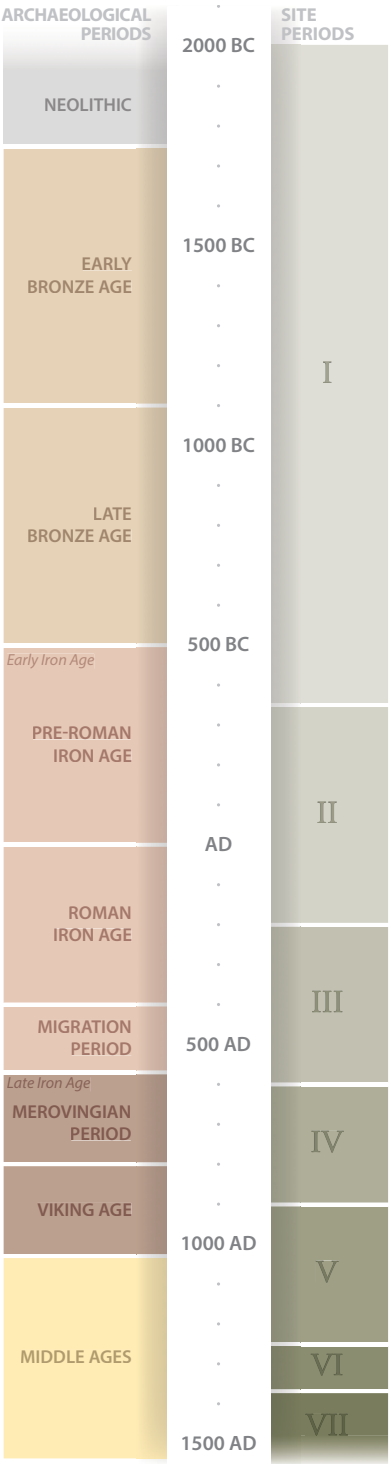
## 1.1 The content of this volume – a guide to readers

The book is divided in five sections. Section A (chapters 1–4) lays out the scholarly background for the research presented in the book. Section B (chapters 5–15) presents the results from the 2011–12 excavations in thematic chapters. Section C (chapters 16–19) presents scientific analyses from the excavations. Section D (chapters 20–26) presents specialist studies of relevant finds, sites, and place names from Avaldsnes, Kormt, and nearby. Section E (chapters 27–29) explores the research questions outlined in chapter 4 on the basis of the results from Sections A–D.

Readers may derive an overview of the book's content from the abstracts that introduce each chapter. Some readers will doubtless have special interest in specific chapters and sections. The general reader is advised to read section A *ad libitum*, and use chapter 6 as a key to excavation results and scientific analyses presented in sections B and C. The specialist studies in section D may also be read *ad libitum*, and are referred to in section E. Chapter 27 is based on the site chronology and main finds presented in chapter 6, while chapters 28–29 are more thematic.

The volume is extensively cross-referenced. These references appear in the following format: (Østmo, Ch. 9:163), indicating author, chapter number, and page; and (Østmo, Fig. 9.4), indicating this specific figure occurring in chapter 9. Initial capitals (Ch., Fig., Tab.) indicate that these are cross-references within the volume; references to chapters, figures, and tables in other publications are not capitalised.

All radiocarbon datings, both from 2011–12 and earlier campaigns, have been calibrated according to OxCal v4.2.3; they are listed with their respective calibration curves in Appendix II. When referred to in the text, datings are given in terms of the one sigma (68.2% probability) unless otherwise stated. If the one sigma spans more than one time interval, only the start of the earliest and end of the most recent is indi-



**Fig. 1.4:** This time line provides an overview of the standard chronological periods in west-Scandinavian archaeology (left) as well as the main chronological periods in the Avaldsnes site (Site Periods I–VII, right; see Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 6).  
Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

cated. For example, for the dating Beta-304876 where the one sigma spans the two periods AD 214–61 and 280–326, this is written as AD 214–326.

Place names are in generally written in their modern form and according to their native spelling, except where a name's Old Norse forms are discussed. With one notable exception: the form *Kormt* is used throughout the book, despite the island's current name of *Karmøy*. This is intended to avoid confusion with the modern *Karmøy Municipality*, which also encompasses other islands and a part of the mainland. *Kormt* corresponds to the island's Old Norse name *Kǫrmt*, a form used in local speech into the 20th century. Names of Old Norse literary works are spelled according to conventions in the specialist disciplines, as are names of persons mentioned therein.

Finally, the use throughout this book of *Norðvegr* ('the route to the north' or 'the northern route'; Brink, Ch. 24:667) as the reconstructed Old Norse form of the coastal sailing route's name is not meant to disregard the current debate on whether the original form could instead be *Nórvegr* ('the narrow route'; e. g. Myrvoll 2011)). In the context of this volume, the essential issue is that the route bore a name that became the name of the kingdom that was created around AD 900. The name's original form and meaning, and indeed the sailing route, will be discussed in detail in the second Avaldsnes volume.

### **Book acknowledgements:**

Copyediting and language revision of the present book has been undertaken by Anthony Zannino. Illustrations have been managed by Ingvild Tinglum Bøckman, who also has produced most of them (see captions). Maps of Norway are used under licence from The Norwegian Mapping Authority (Kartverket). Topographical data for Europe are obtained from Natural Earth Data. LiDAR data from Avaldsnes are produced by Blom Geonatics AS.





Dagfinn Skre

## 2 Exploring Avaldsnes 1540–2005

*Avaldsnes, Kormt, and the Karmsund Strait are frequently mentioned in the Old Norse written sources, often referred to as the residence and burial site of kings. The site has attracted the attention of scholars since the 16th century, first by the humanists who began to study the Old Norse texts; subsequently by historians and antiquarians, from the mid-19th century academic historians, and from the early 20th century joined by archaeologists. In this chapter, the significant contributions from this range of scholars are summarised.*

*The literature on Avaldsnes tends to adopt one of two perspectives: some scholars focus their analysis on evidence from the site itself, while others situate the site within discussions of broader societal or political issues. Summarising scholarship of the first type, this chapter traces how various types of evidence became available at different times and how scholars have shifted in their assessment of the evidence.*

*Discussions of the second type of scholarship identify the continuities and changes regarding the contexts in which Avaldsnes has been situated. One thread in particular has been winding its way through these 450 years of Avaldsnes research: the problem of why kings preferred to reside on the modestly fertile and windblown island of Kormt, rather than the lush densely populated regions further inland and along the fjords.*

*The most significant shift in the scholarship is seen in the integration of Avaldsnes within the research into the rikssamlingen ('the unification of the realm'). The unification process has a long research history, but one that before the early 20th century did not consider Avaldsnes' location on the outer coast. In the 1990s the scope of this research shifted from a national, narrowly 9th–10th-century perspective to a regionally North European, long-term perspective.*

*This literature review of Avaldsnes scholarship forms the foundation for the research strategy employed by the current research project, detailed in Chapters 4 and 5.*

As the medieval literary evidence gradually became known in the 16th–19th centuries, scholars realised that Avaldsnes appeared to have been a kings' seat for a millennium, that is, from the 'heroic age' until the death of Hákon Magnússon (1380), the last king of the medieval Norwegian kingdom. In the late 19th and 20th centuries, when archaeological finds and monuments could be identified and dated with increasing reliability, it became evident that prestigious sites and finds at Avaldsnes and Kormt were not limited to that millennium; rather, indicators of aristocratic presence extend back into the Bronze Age, and even to the late Stone Age, that is, over a period of more than 3,000 years.

However, the history of scholarship entails not only accumulating evidence, but also discarding it. For instance, until the 1860s, the *fornaldarsögur* were considered by scholars as the primary evidence regarding the Iron and Viking Ages; since P.A. Munch (1810–63), however, these sagas have hardly been deemed worthy of mentioning by scholars of those periods. Conversely, the archaeological record, ranked by most early scholars at best as support for the written evidence, has now attained a voice of its own.

Every scholar who has discussed Avaldsnes in a broader context has had to address

the fact that, over many centuries, kings preferred to reside on an island bordered by the open ocean to the west rather than the densely populated hinterland where agricultural yields were higher. Various theories were put forth during the first 300 years of Avaldsnes research; Johan Koren Christie's paper (1842) citing the site's position at the narrow Karmsund Strait, a bottleneck on the Norðvegr, the sheltered sailing route that connected the numerous dispersed settlement districts along the western Scandinavian coast and fjords, has apparently settled the question. However, the connection between Avaldsnes and the sea route has received different interpretations since Christie's paper.

Identifying and characterising these shifts over the 450 years of Avaldsnes scholarship is a central objective of this chapter. Thus, this chapter supplies one of the pillars that support the research efforts of the Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project; in particular, supplying the background for designing an adequate research strategy for the current project (Skre, Ch. 4).

This chapter will not discuss every scholarly work that in some way has mentioned Avaldsnes, only research that discusses the Avaldsnes site, the monuments there, and their location along the Karmsund Strait. While this includes nearly all scholarly writings on Avaldsnes up to c. 1850, from the subsequent period only those that have produced significant insights or were typical of their time will be mentioned.

## **2.1 Renaissance and early modern historians, c. 1540–1711**

### **2.1.1 Mattis Størssøn, Absalon Pederssøn Beyer, and Peder Claussøn Friis**

Mattis Størssøn's (ca. 1500–69) *Norske Kongers Krønike oc bedriff* ('The chronicles and achievements of Norwegian kings'), written in the 1540s (Jørgensen 1994:186–7) and printed in 1594, is for the most part a brief paraphrasing of Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. Størssøn was a law officer of the crown ('lagmann'), from c. 1533 in Agder on the southernmost tip of Norway, and from c. 1540 in Bergen. He held this office for the rest of his life (Sørli 1962:viii–ix).

As was common at the time, Størssøn based his work on written evidence; monuments are mentioned only in passing or not at all. Exceptionally, though, Størssøn mentioned the mound north of the St Óláfr's Church at Avaldsnes (1594:28):

King Haraldr hárfagri lived for three years after Eiríkr blóðøx had received the authority of the land, and King Haraldr died at Avaldsnes and was laid in the great mound north of the church.<sup>1</sup>

In his capacity as a royal official, Mattis Størssøn passed through Avaldsnes by the sea route on numerous occasions and would have seen the mound for himself (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12:231–5; Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22). Størssøn was of course familiar with Snorri's account of Haraldr's mound and its location (Mundal, Ch. 3:37–8); Snorri must have been his source for identifying the mound as Haraldr's.

Further evidence of this period's modest interest in historic sites and antiquities is to be found in the writings of another prominent figure: the priest Absalon Pederssøn Beyer (1528–75), who belonged to the same circle of historically interested humanists in Bergen. Beyer's manuscript, *Om Norgis Rige* ('About the Norwegian Realm'), written in the years 1567–70, was circulated, copied, and widely read before it was printed in 1781. His text on the early period is brief; the time before Haraldr hárfagri covers 3 pages (Beyer [1567–70] 1895:4–6). Beyer would have travelled numerous times past Avaldsnes on his voyages to Stavanger, Oslo, Copenhagen, and beyond, as is reflected in his references to Avaldsnes (Beyer [1567–70] 1895:107):

In the same county lies Avaldsnes church, on the left-hand side as one sails into the Karmsund Strait; it has been one of the vey largest municipal churches in Norway, built at the expense of King Hákon, but now most of it is in decay.<sup>2</sup>

His view on the rulers prior to the establishment of the Kingdom of Norway is interesting (Beyer [1567–70] 1895:5):

Before autocratic kings ruled in Norway by divine providence, there was a kind of secularly ruled state called *aristocratia*; that is, a regime of the best men [...] How long this state prevailed one does not know, even though some promontory kings [*nefse konger*] are listed with their years of rule.<sup>3</sup>

Although they may well have stayed overnight in the Avaldsnes harbour or vicarage, there is no explicit record of Størssøn or Beyer staying there. The first historian – since Snorri's assumed visit – who can be said to have visited Avaldsnes with certainty was the priest Peder Claussøn Friis (1545–1614). Born in Egersund, Rogaland, and rector

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1 "Konning Harald haarfager leffde trij aar eptther att Erich blodøxe fich landitt att raade, och bleff koning Harald haarfager død paa Auellsnes och bleff laggt ij then store høu norder fraa kircken."

2 "Vdi samme stict ligger Auellsnes kircke paa den venstre haand naar mand kommer ind y Karmesund, som haffuer verred en aff de allerstørste herrets kircker y Norrig, oc ved konning Haagens bekostning opbygget, men nu er den største part der aff forfalden."

3 "För end eenvolds konger af gudz forsiun regerede vdi Norge, da var der en slags verdslig regimentis stat, som kaltis *aristocratia*, det er de beste mends regimente, [...] Huor lenge denne stat haffuer verit oc varit, veed mand icke, endog at nogle nefse konger opregnis vdi deris aars regimente."

in Lista on the southernmost tip of Norway at the age of 21, Friis probably received his education at the bishop's see in Stavanger, where he became a member of the chapter at age 30 and archdeacon before he was 45.

Friis, a prominent cleric in his time, left his main legacy in topographical and historic studies. In his later years he produced the first extensive translation into Danish of Snorri's *Heimskringla* and a few other kings' sagas (Jørgensen 1994). His topographical works describe botanical and zoological occurrences in various districts, as well as historical sites, persons, and events (Jørgensen 1994; 2000). From at least 1590 he collected material for his main topographical work, *Norrigis Bescrifuelse* ('Norway's description'), completed in 1613 and published by Ole Worm (see below) with an elaborate title and some alterations and additions in 1632 (Storm 1881:lxvii–lxxix).<sup>4</sup>

In the following two centuries Friis' *Norrigis Bescrifuelse* became immensely influential. Not only did it become the template for the topographical genre that flourished from the mid-18th century onwards; it was also paraphrased and translated in more or less all Norwegian historical works of the following century. For instance, the topographical introduction of Tormod Torfæus' *Historia rerum Norvegicarum* from 1711 is more or less a translation of Friis' book into Latin (1711:1:27–110; Storm 1881:lxixii; Torfæus 2008:118–238). Of the several learned men in 16th- and early 17th-century Norway, writes Storm (1881:liv), but 'one daresay that regarding command of the subject, skill in rendering, and store of knowledge, [Friis] stands above them all'<sup>5</sup>.

Friis' topographical interest is evident in the greater prominence he accords monuments and antiquities in his text. For example, his description of Avaldsnes parish in *Norrigis Bescrifuelse* (Friis [1613] 1881:324–5):

Afueldsnæs, in bygone days called Qgvaldsnæs after Qgvaldr King who first lived and is buried there, and a cow was his God, who was laid in the mound and buried with him. Since then there lived Haraldr hárfagri and several kings after him at the same Augvadsnæs. [...] There stands a small church called the King's Chapel and is one of the four first churches built by K. Óláfr Trygvason here in Norway. [...] and this chapel now stands deserted and in disrepair, but close by is built a lovely great stone church.<sup>6</sup>

The information regarding the three kings' connections to Avaldsnes would have come to Friis through his readings of Old Norse saga manuscripts. However, his description

<sup>4</sup> A revised edition was published by Gustav Storm in 1881.

<sup>5</sup> "det tør dog siges, at han baade i beherskelse af Stoffet, i Skildringens Dygtighed og Kundskabsmasse rager frem over dem alle".

<sup>6</sup> "Afuelsnæs, kaldis fordum Augvaldsnæs, aff Aguald Konning, som der først bode, oc ligger der begrafuen, oc var en Koe hans Gud, huilcken oc bleff lagt i Højen oc begrafuit met hannem. Siden bode Harald den Haarfage oc flere Konger efter hannem paa samme Augvadsnæs. [...] Der hos staar en liden Kircke, kaldis Kongens Capel, oc er en aff de 4 første Kirker som K. Olaff Trøggesøn lod bygge her i Norrige [...] oc staar dette Kapel nu øde oc forfalden, men strax hos er bygt en skøn oc stor Stenkircke."

of the St Óláfr's Church and what he calls a chapel is evidently first-hand.<sup>7</sup> His education and later duties in Stavanger would have made him intimately familiar with the diocese. The rector at Avaldsnes at the time, Christopher Sigurdssøn, was also a member of the chapter (Skadberg 1950:128–9); it is probable that Friis visited him in the Avaldsnes rectory.

A copy of Friis' translation of the kings' sagas was sent by the bishop to the Royal Historian Claus Lyschander, probably shortly after Friis' death (Storm 1881:lxvii). In this way, it would have come to the attention of the king; perhaps for this reason, King Christian IV of Denmark-Norway (reign 1588–1648) visited Avaldsnes during his sojourn in Norway in 1627 (Skadberg 1950:20–1). Ole Worm, the king's physician and a prominent antiquarian, was familiar with both of Friis' two main works, the saga translation and *Norrigis Beskrivelse* – as mentioned, it was he who had them printed in 1633 and 1632 respectively. Friis had not, however, mentioned what later proved to be Worm's prime interest in Avaldsnes: a runic inscription on a raised stone (Skre, Ch. 23:640–4, Fig. 23.2).

Friis' writings brought to the attention of the Copenhagen intelligentsia the idea of Avaldsnes as a historic royal manor and site of prominent antiquities. Friis was the first since Snorri to acknowledge as much in writing. The following century's authors of history and topography appear to have remained content with Friis' work. Almost a hundred years were to pass from Friis' completion of *Norrigis Beskrivelse* before new antiquarian information on Avaldsnes was published. At that time additional Old Norse manuscripts had come to light, providing Tormod Torfæus (1636–1719) a broader base of evidence from which to draw for the writing of his four-volume *Historia rerum Norvegarum*, a history of Norway from the earliest times to 1387.

## 2.1.2 Tormod Torfæus 1711: *Historia rerum Norvegarum*

Pormóður Torfason, or Tormod Torfæus (Fig. 2.1) as he came to call himself, was born just outside Reykjavík in Iceland; he graduated from Skálholt School in Iceland with excellent recommendations and enrolled at Copenhagen University at age 18. Only six years later, in 1660, he was appointed by King Fredrik III as translator of ancient Icelandic texts. Fredrik was greatly interested in Old Norse history and held Torfæus in his good graces. At the king's behest, Torfæus travelled to Iceland to collect antique documents, and returned with important findings. He left this commission in 1664 to take up a position as a royal clerk in Stavanger, Rogaland. The following year he married there; through marriage he became the owner of the farm Stangeland at Kormt, where he lived the rest of his life, from 1682 as the royal Historiograph for

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<sup>7</sup> An alternative identification of the ruin that he identified as a royal chapel is presented in Ch. 14 (Bauer).



**Fig. 2.1:** Tormod Torfæus (1636–1719) portrayed in a posthumous engraving. Photo and owner: The National Library of Norway.

Norge ('Historian of Norway') and assessor at Copenhagen University, a position that *de facto* equalled a professorship. Torfæus employed secretaries at Stangeland and had them produce transcripts of several medieval books and documents, some of which later disappeared.

The publications arrived at a steady pace from the historian at Stangeland. From 1696 to 1706 he published books on the history of the Faroes, the Orkneys, Greenland, and the Norse discovery of America, all based on saga accounts. However, his *magnum opus* that he had been working on for 30 years was the *Historia rerum Norvegicarum*, about 2,000 pages in four volumes, published in 1711. Eight years later, at the age of 83, Torfæus died in his home at Stangeland. He was buried, fittingly for a royal historian, in the chancel of the St Óláfr's Church, built by King Hákon Hákonarson in the mid-13th century. His tombstone can still be seen there.

This *Historia* brought the past of this peripheral country to the knowledge of European readers. However, Torfæus was regarded by some critics already in his own time, and by most after a few decades, as reading the sagas with too uncritical an eye. Only 60 years after Torfæus' *Historia* was published, Gerhard Schøning, professor of history and eloquence and later to become Royal archivist, in his *Norges Riiges Historie* ('History of the Norwegian realm') described Torfæus' work as merely a first step (1771, *fortale* p. 6–7):

[Torfæus' *Historia*] ... does not deserve to be called a History of the Norwegian Realm, but rather a collection or magazine for that history's further preparation. [...] to bring what he has collected into the proper arrangement; to ascribe each event to its correct time and place; in short, to write from this the History of the Norwegian Realm, all this he has left to others. The present mono-

graph that I have taken on the task of writing should therefore in reality be the first to be called the History of the Norwegian Realm.<sup>8</sup>

The assessment of Torfæus as an uncritical compiler of evidence was reinforced in 1916 by Kristian Kålund in his publication of the letters between Torfæus and Árni Magnússon. Regarding Torfæus, Kålund (1916b:x–xi) stated:

[...] he should hardly be called a scholar; he had not undertaken thorough studies. [...] His critique of the evidence was less developed and he shared the superstition of his time; omens and dreams were meaningful to him, as well as the determination of fate by means of horoscopes.<sup>9</sup>

A few years after Kålund's work was published the then-leading historian of Norway, Halvdan Koht, wrote that Torfæus' work was 'a reproduction, lock, stock, and barrel, from all kinds of evidence, but without any critical assessment and without any other intention than writing a mere chronicle'<sup>10</sup> (Koht 1929:38–40). As late as in 1995 the Latinist Inger Ekrem wrote that Torfæus 'was well versed in Old Norse manuscripts, whose reliability he trusted blindly' (1995:81). A more balanced critique than most since Schøning's is A.O. Johnsen's 1969 description of Torfæus' work. In line with P.A. Munch, his assessment does not hold the work to modern standards but to those of Torfæus' own time. Still, they found nothing of historic value in his writings.

Only the last few years have seen more positive assessments of Torfæus' work, in particular his methods, notably following the *Historia*'s first translation into Norwegian (Torfæus 2008). Although some knowledge of Latin was mandatory for historians until some 30–40 years ago, Torfæus' vocabulary and nuances of expression surpass even the competence of modern specialists (Kraggerud 2008). The Latinist Vibeke Roggen (2003:93) writes, half-jokingly, that scholars who have expressed strong opinions on Torfæus' *Historia* are probably more numerous than those who have actually read it.

Most historians from Schøning onwards have overlooked the distinction that for Torfæus, retelling the sagas was not the same as vouching for their accuracy. In fact, his writings critically assessed the saga's historic value. At the same time, aspects of his method deviated from that which was developed by Árni, Schøning, and subse-

8 "...fortiener ikke saa meget Navn af det Norske Riiges Historie, som heller af en Samling eller et Magazin til bemeldte Histories viidere Udarbeidelse. [...] at bringe, hvad af ham var samlet, i behørig Sammenhæng; at henføre enhver Ting til sin rette Tiid og sit rette Sted, kort, at forfatte deraf det Norske Riiges Historie, det har han alt sammen overladt til andre at udføre. Nærvarende Skrivt, som jeg har foretaget mig at udarbeide, skulde altsaa blive den første, eegentlig saa kaldet, Norske Riigs-Historie."

9 "...videnskabsmand kan han næppe kaldes, lige så lidt som han havde foretaget dybere gående studier [...] Hans kritik var lidet udviklet, og han delte tidens overtro; varsler og drømme havde betydning for ham, så vel som horoskop-beregning til bestemmelse af skæbnen."

10 "en gjenfortelling av rubb og stubb etter all slags kilder, men uten kritisk siktnig og uten tanke på annet enn den rene krønike."

quent historians. Rather than rejecting many stories outright as historical evidence, Torfæus insisted that most of them must contain some kernel of historic value; if not, why should generations of Icelanders passed them down orally and eventually had them written down?

This crucial difference in understanding between Torfæus and subsequent historians resulted in a distinct contrast in their approach to the sagas. Rather than simply peeling away untrustworthy elements in search of historically credible pieces of information, Torfæus identified mythical and legendary elements and offered his interpretations (Roggen 2003:99–100; Jørgensen 2008).

Apart from a passage that paraphrased Peder Claussøn Friis' account (Torfæus 2008:173) the passages in Torfæus' *Historia* that deal with Qgvaldr and Avaldsnes are based on Torfæus' own observations as well as on the *fornaldarsögur* and the more historically rooted sagas written by Oddr Snorrason munkr and Snorri (see Mundal, Ch. 3).

The site is first mentioned in his discussion of whether the ancient sagas are fictional or true. He proposes that grave monuments and raised stones may be studied for corroboration of the sagas: (Torfæus 1711, introduction; 2008:62):

[...] the Histories of Half the Hero and Olaf Tryggvason refer to two such stones, erected in memory of Qgvaldr Rogius and a cow, which he had worshipped during his lifetime, and which he ordered to be buried near him after he died. The stones stood in Kormti, where I myself live, on the priest's estate of Qgvaldsness, and stood in our time on either side of the church, one of them may still be seen today, and they bear out some part of the ancient account; this makes it absolutely certain not only that this Qgvaldr existed but also that what is recorded about him in the recently discussed histories is true.<sup>11</sup>

Further details about the stones are given in a subsequent passage about Qgvaldr and the cow he worshiped, and their burial in the two mounds there (Torfæus 1711, introduction; 2008:360):

Evidence of their tombs is found in two stone columns which could until recently be seen there, one rising thirty feet from the ground, and the other twenty-six feet. The first is still standing, but the second burned down in the year 1698, in the accidental fire that destroyed all the houses.<sup>12</sup>

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11 "...memorant Halfi Herois et Olafi Tryggvini Regum Historiæ de binis talibus saxis, in Augvaldi Rogii, et vaccæ, qvæ vivus ille coluerat, ac prope se post fata contumulari jussit, memoriam erectis: qvi quidem, qvoniæ in insulæ hujus Kormtis, ubi ipse habito, sacerdotali prædio Augvaldsnesia, ad suum quisque templi latus nostrâ ætate, et alter etiamnum conspicitur, et nihil non narrationi priscae respondet, fidem indubiam faciunt, non modò Augvaldum illum extitisse, sed vera etiam esse ea, qvæ de ipso in memoratis nuper historiis leguntur."

12 "...testes sepulchrorum duæ columnæ lapideæ, qvæ inibi nuper visebantur, qvarum alia a terra longitudinem triginta pedes, alia viginti sex erecta prominuit; prior etiamnum perstat, posterior anno millesimo sexcentesimo nonagesimo octavo, fortuitò incendio simul cum universis ædibus conflavit."



His third reference to the stones appears in his account of the story of Óðinn, disguised as an old man, telling the story about Qgvaldr and his sacred cow to King Óláfr Tryggvason (Torfæus 1711:vol. 2, book 9, chapter 17; 2010:93; Mundal, Ch. 3:37–8):

An intact tombstone, raised in memory of the king, can still be seen undamaged. But on 14th August in the year 1698, when the whole of Avaldsnes rectory by accident burnt down, the cow's tombstone, which could not withstand such heat, burst into smaller bits, except for a small base which still stands as an indication of its place. The remaining bits were reshaped and used as steps in the entryway to the church.<sup>13</sup>

Torfæus tells us that Qgvaldr was a fourth-generation descendent of Nor, the first king of Norway, and that he settled at Avaldsnes; that is why the farm was given his name (Torfæus 2008:360–1). He was killed in a battle with another king and entombed in the great mound north of the church. Based on his meticulous genealogy and chronology, Torfæus calculated that King Qgvaldr died c. AD 200, actually the very time to which the main grave in Flaghaug has been dated using modern methods (Stylegar and Reisersen, Ch. 22:574; Vea 2004).

As Torfæus tells us, 700 years after Qgvaldr's death, the landnámsman Finn the Rich from Stavanger was berthed in the Avaldsnes harbour before setting sail to Iceland. In response to Finn's enquiries as to when King Qgvaldr after whom the farm was named had lived there, a voice from the mound answered with a verse (Torfæus 1711:vol. 1, book 4, ch. 5; 2008:360–1):

He then heard a voice deep inside the mound intoning verses with the following sense.

*A long time has elapsed  
since that pack of fierce dogs  
followed Hækling,  
sailed over the salty way of the salmon  
and headed for this place  
and then I became lord of this house (he meant the burial mound).<sup>14</sup>*

By 'the way of the salmon' the voice meant 'the sea', Torfæus noted. He did not question the truth of the story, but discussed the name of Qgvaldr's killer. Flateyjarbók named him Dixi, but Torfæus believed that the sited passage from Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka was correct in naming him Hækling. To substantiate this conclusion Torfæus

<sup>13</sup> "Cippus monumento Regis adstructus integer adhuc visitur, is autem, qvi vaccæ erat, anno MDCXCVIII, die XIV Augusti, cum universæ ædes Augvaldznesiæ fortuito incendio conflagrarent, tanti caloris impatiens in minutiores partes dissiliit, præter exiguum basin, qvæ positus indicium superest, reliqvæ particulæ in usum graduum ædes intrantibus conversæ sunt."

<sup>14</sup> "...vocem intra tumuli penetralia rhythmum modulantem, hoc sensu excepit. Longum quidem tempus elapsum est, postquam Hæklingum secutus ferocium canum manipulus, salsam præternavigans salmonum viam, cursum huc direxerat, tunc hujus villæ (tumulum intellexit) dominus evasi."

cited information that he had personally collected on site: “some mounds nearby even today take their name from Hækling, which the natives in their own dialect call ‘Køklung’, which adds credibility to this tradition”.<sup>15</sup>

In these passages Torfæus combines the evidence from the ancient manuscripts with his own on-site observations. Although some of his conclusions are untenable from a modern perspective, this combining of disparate types of information represented a methodical leap from earlier research practices. Moreover, several of his observations are valuable in themselves and have been used by modern scholars (e.g., Skre, Ch. 23:642–5, 652–3).

## 2.2 Enlightenment and rationalism 1771–1862

### 2.2.1 Gerhard Schøning: Norges Riiges Historie, 1771

The breakthrough of rationalism in the 18th century brought an end to beliefs in the supernatural among the intelligentsia. Torfæus’ younger friend Árni Magnússon rejected such phenomena, as did Gerhard Schøning (Fig. 2.2) in his *Norges Riiges Historie*. For an example of this shift, compare Torfæus’s recounting of the story about the landnámsman Finn the Rich from Stavanger (above) with Schøning’s. The latter did not dispute the historicity of the information about Qgvaldr found in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* and other manuscripts, but expressed scepticism that a voice could have been heard from within the mound. In a footnote he added (1771:282):

One may believe that the above-mentioned Finn has heard the verse about Qgvaldr when he lay at Qgvaldsnæs; not sung from his mound, however, as Finn or others have since pretended, but from an aged skald living there.<sup>16</sup>

While not withdrawing from assessing the historicity of the account overall, the footnote text signalled the distance to Torfæus’ *Historia*, as Schøning announced in his introduction (above, pp. 16–17). However, apart from such rather symbolic gestures, Schøning did not bring to bear a systematically critical attitude to the substance of the saga evidence. He argued explicitly against the notion that sagas are untrustworthy legends and tales – a small number are fictitious, he agreed, but most are absolutely trustworthy; fictitious elements are easily distilled from the factitious parts (Schøning

<sup>15</sup> “Colles propinqui hodieque ab Hæklingo, qvem propria dialecto Kōklingum incolæ pronunciant, nomen sortiti fidem huic traditioni faciunt.”

<sup>16</sup> “Man kan troe, at benævnte Finn har der faaet anførte Vers om Augvalld at høre, da han laae ved Augvaldsnæs, dog ei sunget i hans Høi, som Finn eller andre siden have foregivet, men af en gammel der boende Skald.”



**Fig. 2.2:** Gerhard Schøningh (1722–80) portrayed in a contemporary print. From Hansen 1886:301.

1771:fortale p. 4–5). Furthermore, the passages that concern Avaldsnes are obviously based on Torfæus' work, which is cited by name (Schøningh 1771:279–82).

At the same time, as stated in his introduction, Schøningh adopted a more analytic approach. In his time, Qgvaldr was not unique, Schøningh (1771:181, 278–82, 447) maintained, but one of the seafaring pirates of that period; that is, the 3rd–4th centuries. He drew a distinction between kings who were land-based and those who preferred to sail the seas; Qgvaldr was initially one of the former, and subsequently became a sea pirate. As land king he defeated enemies and conquered land until his rule covered the entire region of Rogaland. Having done so, his position was bound to be challenged, Schøningh wrote (1771:279–80):

[...] for which reason a residence in the islands was most suitable; more so since he found his greatest joy in war and piracy, on which he constantly ventured. The ancient writers have noted that on these undertakings he always brought a cow and that with two intentions: He drank her milk as an unusually powerful medicine or refreshment, and besides he cultivated or sacrificed to her as a deity. [...] But neither Qgvaldr's courage nor the alleged deity could secure him against enemy attacks, and from that followed a violent death.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "...hvorover Boepæl paa Øerne var ham beqvemest; allerhelst da han for Resten fandt sin største Fornøielse i Krig og Søerøver-Toge, paa hvilke han iidelig sværmede omkring. De gamle have anmærket, at saavel paa disse Søerøver-Toge, som paa andre Reiser, førte han stedse en Koe med sig, og det i dobbelt Henseende: Hendes Mælk drak han, som en usædvanlig kraftig Lægedom eller Forfriskelse; og for Resten dørkede eller offrede han til hende, som en Guddom. [...] Men hverken Augvalds eegen

Although he did not reject the historicity of the story about Qgvaldr's cow, Schøning aimed his rationalistic critique at what he took to be unfounded superstition: this 'alleged deity' could not protect Qgvaldr. Schøning's observations about sea-kings in the 3rd–4th centuries and the reasons for their settlement on islands are more interesting: firstly, that islands were more easily defended, and secondly, that Qgvaldr could more easily attain 'joy in war and piracy' from an island base.

The cited passage is an apt example of how Schøning was more adept than Torfæus both in analysing the accumulated evidence, written and topographic, and in drawing general conclusions – definitely a leap in ambition and scope from Tomod's research practise. This difference between them is profound; as the Icelandic philologist Véstein Ólason (2006:109) claims, Torfæus was less a historian and more a writer of Norwegian history in the tradition initiated by Sæmund and Ari in the early 12th century:

In that sense we may claim that the heyday of the ancient Icelandic saga writing had, if not its final phase, at least an epilogue here in Karmøy.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2.2 Antiquarians of the 18th and early 19th centuries

In Schøning's time and well into the 19th century topographic and antiquarian writings were highly popular. Several regions in Norway were described according to the standards of the topographic genre – as explicitly laid down by Peder Claussøn Friis in the early 17th century (above). In 1745, County Governor Bendix Christian de Fine published a topographic description of Stavanger County that contained information regarding the raised stone north of the church (Skre, Ch. 23:646). Additionally, de Fine briefly retold the stories from *Heimskringla* that were connected to Avaldsnes. One passage in particular demonstrates that he had reflected on the position of the royal manor. After stating that some 10th-century kings stayed there, he writes (de Fine [1745] 1952:45):

Also, because of the site's particularly convenient location, some of the subsequent kings have resided there, from whence they could set sail as they wished and be ready to ward off all hostile incursions into the country.<sup>19</sup>

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Tapperhed, ei heller denne formeente Guddom, kunde sætte ham i Sikkerhed mod fiendtligt Angreeb, og derpaa fulgte voldsomme Endeligt."

**18** "I den forstand kan vi hevde at den gamle islandske historieskrivningens storhetstid fikk, om ikke sin avslutning da i hvert fall en epilog her på Karmøy."

**19** "Desforuden har der Resideret een og anden af de efter følgende Konger, for Stædets særdeelles beleilige Situation, hvorfra de kunde komme til Søes naar de vilde, og være færdige til at afværge alle Fientlige indfald i Landet."

Probably, this assessment of Avaldsnes would have been inspired by the role royal naval bases played in warfare in de Fine's own time; they were aimed at warding off external enemies.

Bishop Peder Hansen's account, published 1800, contained significantly more information on Avaldsnes. King Qgvaldr ruled over Rogaland in AD 316–30<sup>20</sup> Hansen stated (1800:261). His text appears to have been based on Torfæus' *Historia* and Schøning's *Norges Riiges Historie*, but also incorporated pieces of information that he had obtained from a local priest or collected himself on the site (Hansen 1800:259). Hansen introduced one new piece of information that is not known from any other sources: digging in the cemetery, 16 paces south of the St Óláfr's Church, he writes, revealed the foundations of an octagonal chapel, 34 ells in circumference (Bauer, Ch. 14:295–7).

Hansen introduced a theme that came to be the main point of discussion in the following years; namely, in which mound was Qgvaldr entombed and which housed the remains of his cow? Hansen held that the southern Kjellerhaug was Qgvaldr's and the northern Flaghaug his cow's, each mound with an associated memorial stone (Hansen 1800:263–4; Skre, Ch. 23:646). The topographer Jens Kraft, who placed Qgvaldr in the 7th century, agreed with Hansen on the location of the cow's mound, but placed Qgvaldr's mound at Kongshaug, an elevated ridge about 150 metres west of the church (Kraft 1829:266–7; 1842a:124–5). Kraft (1829:224) also claimed that Skrattekjera, the skerries where Óláfr Tryggvason drowned some sorcerers in AD 997 (Mundal, Ch. 3:38–40), were "Fladeskjær" nearby.

Both of Kraft's propositions were rejected by Johan Koren Christie (1842:326–32), who served as tutor in the Avaldsnes rectory around 1840 and thus had detailed knowledge of the site (Østrem 2010:208–9). Regarding Qgvaldr's grave Christie based his argument on the 1834–5 excavation of Flaghaug, the great mound north of the church (Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch 22). The excavation clearly demonstrated that this was a royal grave for a male person, and Christie concluded that it was Qgvaldr's. The cow, he argued, was buried in the Kjellerhaug mound just south of the church. Regarding Skrattekjera, Christie argued that "Fladeskjær" was not flooded by the tide and thus would not have served the purpose of drowning the sorcerers. Likewise, the King's men would have chosen the nearest convenient spot, which was "Pibeskjerret", a skerry in the Avaldsnes harbour that was covered by two feet of water at high tide. This skerry would have ample room for a boat crew – even for two if they were all lying on their backs, Christie argued (1842:339–40).

Christie also discussed the location of the Viking Age royal farmyard. He suggested that it should be sought south of the present rectory buildings. If it had been lying where the rectory buildings currently lie, he argued, there would not have been

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<sup>20</sup> His text says AD 1316–1330, but since he also writes "i det 4de Seculo" ('in the 4th Century'), the years are obviously a misprint.

sufficient room for Erlingr Skjálgrsson's 1,500 men who, according to *Heimskringla*, surrounded King Óláfr inn helgi when he walked from the church to his chambers (Christie 1842:334; Mundal, Ch 3:40–3). Christie also argued that the octagonal remains described by Bishop Hansen must have been from the church that Óláfr Tryggvason built in 997.

Avaldsnes would be an optimal location for convening for chieftains, Christie (1842:322–3) reasoned:

Whether they came from the north [...] or the south [...] the Vikings travelled past the site. For beyond Kormt (Karmø) is the wild ocean, and the coast is shut off by an exceptionally dense and dangerous series of skerries with seething breakers, so clearly, sailing west of the island was not a preferred choice [...] The site's local advantages were noticed early on by the region's petty kings, and far back in historic time we find Qgvaldsnes mentioned as a royal manor in the obscure legends of antiquity.<sup>21</sup>

Christie is the first to describe the natural conditions that led sailors to prefer the Karmsund Strait for sailing west of Kormt. Although not explicitly, Christie seems to consider the military advantage of holding Avaldsnes; the site allowed the exertion of power over sea travellers.

The minutely detailed analyses of saga evidence, monuments, and landscape features undertaken by these antiquarians was in line with Torfæus' combination of saga information with his own observations. Similarly, their profound confidence in the saga evidence resembles that of Torfæus and Schøning. Still, their painstaking argument and involvement of a wider scope of evidence marked a new leap in research practice. Also, their rational and thorough empirical argument, in particular Christie's, pointed ahead to the academic historic research of the late 19th century.

## 2.3 The Age of Academic Exploration 1862–2005

In late 19th-century Avaldsnes research, as in historical scholarship in general, a shift took place from the antiquarian tradition to the academic. In this process monuments and sites became less important, while the approach to the written evidence became increasingly critical and refined. This latter development continued into the 20th century. Thus, just a few decades after the publication of Christie's paper, his and his

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21 "Herforbi droge Vikingerne, vad enten de fore nordfra [...] eller søndenfra ... Ti udenom Kormt (Karmø) er det vilde Hav og Stranden indsluttet af en usædvanlig tæt og farlig Skjærkjede med frådende Brændinger, saa Seiladsen vestom Øen, som rimeligt, ikke gjerne valgtes [...]. Stedets lokale Fordele vare da og tidlig bemærkede af Egnens Smaakonger, og langt opover den historiske Tid finde vi i Oldtidens omtaagede Sagn Augvaldsnæs nævnt som Kongsgaard."

predecessors' confidence in the sagas was brutally shaken, never to reappear among scholars.

The two categories of sagas that mention Avaldsnes, the *fornaldarsögur* and the *konungasögur* (Kings' sagas that deal with the period c. 850–1100, e.g., *Heimskringla*) had rather different fates in this process. The former continued to be used as evidence for pre-850 history up to the 1860s, even by Norwegian academic historians such as Rudolf Keyser (1803–64) and P.A. Munch (1810–63), although based on a much more critical assessment than that of Torfæus, Schøning, and the antiquarians (Dahl 1990:70–5). This use of sagas by scholars rapidly faded in the late 19th century, partly due to a rather short thesis by the Danish historian Edwin Jessen, *Undersøgelser til Nordisk Oldhistorie*, published in 1862. In clear prose and with a polemic tone he dismissed the *fornaldarsögur* as useless in terms of historic evidence (Jessen 1862; Helle 2001:16; Krag 2006:91–2), due to internal contradictions and inconsistencies. If there is a historic core, there is no way of identifying it, he stated.

The critical assessment of the *konungasögur* underwent further refinement over the course of the 19th century, in Norwegian scholarship most prominently by Gustav Storm (1845–1903; Helle 2001:18). While Keyser and Munch worked on solving contradictions and cleaning out mistakes and misunderstandings in the sagas, Storm (1869; 1873) introduced the notion that saga writers were authors in their own right and not mere compilers of oral tradition. Thus, Storm supplemented Keyser's and Munch's methods for distilling reliable evidence from the sagas with a path toward assessment of the sagas in light of the interests, personalities, and circumstances of their authors.

In the early 20th century a thesis by the Swedish historian Lauritz Weibull proposed a radical break with the positive assessment of the source value of the *konungasögur* shared by the vast majority of scholars at the time. In *Kritiska undersökningar i Nordens historia omkring år 1000* published in 1911 he rejected the main themes and grand lines in the saga accounts and asserted that their sole value lay in the scattered bits and pieces of reliable information that might be identified using the strict methods that he had developed.

Although Weibull had lasting impact, his methods proved less suitable for actual research (Bagge 2014:595). His negative assessment of the historicity of the sagas was soon to be challenged by research into the nature of oral tradition. By applying insights from his own discipline to the sagas, the folklorist Knut Liestøl (1929) analysed the mechanisms by which historical events were transformed in the Icelandic oral tradition on which the written sagas were based. Liestøl, soon joined by the historian Halvdan Koht, believed it possible to use insights in the transformation of oral tradition to peel away fiction, and trust what was left (Helle 2001:21–4; Bagge 2014:581). The joining of these two scholars' perspectives on the sagas, inspired in some aspects by Weibull, still forms the methodological backbone of Norwegian saga research, and has had significant international impact. For instance, the methods that Else Mundal applies in her analyses of the saga evidence in the present volume (Ch. 3; see also Skre, Ch. 27:761–4) are rooted in this tradition.

### 2.3.1 Post-Weibullian Avaldsnes research

Rikssamlingen ('The unification of the realm') was a major topic in 20th-century Viking Age studies, and Avaldsnes was mentioned repeatedly.<sup>22</sup> Johan Schreiner (1929:22–4) accords Avaldsnes a key role in royal control of western Norway in the 10th–13th centuries. He pointed to the ease with which sea traffic could be controlled in the narrow Karmsund Strait, and drew a line from the prominent Bronze Age finds through those from the early Iron Age to the two Viking Age ship graves. The long continuity of rich finds, he stated, can only be explained thus (Schreiner 1929:24):<sup>23</sup>

This major manor was a constant threat to sea traffic along the sailing route, a threat to chieftains further north, who depended on sailing the Karmsund Strait. The need to secure the coastal trade route was the basic factor for the political unification of Norway, or rather, the unification of the coastal regions by Haraldr hárfagri and subsequent monarchs.

Haraldr, supported by the earls of Hålogaland further north, conquered Avaldsnes to secure the sailing route (Schreiner 1929:31–2). Schreiner's assessment was supported by several prominent historians, Andreas Holmsen and Claus Krag among them. According to Holmsen (1949:172) the prospering trade in the 9th century made safe sailing a prominent concern for chieftains along the coast. Haraldr created peace, he noted (1949:178); before Haraldr hárfagri settled at Avaldsnes and his four other manors along the sailing route, 'the very worst among coastal pirates' ("de aller verste kystrøverne") had resided there.

Continuing Schreiner's and Holmsen's line of reasoning, Per Hærnes (1997:89–90) and Claus Krag (2000:46) pointed to Avaldsnes' prominent position in the coastal regions that comprised the core of Haraldr hárfagri's kingdom, Hordaland and Rogaland. Krag suggested, based on Opedal's work (below), that when Haraldr took control of these regions they might already have been a chieftain's realm. Trade and communication along the Norðvegr connected the coastal regions and made military control along the sailing route the key to Haraldr's power (Krag 2000:50–2).

While these historians did not conduct in-depth studies of Avaldsnes, Odd Nordland (1950) presents a thorough and detailed discussion of Avaldsnes' position at a bottleneck on the Norðvegr. As an ethnologist and philologist, Nordland (1919–99) produced significant works on numerous topics, including Old Norse literature. His Avaldsnes paper was published in 1950, four years after he had taken his master

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<sup>22</sup> An overview of research is given in Andersen 1977:40–157.

<sup>23</sup> "Denne storgård betegnet en stadig trussel mot skibsfarten i leden, en trussel mot stormennene lenger nord, som var henvist til å seile gjennom Karmsundet. Behovet for å frede handelsveien langs kysten gav grunnlaget for Norges politiske samling, eller rettere kystlandskapene samling under Harald Hårfagre og de følgende landssstyrere."



degree. He took his doctoral degree in 1956 and later became professor of Nordic culture and history of religion at the University of Oslo.

Based mainly on philological and historic evidence, as well as in his detailed knowledge of the landscape and sailing conditions, Nordland pointed to the ease with which trade and traffic along the Norðvegr could be controlled from Avaldsnes. Applying the majority of methods from the Koht/Liestøl toolbox (summarised in Helle 2001:22–4), Nordland (1950:17–34) discussed in detail all passages in *Heimskringla* that relate to Avaldsnes, including the various versions and related sagas. In line with Storm and others, he emphasised Snorri's creative authorship and attempted to identify the rationale behind his combinations of disparate pieces of information to compose coherent stories about events at Avaldsnes. Nordland (1950:34) concluded this discussion:

Thus, we may suspect that Snorri's account of events in the Karmsund Strait rest upon a quite weak historic basis. On the other side, however, we need to ask if he still may be right in the basic outline of his assessment of the Karmsund Strait and the role it played in history. – Although the foundation may be weak, the conclusions may be correct.<sup>24</sup>

To support the reasonability of what he deemed to be Snorri's conjectures, Nordland (1950:34–6) referred to the prominent Bronze Age monuments near Avaldsnes, and to Shetelig's assessment of the Flaghaug find (below, p. 28). He also pointed to the fact that Avaldsnes' main qualities are military-strategic, not agrarian-economic. In contrast to Bø, the nearby farm to the north with the richest agricultural yield in Kormt, Avaldsnes has the best natural harbour facilities along the Karmsund Strait and lies on the spot with the best view of the sailing route north and south. He called Avaldsnes 'the warrior manor' ("krigargarden", 1950:38).

Nordland agreed with Professor in Old Norse Philology Magnus Olsen's (1913) reading of *Haraldskvæði*, composed by the skald Þorbjörn Hornklofi c. AD 900. Olsen's paper strengthened the common assumption among historians at the time, based in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* (ch. 38) as well as *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar* (ch. 36), that Haraldr hárfagri had five royal manors, and that Avaldsnes was his main residence. Olsen argued that the first lines in stanza 5 in *Haraldskvæði* were misspelled in both versions of the saga-redaction *Fagrskinna*. The B version has: *Kunna hugðak þik konung, þann a kvinnu býr, dróttin Norðmanna* ("I thought you knew the King, who lives at Kvinne, King of Northmen"), while the A version has "*a kymnum*" (Olsen 1913:66). Olsen argued that the writers of both manuscripts had misunderstood their sources, and that the correct phrase should be "*i Kormtu* ('in

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<sup>24</sup> "Det Snorre fortel om einskild-hendingar i Karmsundet, kan me difor mistenkja for å stå på eit temmelig veikt historisk grunnlag, men me lyt på den andre sida spyrja oss om han ikkje likevel kan ha rett i hovuddraga i den vurderinga han har av Karmsundet og i den rolla han let det spela i saga. – Om grunnlaget et tunt, kan slutningane vera rette."

Kormt’); he concluded that Haraldr hárfagri’s “true residence, the first ‘capital’ of Norway, had been Avaldsnes in Karmsund” (Olsen 1913:72).<sup>25</sup>

Olsen (1913:70) reinforced his argument concerning Avaldsnes’ prominence by referring to the unanimous evidence of the sagas that Haraldr was buried “at Haug by the Karmsund Strait”<sup>26</sup>, across the strait from Avaldsnes. In the sagas he found several examples of prominent men being buried some distance from their residence. Nordland (1950:40) agreed with Olsen and added that the belief common in more recent times, that the dead would not haunt the living if they were separated by water, may have been held at the time.

An additional indication of Avaldsnes’ early prominence, writes Olsen (1913:70) and Nordland (1950:36), was the richly furnished grave in Flaghaug described by Haakon Shetelig (1912a:53–9; Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22). Based on the three Roman vessels in the grave, and the concentration of such vessels in the close vicinity together with their distribution along the coast, Shetelig suggested that Avaldsnes was a centre of distribution of these and other objects as well as the new inhumation burial custom. He highlighted that this distribution centre was located at ‘one of the most important points along the coastal sailing route’<sup>27</sup> (1912a:58–9).

Both Olsen and Nordland commented on the fornaldarsögur. In the legend of King Qgvaldr and his cow, Olsen (1913:70) found an indication that Avaldsnes “probably played a prominent role as a royal seat also in prehistoric times”<sup>28</sup>. The only firm piece of evidence Nordland found in the fornaldarsögur’s Avaldsnes accounts was that Qgvaldr was the actual name of a person who gave his name to the manor, whereas the names of most persons in these stories are derived from place-names and are thus unhistorical. He interpreted Qgvaldr as he who ‘rules by fear’<sup>29</sup> (Nordland 1950:42).

Nordland points to the telling fact that some farms situated near narrow straits on sailing routes or at an important eið (‘isthmus’) across which people, cargoes, boats and sometimes ships could be hauled, bear names with a person’s name as prefix – Qgvaldsnes is but one example. Such names at isthmuses have the suffix -eið and those by straits have the suffix -nes (‘promontory’). Nordland (1950:47) commented: “The name conveys the sense of a distinct *will* by the route, a will of a kind that made people remember names of persons.”<sup>30</sup>

25 “Harald haarfagres egentlige residens, Norges første ‘hovedstad’, har været Avaldsnes i Karmsund.”

26 “á Haugum við Karmtsund”

27 “et av de viktigste punkter i hele kystleden”.

28 “sandsynligvis har spilt en fremtrædende rolle som kongssæte ogsaa i forhistorisk tid”.

29 “herskar med otte”.

30 “Ein fær ei viss kjensle av at ein i dette namnet møter ein vilje atttmed leia, ein vilje av eit slag som fekk folk til å hugsa person-namn”.

Out of about 700 farm names with the suffix *-nes*, ten have personal names as a prefix; of these ten, Nordland found that the majority lie at strategic points along routes. At one of them, Sotenäs in Båhuslän, Nordland found the same legendary saga themes as at Avaldsnes. Söti was defeated by King Óláfr inn helgi, and from his mound he acted among the living. Nordland suggested that the naming of *nes* after men indicate that they were *neskonungar* ('promontory kings'). The word is known in writing already in the early 13th century, and Nordland (1950:49–53) believed that it denoted a genuine and accurate historic tradition. He connects this tradition to a term used by the two skalds Þorbjörn Hornklofi c. AD 900 and Eyvindr skáldaspillir in the mid-10th century: *Holmrygir*, meaning 'Island Rugii'. Rugii is the tribal name that forms the prefix of the name of the region where Kormt is located; Rogaland. The *Holmrygir*, writes Nordland (1950:53–4), would be Rugii that resided on easily defendable islands along the sailing route. This gave them a strategic benefit that was used to extract income from travellers sailing past.

Among the scholarly works on Avaldsnes discussed above, Nordland's paper is the most exhaustive and of the widest scope; his method and assessment of the evidence is most closely in accordance with modern standards. Although previous scholars, such as Christie, had mentioned Avaldsnes' position on the sailing route along the *Norðveg*, Nordland was the first to qualify and develop the idea, emphasising the possibilities for controlling the seaway's traffic from Avaldsnes and for keeping watch over the sea route from the elevated settlement plateau. His conclusions are summed up in his characterisation of Avaldsnes as 'the warrior farm'.

Regarding Haraldr hárfagri and subsequent kings, Nordland's assessment of the Old Norse literary evidence is still valid, although not undisputed – the same goes for Olsen's discussion of Haraldskvæði (e. g. Fidjestøl 1993:18). Regarding earlier periods, Nordland drew to the fore the concept 'promontory kings' and other indications that Iron Age kings purposely exploited the advantages inherent to island residence by extracting revenues from the seaway's travellers.

### 2.3.2 Local interest in Avaldsnes 1935–89

On the periphery of the post-Weibullian scholarly endeavours, interest in Avaldsnes' history was maintained by intellectuals living in the vicinity; three of them will be mentioned briefly. The journalist and author Heming R. Skre (1896–1943) connected Avaldsnes to what he considered to be a universal phenomenon of the past: the worship of the sun. He was a proponent of the opinion that ancient monuments and sites with cultic names in the region were organised along an elaborate system of lines that had their centre in the raised stone at Avaldsnes, *Jomfru Marias Synål* ('St. Mary's Sewing Needle'; Skre, Ch. 23).

For the church's 700-year anniversary in 1950, the Avaldsnes priest Lars Skadberg (1898–1966) published a book about the church and manor. The book is indebted to

the topographic traditions, in particular regarding its greatest strength: the author's extensive knowledge of the sites, landscapes, and traditions.

Since the 1980s, the psychologist and author Aadne Utvik (1936–) has worked at raising the local interest in Avaldsnes. Most significantly, in 1988, he published a series of articles in the local newspaper, which were later assembled in a book titled *Vårt historiske Avaldsnes* ('Our historic Avaldsnes'). This series, together with the recent discovery of a subterranean passageway near the church (Bauer, Ch. 14:304–6) spurred considerable interest at the time. In 1989 the Archaeological Museum in Stavanger published a book aimed at the general public titled *Avaldsnes, Norges eldste kongesete* ('Avaldsnes, Norway's first royal seat'), which also was well received.

The social and cultural role of all historical studies, including the strictly academic – namely, their relation to current concerns – is particularly visible in the non-specialist publications by H. Skre, Skadberg, and Utvik. Indeed, it was precisely local awareness and enthusiasm for Avaldsnes' historic significance, evident in these writings, that initiated the boom in Avaldsnes research since 1993, ultimately leading to the research project that has resulted in this book (Skre, Preface).

### **2.3.3 A new beginning, 1993–2005: The Karmøy Seminars and Opedal 1998**

In 1993, Karmøy Municipality established the Avaldsnes Project (Skre, Preface), initiating research on a variety of aspects connected to Avaldsnes. They developed a productive collaboration with Stavanger Maritime Museum, who conducted extensive underwater surveys in the Avaldsnes harbour, revealing mainly late-medieval and modern deposits and finds (Elvestad and Opedal 2001; Bauer and Østmo, Ch. 5:69). The archaeologist Per Hernæs (1997) contributed the volume on the prehistoric era to the three-volume *Karmøys historie*. In preparation for the St Óláfr's Church's 750th anniversary in 2000, the Avaldsnes Church Council called upon prominent scholars to write a book about the church, published in 1999 as *Kongskyrkje ved Nordvegen* ('A royal church by the Norðvegr', Langhelle and Lindanger 1999). The Bronze Age monuments in northern Kormt (Skre, Ch. 27:750–2) were explored by Lise N. Myhre in her 1999 book *Historier fra en annen virkelighet* ('Histories from another reality').

Beginning in 1993 the Avaldsnes project organised a scholarly seminar series, *Karmøyseminaret* ('The Karmøy Seminar'), on topics related to Avaldsnes' history. The seminars, seven in the period 1993–2004, attracted leading Scandinavian and some international scholars, and were published by the municipality (Vea and Myhre 1993; Krøger and Naley 1996; Krøger 1997, 2000; Naley and Vea 2001; Jacobsen 2004; Kongshavn 2006). The seminars covered a wide array of topics, from Iron Age social and political structure to medieval trade, as well as the work of Tormod Torfæus. Several significant papers were published and are indeed referred to in relevant chapters in the present book.



**Fig. 2.3:** Professor of Archaeology, Bjørn Myhre (1938–2015). Photo: Terje Tveit, AM.

While Schreiner, Holmsen, and Krag looked to the north when discussing Avaldsnes' significance in Viking Age politics, some contributions in the seminar publications look to the south and west, beyond what was to become the Norwegian Kingdom. Although Holmsen (1949:178) had noted that Haraldr – through his conquest of Avaldsnes and other manors – acquired treasure collected overseas by Vikings, the international perspectives introduced by Bjørn Myhre (1993) and developed by Egon Wamers (1997) and Arnfrid Opedal (1998, 2005) marked a significant shift in research perspective.

Bjørn Myhre (1993; Fig. 2.3) sought the background for the 10th-century Norwegian Kingdom in the 7th–9th-century south and the west. Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian lords would have sought control over the trade in prestige commodities produced in the north, such as fur and walrus tusk. Since the 7th century the Karmsund Strait was the gateway to the resources in the north, and since the 8th a point of departure for traffic towards the British Isles and Ireland in the west. Thus, in Myhre's thesis, the process that historians call 'the unification of the realm' should be regarded as the final phase in a development that began in the 7th century. During the three centuries preceding Haraldr hárfagri's success there may have been several failed attempts to unify realms, and short-lived polities may have emerged only to dissolve with few or no traces (Myhre 1993:57–60).

Primarily discussing the 9th–10th centuries, the archaeologist Egon Wamers (1997:18–21) considered the resistance to Danish dominance to have constituted a formative force in the creation of the kingdom of Haraldr hárfagri and his sons. The kingdom's economic, military, and political base was built up in the lands he assumes they held overseas in the British Isles and Ireland. He suggests that the absence in

Rogaland of 10th-century imports may be connected to the expulsion of the Northmen from Dublin in 902; if so, Rygir (people from Rogaland) must have held prominent positions there. The close relations in the 9th century to Danish, Frankish, Anglo-Saxon, and Irish kingdoms, writes Wamers, inspired the creation of a Norwegian kingdom.

Although these two and other significant papers that contextualised Avaldsnes appeared in the publications from the Karmøyseminaret, few if any of them contribute new information regarding the archaeology of the Avaldsnes area. That lacuna was soon to be filled, however, by two books by the archaeologist Arnfrid Opedal (b. 1965).

After earning her master's degree in 1994 with a thesis on the national undercurrent in Norwegian settlement research 1905–55, Opedal was affiliated with the Archaeological Museum in Stavanger. There she undertook research on the two ship graves near Avaldsnes: Storhaug, excavated by Andres Lorange in 1884, and Grønhaug, excavated by Haakon Shetelig in 1902.

Opedal published two books in 1998, *De glemte skipsgravene* and *Makt og myter på Avaldsnes* ('The forgotten ship graves' and 'Power and myths at Avaldsnes'), and in 2005 developed her research into a PhD thesis. The thesis was published in a revised form 2010 under the title *Kongemakt og kongerike. Gravritualer og Avaldsnes-området politiske rolle 600–1000* ('Royal Power and realm. Grave rituals and the Avaldsnes area's political role 600–1000').

Opedal's two books represented a leap in Avaldsnes research. On the basis of detailed analyses of the finds and the documentation from the Storhaug excavations, she argued that the grave rituals were intended to stabilise and mend the societal crisis following the king's death by connecting to the world of the gods and bestowing the new king with power. While Opedal (1998:65) dated Storhaug to the late Merovingian Period (680–800), she concludes that the Grønhaug grave was built in the mid-10th century (1998:75). She places the Grønhaug funeral in the political calamities of that period, more specifically in an alliance between the Norwegian and the Anglo-Saxon kings to fight Danish expansion in Norway and England. She suggests (1998:200–4) that the grave is possibly that of Haraldr hárfagri.

The connection drawn by Opedal (1998:109–40) between the two ship graves concerns kingship; she interprets the ship graves as manifestations of attempts to establish kingdoms in the region modelled on the Frankish kingdom. In this scheme, the polity was a *Personenverbandsstaat* centred on a mobile king and his retinue, the loyalty of which was maintained by gifts of luxuries and land. The Storhaug grave indicates the establishment around AD 700 of such a kingdom stretching from northern Rogaland to southern Hordaland. She points out as the kingdom's nodes other coastal manors, and she stresses that sea travel connected the sites and facilitated kingship. This regional kingdom may have constituted the core from which Haraldr hárfagri expanded to establish a Norwegian kingdom in the decades around AD 900.

Although the two ship graves in Kormt had been known by specialists, Opedal's work brought them to the attention of the general community of scholars of the Viking Age, and she took the step of situating the ship graves within current strands of

research. This increased interest is mirrored in Frans-Arne Stylegar and Niels Bonde's (2009) dendrochronological dating of Storhaug to 779 and Grønhaug to 790–5, and to Jan Bill's (2015) discussion of the ship-grave custom, followed in 2016 by Stylegar and Bonde's discussion of the same theme.

## 2.4 Why did kings settle in Kormt?

The various strands of research into which Avaldsnes has been included seek answers to this chapter's introductory question: why did the kings choose to settle in Kormt? Absalon Pederssøn Beyer (1567–70) was the first to address Avaldsnes' position along the coastal sailing route, although not explicitly. His use of the term *neße konger* ('promontory kings'), later used by Nordland (1950), was probably inspired by the military advantages he deduced from the maritime setting of Avaldsnes and other royal manors along the coast.

Although Tormod Torfæus (1711) repeatedly mentioned sea travels in connection with Qgvaldr and other kings, juxtaposing them with land-based kings – Qgvaldr was initially one of the latter – he did not explicitly address this significance of this difference. That is rather in keeping with the scope of his scholarly inquiry; retelling and interpreting the original meaning of the old stories, rather than analysing them for general patterns. Gerhard Schøning (1771) was the first to identify Qgvaldr as a representative of one type of king, namely a pirate-king that roamed the seas. Qgvaldr's predilection for piracy and his consequent need to protect his possessions are the two reasons he and other sea kings settled on Kormt, an easily defended island. Some years previously de Fine (1745) had identified a related rationale for Viking and Medieval Period kings settling at Avaldsnes, namely the site's favourable position for defending the realm from external enemies.

Christie (1842) was the first to describe how sailing conditions east and west of Kormt made Avaldsnes a favourable position for controlling traffic along the coast. Christie, along with other 19th-century writers such as Hansen (1800) and Kraft (1829; 1842a), was interested primarily in interpreting the Avaldsnes monuments in light of the Old Norse literature. By the 20th century, however, scholars began to involve the site in their discussions of the creation of the Norwegian kingdom in the 10th–11th centuries. Based on the maritime position of Avaldsnes and the other early royal manors, Schreiner (1929) suggested that the need by chieftains further north for securing the coastal sailing route and defending against piracy was for Haraldr hárfagri the primary motive for unifying the realm. This idea was adopted more or less unaltered by Holmsen (1949) and Krag (2000). Although they do not refer to Olsen's (1913) reading of the poem *Haraldskvæði* from c. AD 900, which identified Avaldsnes as Haraldr's most prominent residence, their thinking appears to have been influenced by his analysis of it.

Nordland (1950) extended and deepened the line of thinking from Olsen and Schreiner. He built a detailed and complex, albeit conjectural argument, concluding that Snorri's repeated references to Avaldsnes as the main manor of Haraldr and subsequent kings reflected a past reality. Nordland picked up Christie's and Schreiner's idea that Avaldsnes' prominence was not due to its agricultural yield, but the threat it represented towards sea travellers. Poignantly, in reference to the ease with which passing ships could be cut off and the route could be observed from the elevated settlement plateau, Nordland called Avaldsnes 'the warrior farm'.

With a different perspective from that of Schreiner, Holmsen, and Krag, Myhre (1993), Wamers (1997), and Opedal (1998) saw the creation of a possible 8th–9th-century regional kingdom and a 10th-century Norwegian kingdom as the product of relations, peaceful and hostile, to kingdoms in the south and the west. Myhre's long-term perspective as well as the international dimension introduced by Myhre, Wamers, and Opedal marked a significant shift in research related to Avaldsnes, pointing ahead to the ambitions of the ARM Project (Skre, Ch. 4).

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Else Mundal

### 3 Avaldsnes and Kormt in Old Norse Written Sources

This chapter provides an overview of references to Avaldsnes and to events occurring there in written sources from the Old Norse period. In written sources from the 13th century, Avaldsnes is named among the five royal estates belonging to Haraldr hárfagri in central Western Norway. In the narratives of an event that occurred during the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason, the god Óðinn appears and recounts the tale of a King Qgvaldr who lived on Avaldsnes in the distant past. This story, though of dubious factual reliability, nevertheless demonstrates that saga authors at the end of the 12th and throughout the 13th century were familiar with a tradition in which Avaldsnes was accorded a history as a royal estate beginning long before the time of Haraldr hárfagri. The Norwegian kings gradually took up residence in the towns, but sources for the end of the 13th and throughout the 14th century show that Avaldsnes continued to be a central, albeit occasional, place of residence for the king. From a reading of the late 12th- early 13th- century kings' sagas, which recount events in Avaldsnes during the reigns of the two Christianising kings Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr inn helgi, it is evident that the original stories upon which the saga authors based their works had been modified over the centuries by oral tradition and removed from the historical basis that was perhaps there at the outset. In Óðinn's tales about King Qgvaldr, the events are set in a time long before the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason. Normally, there would not be the slightest reason to have faith in stories about something that happened so long ago. But, in the case of Avaldsnes, where the archaeological excavations have shown that the place was a centre of power some hundreds of years before the unification of Norway, there are, after all, reasons to ask oneself whether the tradition about a King Qgvaldr has an historical core that has persisted through the centuries, likely supported by a place name and historical relics, such as burial mounds and memorial stones.

#### 3.1 Kormt

Avaldsnes (in Old Norse, Qgvaldsnes) is mentioned quite frequently in medieval written sources, often in connection with the name Kormt – the Old Norse for Karmøy, the island upon which Avaldsnes is situated. Avaldsnes was usually referred to as 'Qgvaldsnes á Kormt', which suggests that the name Qgvaldsnes shared to a certain degree those associations evoked by the name Kormt. By way of introduction to the discussion of Avaldsnes in Old Norse sources, it is therefore appropriate to begin with some comments on the name Kormt.

The name Kormt occurs not only in narrative saga texts, but also in eddic poems and þulur (i.e. enumerations of poetic words). For instance, it appears in the first half of strophe 29 of the eddic poem Grímnismál, amongst an enumeration of river names:

Kǫrmt ok Qrmt  
 ok Kerlaugar tvær  
 þær skal Þórr vaða  
 hverjan dag,...  
 (Dronke 2011)

Kǫrmt and Qrmt and the two Kerlaugar ('tub baths') shall Þórr wade each day,...<sup>1</sup>

In *Grímnismál* it is clear that Kǫrmt is the name of a river in the poem's mythological landscape. The god Þórr must wade across this river in order to reach the meeting place of the gods by the ash tree Yggdrasil. One explanation for the name's designation of a locality over which one can wade is that Kǫrmt has also been the name of the Karmsund ('the Karm Strait') (Storesund 2012). With its strong current, the long, narrow Karmsund features many riverine qualities, but the semantic content of the name Kǫrmt – derived from the same root as the word *karmr* ('low protective wall') – is better suited to an island, connoting a parapet that offers protection from the ocean beyond. Of the names enumerated in *Grímnismál* in full, the majority can be identified as names of actual rivers; the three names in the strophe cited above, however, stand out as names of mythical rivers. According to Magnus Olsen, they are the fabrication of the poet, who was familiar with the island name Kǫrmt, but not the actual locality (Olsen 1925).

Kǫrmt, Qrmt, and Kerlaugar also occur as river names in *þulur* in all manuscripts of *Snorra Edda*.<sup>2</sup> The heading of these *þulur* is "á heiti" / "áheiti"; one manuscript (AM 757 a 4to) has the variant "vatna heite". In the *þulur* the names are grouped together, which suggests that they were gathered from the eddic poem, where they also appear together. Kǫrmt, however, is also found in the *þulur* as an "eyja heiti".<sup>3</sup> This could seem quite puzzling. The evident explanation is that Kǫrmt has been used as both an island name and a river name, and other examples are found of this. But it is equally probable that the name Kǫrmt had already acquired, for one reason or another, an almost mythical dimension, and was already being employed in mythological contexts as a name for a type of locality other than its original one. If we have here a name that at one point in time in effect has been elevated into the mythological sphere, this can thus also be of some interest for those associations connected to the name Ögvaldsnes, which is so closely linked to Kǫrmt.

<sup>1</sup> The translations from Old Norse are my own throughout the article.

<sup>2</sup> The *þulur* in the manuscripts of *Snorra Edda* are published in Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, AI (text according to the manuscripts with information about which manuscripts have the text) and AII (normalised text). "Á heiti" is found in AI:669–70, in BI:666–7. These *þulur* are forthcoming in volume 3 of the new edition of skaldic poetry, *Skaldic Poetry in the Middle Ages*.

<sup>3</sup> Kǫrmt is also found as an "eyja heiti" in a *þula* in AM 748 II, 4to and AM 757 a, 4to, and additionally in one strophe in AM 748 II, 4to. Finnur Jónsson 1912–15, AI:689–90, BI:678–9; AI:652, BI:657.

## 3.2 The Royal estate Avaldsnes

Snorri recounts in *Heimskringla* (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, ch. 37), that when King Haraldr hárfagri had reached old age, he often took up residence at his large estates in Western Norway, and then he tallies them in the following order: Alrekksstaðir (now Årstad), Sæheimr (now Seim), Fitjar, Útsteinn and Qgvaldsnes. Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar (ch. 36) contains an enumeration of the same royal estates, here in sequence from south to north. According to 13th-century tradition, Avaldsnes had been a royal estate from the time of Haraldr hárfagri; however, in the saga of Óláfr Tryggvason by Oddr Snorrason munkr, which was originally written in Latin around 1190 but preserved only in Old Norse translation,<sup>4</sup> Oddr relates (chs. 43–4) that Avaldsnes had been the seat of kings from time immemorial and that the place was named after King Qgvaldr,<sup>5</sup> who had lived there long before the reign of Haraldr hárfagri. In Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (ch. 64) in *Heimskringla*, Snorri recounts the same story, which he most certainly took from Oddr, but the two stories differ in details.

Both authors recount an episode from a time when King Óláfr Tryggvason was in residence on Avaldsnes: one evening, an elderly, one-eyed man with a low hat arrived and began to converse with the king. The king interrogated him on many topics, and the visitor could answer all his questions. The king asked whether he knew the identity of the person after whom the ness and the estate had been named, to which the guest answered Qgvaldr, a king and a great warrior. Oddr narrates that Qgvaldr became very fond of a cow that he always had with him in order to be able to drink her milk, while Snorri adds that Qgvaldr performed sacrifices to such a cow. Both recount that King Qgvaldr was slain in a battle against a king called Varinn and was buried in a mound in the vicinity of the royal estate, with the cow buried in a mound in close proximity. The morning after the guest had told this to the king, he disappeared, and the king understood that it was Óðinn who had visited them. Oddr relates further that on the fourth day after this visit, the king had the two mounds opened; human bones were found in one of the mounds, and cow bones in the other.

Snorri's account provides a detailed description of Avaldsnes. Both Oddr and Snorri mention the mounds near the estate; Snorri in addition mentions the memorial stones – “those that are still standing”<sup>6</sup> – which Oddr does not mention. This could indicate that Snorri had been in person to see the estate on Avaldsnes. Bio-

<sup>4</sup> The Old Norse translation of the work of Oddr Snorrason munkr is found in slightly different variations in AM 310, 4to (from the mid-1200s, Copenhagen) and in Sth. Perg. 4to, no. 18 (c. 1300, Stockholm). In addition there exists a fragment, De la Gardie 4–7 (c. 1270, Uppsala).

<sup>5</sup> The name exists in slightly different variations. Parallel to Qgvaldr (with u-umlaut), we find Agvaldr (without u-umlaut), Ávaldr and the weak form Ávaldi could also be variants of the same name.

<sup>6</sup> One of the memorial stones that had stood on Avaldsnes was ruined in 1698 when the church caught fire, according to Torfæus (2011:93).

graphical circumstances also suggest a high likelihood of such a visit. On Snorri's first voyage to Norway in the late summer of 1218, we do not know precisely where he landed, but it was some place in Western Norway. Over the winter, he resided with Skuli jarl, who was then in Eastern Norway. In the summer of 1219, Snorri travelled to Sweden, and the next winter resided once more with Skuli, who was then in Trondheim. Consequently, we can be quite certain that Snorri sailed past Avaldsnes at least twice.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.3 Events during the reigns of Hákon inn góði and Óláfr Tryggvason

In the literature of the kings' sagas, Avaldsnes is the setting for many notable events. In chapter 5 of the Norwegian kings' saga *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum*, c. 1190, Hákon inn góði is victorious over the sons of Eiríkr blóðox in the battle "í Kqrmt við Qgvaldsnes". The account of this battle in *Ágrip* is most probably the source for Snorri's description of the same battle in *Heimskringla* (*Hákonar saga góða*, ch. 19). He specifies as well that the battle occurred "á Kqrmt / ... / á Qgvaldsnesi".<sup>8</sup> The battle most probably occurred in a place with conditions suitable for battle, or where the opposing armies happened to encounter one another. Regardless of whether or not the site of the battle was intentional, the relevant question is whether a victory – or a defeat – at a place such as Avaldsnes (according to tradition, an ancient seat of royal power) would garner special symbolic weight and therefore constitute a pivotal moment for King Hákon.

In addition to the meeting with Óðinn, the sagas recount another dramatic event on Avaldsnes during the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason. In Oddr's narration, the king summons to Nidarnes (in Trondheim) many seiðr-men and those skilled in magic. He has a ship made ready for them and orders their departure from the country. Among the exiles was a man called Eyvindr kelda, who Oddr says was the third or fourth man from Haraldr hárfagri. Before the time of their departure, Óláfr Tryggvason invites the men to a great feast and administers copious amounts of food and drink. When the seiðr-men become sufficiently drunk, the king has the building set aflame, and all are burned to death ('burnt in') with the exception of Eyvindr kelda, who escapes

<sup>7</sup> Information about Snorri's journeys in the country can be deduced by comparing the text in *Sturlunga saga*, chs. 185–8, and the text in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, chs. 58–62.

<sup>8</sup> Snorri cites two strophes from the skaldic poem *Hákonardrápa* (strophes 6 and 7) by the Norwegian poet Guthormr sindri as the basis for his information about the battle on Avaldsnes, but the skaldic poem mentions neither Avaldsnes nor for that matter a particular battle, stating merely that the sons of Eiríkr often had occasion to witness Hákon's power.

through the smoke vent over the fireplace. Oddr refers to Sæmundr fróði as the source for this story.

Snorri tells essentially the same story, but he sets the burning-in of the seiðr-men in Eastern Norway. Eyvindr kelda is said to be the grandson of Rognvaldr réttilbeini, one of the sons of King Haraldr hárfagri by the Sami girl Snæfríðr; Snorri by this detail creates a clear parallel between the burning-in of Eyvindr kelda and that of Rognvaldr réttilbeini, who was burnt-in together with 80 seiðr-men by his half-brother Eiríkr blóðøx under the orders of Haraldr hárfagri. In both variants of the story, Eyvindr kelda sends greetings to the king along with the message that he has escaped death.

Both Oddr and Snorri recount that Eyvindr kelda later sought out the king on Avaldsnes. Oddr sets this event during Christmastide, while Snorri sets it during Eastertide. Both describe Eyvindr's arrival on the island with a large company of seiðr-men and others skilled in magic (sailing in five longships in Oddr's account, one in Snorri's). Oddr has Eyvindr plotting an assault on the king and his people to kill them, but as they came up on the island and to the church that the king, bishop and all the people were inside, the sight of the holy church blinded them all. Rendered easy prey, the king's men took them prisoner, and the next day the king had them taken to a skerry where they were struck down. Snorri's account of Eyvindr kelda's arrival at Avaldsnes unfolds slightly differently: Eyvindr covered his men with a cloak of invisibility, creating a great darkness to prevent the king and his men from seeing them. But when Eyvindr and his people arrived at the royal estate, it was as light as day, the darkness overcame them instead so that they were unable to see, and the king's men easily took them prisoner.

The greatest difference between Oddr's and Snorri's accounts is found in the story's conclusion. While Oddr narrates that the seiðr-men were led to a skerry north of the ness where the Karmsund ends, where they were struck down,<sup>9</sup> Snorri's version has them led to an exposed skerry that went underwater at high tide, where they were bound and left to drown. As Finn Hødnebo has called attention to (Hødnebo 1992:129), the punishment meted out to the seiðr-men, according to Oddr, is in accordance with the punishment prescribed for practicing magic in the Older Gulating's Law (NGL 4:18). There it is stated that those who practice magic shall be taken out onto the sea, struck in the back, and sunk. Snorri's version of the execution of Eyvindr kelda and his men by means of confinement on a tidal skerry near Avaldsnes was likely his own fabrication; as Hødnebo points out, Snorri was perhaps influenced by the mythological narrative describing the slaying of the dwarves Fjalarr and Galarr at the hands of Suttungr the giant by similar means (Hødnebo 1992:130). Snorri has forgotten, however, that the tidal range occurring around Kormt was not

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<sup>9</sup> It is AM 310, 4to that gives this presentation. Sth 18 has a shorter presentation and states only that they were submerged in the place known as Skrattekjæra (Sorcerers' skerries).



**Fig. 3.1:** Seiðr-men on Skrattekjer. Illustration: Halfdan Egedius, 1899.

Owner: The National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design © The image has been cropped.

the approximately two metres particular to his native region in Iceland, but a mere 30–40 cm.

The narratives of events on Avaldsnes during the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason were subsequently incorporated into the manuscripts of Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta, which built upon Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in Heimskringla, while also interpolating material from other sagas.

### 3.4 Events during the reign of Óláfr inn helgi

A particularly consequential event, seen as a pivotal moment in the saga of Óláfr inn helgi, occurred on Avaldsnes during his reign. The narration of how Ásbjörn selsbani killed Þórir selr on Avaldsnes, something that led not only to his own death but also to the king's death at Stiklestad, we know first and foremost from Snorri, but Snorri had both the so-called Oldest Saga and the Legendary Saga upon which to build. In Snorri's version, Ásbjörn Sigurðarson, who was the son of the brother of Þórir hundr and the son of the sister of Erlingr Skjálgsson in Sola, travels south from Hålogaland seeking to buy grain after enduring many hard years of crop failure. Reaching the Karmsund, he moored up for the night by the Avaldsnes estate, where Þórir selr, the king's steward, was in residence. In the morning he came to the ship, and Ásbjörn announced his errand to buy grain and malt to alleviate the crop failure in the north of the country. Þórir selr informed him that he should just turn back towards the north, as the king had decreed a ban against taking grain out of southern Norway. Ásbjörn





**Fig. 3.2:** Ásbjörn hacks off the head of Þórir selr so that it lands on the table before King Óláfr.  
Illustration: Theodor Kittelsen, 1897.

replied that if he would not be permitted to buy grain, he would travel on to stay with his maternal uncle, Erlingr Skjálgsson, in Sola, but he promised to pay another visit to Þórir selr at Avaldsnes on his way back northwards.

Ásbjörn presented his wish to buy grain to his uncle, and Erlingr devised the solution that he could buy grain from his slaves, who stood outside the law and were not bound by the king's prohibition against taking out grain, permitting Ásbjörn to travel northwards with a fully loaded ship. Returning to Avaldsnes, he fulfilled his promise to Þórir selr, but Þórir confiscated all of the grain from him, along with his beautiful sail and gave him an old one instead. When Ásbjörn reached home, he was little satisfied with his journey, and had to tolerate scornful words from his paternal uncle, Þórir hundr. The spring after this event, Ásbjörn travelled southwards on a longship with almost 90 men, and he arrived at Avaldsnes the Thursday of the Easter week. He moored up on the outer side of the island, and walked alone to the royal estate. It turned out that King Óláfr inn helgi was at a feast there. Ásbjörn entered the vestibule, and overheard Þórir selr telling the king about how he had taken the grain from Ásbjörn. As Þórir selr recounted that Ásbjörn had cried when he had the sail taken from him, Ásbjörn jumped into the room, drew the sword that he had hidden under his cloak, and hacked off Þórir selr's head. The head fell on the table in front of the king, and the body at his feet. Skjágr Erlingsson, a relative of Ásbjörn, was in the king's company and bade for mercy for Ásbjörn, but the king was furious and had Ásbjörn taken prisoner, announcing his intention to have him put to death. Skjálgr set off immediately with his company home to Sola in order to fetch help, but before he departed, he assigned the Icelander Þórarinn Nefjólfsen the task of keeping Ásbjörn alive until Easter Sunday. Þórarinn managed continually to find reasons to postpone the execution. When Skjálgr came to Sola and announced what had happened, Erlingr Skjálgsson immediately assembled a large army and sailed to Avaldsnes. With their superior strength, they forced the king to agree to a reconciliation with Ásbjörn. The agreement was that Ásbjörn, who had now received the byname *selsbani* ('the killer of [Þórir] selr'), should take over the place of Þórir and become the king's steward on Avaldsnes, after first going home to Hålogaland to sort out affairs there. His paternal uncle, Þórir hundr, persuaded Ásbjörn to remain seated on his farm; by doing so, he broke the agreement with the king.

Ásbjörn *selsbani* was killed by one of the king's men the summer after the event on Avaldsnes. Ásbjörn's mother gave the bloody spear with which Ásbjörn was killed to Þórir hundr with the words that she desired that it should stand in the chest of Óláfr digri (Óláfr inn helgi). The event on Avaldsnes also led to renewed enmity between the king and Erlingr Skjálgsson. In Snorri's account, there is a clear causal connection between the events on Avaldsnes and the king's death in the battle at Stiklestad. This connection is not found in the versions older than Snorri's.

The narrative about Ásbjörn *selsbani* subsequently found its way into manuscripts of the Great Saga of St Óláfr, which builds upon Snorri's separate Óláfs saga helga but interpolates material from other sagas.





**Fig. 3.3:** King Óláfr Haraldsson must force his way through the men of Erlingr Skjálǫgsson in order to return from the church where he had heard the Easter Mass to his chamber. Illustration: Erik Werenskiöld, Unpublished sketch. Photo: Ellen C. Holte, MCH. Owner: Marit Werenskiöld.

### 3.5 Avaldsnes at the end of the 1200s into the 1300s

After the founding of the towns Bergen and Stavanger (Bergen, according to tradition, was founded in 1070 by King Óláfr kyrri; Stavanger likely somewhat later), one should believe that the rural royal estates in Western Norway declined in importance as centres of administration. The literature of the kings' sagas, which narrate the kings' journeys about the country, suggests that the kings increasingly took up residence in the towns. In Bergen, King Sverrir had his residence at Sverresborg; the royal installation on Holmen in any case dates back to the early 1200s. The sources speak little of events on Avaldsnes in the period between Óláfr inn helgi and the latter half of the 1200s, apart from the short version of *Bǫglunga sǫgur* (*Bǫglunga sǫgur* 1988:43), which mentions a skirmish between the baglers and the birkebeiners on Avaldsnes.<sup>10</sup> Despite the scant information from the written sources, along with the gradual displacement of the old royal estates by the towns as political and administration centres, sources from the end of the 1200s and 1300s indicate that some royal estates, including Avaldsnes, retained their influence long after the foundation of the towns in the area.

<sup>10</sup> The long version of the saga also mentions the event, but locates it with less precision to the Karmsund.

In the final chapter of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, the king builds a stone church on Avaldsnes – the fourth largest church in the rural districts of Norway. By the end of the 1200s and in the 1300s, royal charters were being issued principally in the towns, but some charters were issued on Avaldsnes: King Eiríkr Magnússon issued a charter there in 1297 (DI 2:67), and King Hákon V Magnússon issued many there in the early 1300s. He issued two charters there in 1308 (DN 3:71 and DN 2:90),<sup>11</sup> one in 1309 (DN 3:81), and one in 1313 (DN 5:105). In 1314, Hafþórr Jónsson, the king's son-in-law, was one of the granters of a charter on Avaldsnes (DN 4:107). From one charter in 1322 (DN 1:168), it can be surmised that a law-thing was convened on Avaldsnes. Some amendments were also issued on Avaldsnes in this period: one by Hákon V Magnússon in 1313 (NGL 3:105–6) and another in 1314 (NGL 3:108–9), and one by King Magnús Eiríksson in 1355 (NGL 3:174). In the Icelandic *Flatey-annals*, under the year 1343, it is said that *Qgvaldsnesbuza* was wrecked in Grindavík (Storm 1888:402). This ship – or possibly an older ship with the same name – is also recorded many times in toll rolls from the English town King's Lynn early in the 1300s. A *buza* is a large ship; in this period, the term designated a large merchant vessel. The ship was named after its place of origin, which signifies that Avaldsnes remained a significant centre for overseas commercial trade. In a letter from 1370,<sup>12</sup> King Hákon VI Magnússon accused Hanseatic merchants of having burnt in 1368 his estate on Avaldsnes, other royal estates by the Karmsund, and a house for travelers (RN 7:46). In 1374, King Hákon VI Magnússon issued the last known royal charter to have been written in the Avaldsnes region (DN 15:29). The charter exists only in a late copy, and its location is given as “vdi Karirsund”, but *ir* in “Karirsund” is very likely an incorrect reading of *m*, and this is thus reason to consider the possibility that the location in the charter should be Karmsund. What the Old Norse text said that lies behind “vdi Karirsund” is not possible to establish with full certainty, but it was most likely “í Karmsundi”, which could indicate that the charter was issued aboard the king's ship. It was in fact common practice for the king and his company to reside aboard the ship, possibly using a tent on land, when they were anchored in the harbour. Among other examples, King Magnús Erlingsson is said (*Sverris saga*, ch. 85) to have sailed northward along the coast of Western Norway, staying two or three nights in each harbour. He stayed in the Karmsund for two nights, and asked for news about King Sverrir from ships that came sailing through the strait from Bergen. On the other hand, it is hardly likely that King Hákon VI Magnússon would have stayed either on the ship or in a tent on land when he was in the vicinity of the royal estate on Avaldsnes. The fact that the charter is not localised to Avaldsnes, as

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<sup>11</sup> The location for this charter is not indicated, but the editors of RN (3:467) suggest that the charter was written on Avaldsnes, as another royal charter had been issued there two days earlier.

<sup>12</sup> The king's letter is a reply to the coastal towns' response to the king's earlier response to a letter of complaint from the coastal towns.

were the earlier royal charters that were issued by the king during a stay at the royal estate, most likely reflects that the royal estate, six years after the fire in 1368, had not yet been rebuilt.

In the king's response from 1370, the loss suffered by the king on Kormt after the devastation by the Hansa is valued at more than 2000 marks of burnt silver. This sum includes assets additional to the royal estate itself, such as the loss of other royal farms by the Karmsund and a forest, but it is reasonable to assume that the royal estate made up a large part of this appraisal. By comparing the valuation of the king's loss at the Karmsund with valuations in the same response letter of other acts of destruction perpetrated by the Hansa, we see that the destruction of Marstrand with the castle, cloister, and church as well as a number of islands was appraised at more than 10,000 marks of burnt silver; a single farm by the Karmsund that belonged to one of the king's men is valued at more than 40 marks of burnt silver, and the destruction of a whole area with many houses in the same place (perhaps a settlement in which farm houses were set close together; in Norwegian: 'klyngetun') is valued at more than 600 marks of burnt silver. It is difficult to establish how large a part of the king's loss of 2000 marks of burnt silver was made up by the royal estate; in any case, the valuations suggest that the royal estate that was burnt in 1368 was an establishment with a considerable number of buildings. It is unknown whether Avaldsnes subsequently resumed its role as a royal estate; perhaps the ravages of the Hansa put an end to its long history as such. At any rate, with the onset of the period of unification there was no longer much need for maintaining royal estates throughout the country.

### 3.6 History and the creation of traditions

When Avaldsnes is presented in Old Norse sources as a central place hosting many events of some consequence for Norwegian history, this is obviously connected with the fact that as a royal estate, the king would occasionally stay there. As the king stood at the centre of political activities in Old Norse society, and would be sought out by friends as well as enemies, it follows that the place of the king's residence would consistently be the scene for dramatic events. Sites hosting such events lend themselves to the creation of traditions.

It has been shown that people (such as kings and saga heroes) as well as places can attract traditions. The two kings responsible for Norway's conversion to Christianity, Óláfr Tryggvason and Óláfr inn helgi, are without a doubt characters who attract traditional material and become attached to wandering stories and stereotypical motifs. Places can also attract tradition to themselves and Avaldsnes seems to have been such a place. Very likely this is connected with the toponym itself containing the man's name Qgvaldr, the last element of which has the meaning 'king/

ruler'.<sup>13</sup> Of the royal estates belonging to Haraldr hárfagri in Western Norway, two are thought to contain a man's name, the other being Alreksstaðir; this name, Alrekr, likewise has a final element that means 'king'. It appears that in connection with royal estates that could be associated with a personal name, there, at one point or another, developed a tradition that connected the toponym of the royal estate to a king from long ago. Where such a toponym contained a name element that meant 'king', that would be a factor lending additional support for the formation of a tradition. Such traditions are not only connected to royal estates and to names that contain an element meaning 'king': in many Old Norse texts, often in *fornaldarsögur*, which narrate events taking place prior to the unification of the Norwegian state, there occur toponyms containing a man's name – or a name element that has been interpreted as a man's name. This element often forms the basis for stories that the place was named after a king who lived there long ago. One of the better-known examples of this is Balestrand in Sogn, which is thought to have been named after a King Beli in the *fornaldarsaga Friðþjófs saga ins frækna*. Appearing in the same saga is a King Hringr in Ringerike (Old Norse Hringaríki), and in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra* in *Heimskringla* there is King Haki, to whom Hakadal owes its name.

Alreksstaðir is likewise traditionally associated with a namesake king. The *fornaldarsaga Hálf saga ok Hálfrekka*, which likely appeared in written form in the 1300s, begins with the saga of a King Alrekr who lived in Alreksstaðir. The king had two queens; they did not get along well, so he had to send one of them away. In order to decide, he had the two queens compete to determine who could brew the best beer. One of the queens sought help from Freyja, the other from Óðinn; the latter queen won the competition and was allowed to retain her position as queen. As regards King Haraldr hárfagri's royal estates, it seems that separate traditions have been conflated. *Hálf saga Hálfrekka* (ch. 2) also mentions King Qgvaldr.<sup>14</sup> In this version, Qgvaldr does not live on Qgvaldsnes; rather, he had been killed in a fight against a Viking named Hæklingr and was buried in a mound at the location that would subsequently be named Qgvaldsnes after him. Once, when one of the Icelandic settlers lay ready to sail from Avaldsnes for Iceland, he asked when it was that King Qgvaldr had been killed; the dead king answered from the mound in the form of a stanza that it happened a long time ago.

Regarding this type of tradition connected to Qgvaldsnes and Alreksstaðir, it can seldom be determined with certainty whether it was a single (petty)king who pro-

<sup>13</sup> Less certain is meaning of the first element in the name. One possible interpretation of Ag/Qg is 'sword edge' (Alhaug 2011, see under the lemma Agvald and Åvald; Kruken og Stemshaug 2013, see under the lemma Agvald). The word could also be a derivation of the root in 'age' (Old Norse *agi*), which means 'respect, fear, admonition'.

<sup>14</sup> In the manuscripts of *Hálf saga ok Hálfrekka* there are also found forms of the name that have inserted an *n* after the *g* (Qgnvaldr). Sophus Bugge comments on this "incorrect" form in his edition of the saga (Bugge (ed.) [1864–73], p. 4, note) and explains it as an analogy with the name Rognvaldr.

vided the origin of the toponym, or whether it was the toponym that provided the name of the king. Without question, the place name contains a man's name, but it is difficult to know whether this original man was the Qgvaldr referred to in the sources, or someone else. Assuming an historical core that there was once a King Qgvaldr on Qgvaldsnes, the fact that the particular name happens to contain an element meaning 'king' is suspiciously apt. Because the name is so suitable for he who carries it, it would be reasonable to expect that the name is to be understood as a by-name, as many names do indeed have origins in by-names. That the name Qgvaldr was rare,<sup>15</sup> could also serve as an argument that the name was originally a by-name that had not quite established itself as an ordinary name.

More plausible, however, is the evidence suggesting that Qgvaldr should be understood as an ordinary man's name. The two elements composing the name – Ag/Qg and valdr – were widely distributed elements in Old Norse male names. The latter element, -valdr, is found in many common male names, like Þorvaldr, Gunnvaldr, Rognvaldr, and Sigvaldr, among others. The former element, Ag/Qg, is less widespread, but is found in common names such as Qgmundr. The fact that both name elements are common, albeit not in combination with each other, supports the suggestion that Qgvaldr was a common Old Norse male name; if the name was rare within the collected Old Norse name material, it may yet have found more frequent use within a limited geographical area.<sup>16</sup>

It might be supposed that a name containing an element meaning 'king/ruler' would originally have been used by the highest social layer in a society, which would also explain why the name suits the bearer, as is the case with Qgvaldr on Qgvaldsnes. However, there is nothing in the Old Norse sources to indicate that the name in Old Norse times was reserved for members of ruling dynasties. Names with the element valdr had gained wide circulation in the Old Norse name material. This can indicate that the semantic content of 'king/ruler' had lost any former exclusivity; nevertheless, the interpretation of valdr, which is also a poetic word for 'king' in the language of the skalds, is sufficiently clear that it can be activated whenever desired. Whether Qgvaldsnes really was named after a man who was king in the distant past, or after a man who was not a king but was coincidentally called Qgvaldr, is impossible to establish.

What is certain is that even with an historical core to the traditions regarding King Qgvaldr, the details of the tradition would remain unreliable. We have seen that variations in the traditions surrounding the same king are easily formed. This is also the case for Qgvaldr – one tradition is seen in the kings' sagas and another in the for-

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<sup>15</sup> An overview of the existence of the name in Old Norse sources is found in Lind 1905–15 and 1931.

<sup>16</sup> The overview of the existence of the name Qgvaldr (with variants) in Lind 1905–15 and 1931 shows that the name in the late Middle Ages has a concentration in Telemark, but the presence of the name in toponyms indicates that it had previously enjoyed a somewhat broader geographical distribution.

naldarsaga Hálf sága ok Hálf srekka. In the formation of a tradition can be discerned permanent and less permanent elements or motifs. Elements that are permanent, in the sense that they do not change significantly over time and do not split into multiple variants, can easily create the impression of greater historicity or “truth” than those parts of the tradition more prone to changing and splitting into variants. Consistency in a tradition is not necessarily a guarantee of a high level of truth. Permanence in the tradition would be an argument for a certain level of truth only if there is reason to believe that the tradition was formed not long after the events actually happened. If a relatively permanent element was fixed at a later point in time in the formation of that tradition, permanence in itself does little to verify any core of truth contained therein. However, in cases where the tradition or elements of it are seen to change easily, there is even greater reason to be skeptical regarding the level of historical truth it might preserve.

Another hallmark of oral tradition is that it often contains stereotypical motifs recognisable in numerous other texts that build upon tradition – so-called wandering motifs. At the oral stage, such motifs could have moved at suitable times from a tradition linked to one hero to a tradition linked to another hero; at the written stage, an author could have gladly adapted such motifs from older written texts or from oral tradition. The author at the written stage, as well as the teller of the tale at the oral stage, could also compose freely around the subject at hand while altering the earlier tradition. At the oral stage, a new variant of the transmitted tale could enter the tradition if the new composition met with its audience’s approval.

As concerns the tradition of King Qgvaldr and Avaldsnes, some elements of the tradition can be characterised as relatively permanent, while others have clearly been altered. There are elements of wandering motifs, as well as probable examples of new composition added at the written stage.

Permanent elements in the tradition hold that there was once a real king who was called Qgvaldr, after whom Qgvaldsnes/Avaldsnes was named, and that the grave mound of this king is found on Avaldsnes. One reason that these pieces of information seem to have been a stable part of the tradition is easy to see. The oral tradition has here support in the form of the place name and in the form of the visible grave mound, which both virtually function as evidence that the narrative is true. But while the name of the king, Qgvaldr, has been preserved in the place name, the name of his opponent varies in the tradition. In the Old Norse kings’ sagas from the end of the 1100s and from the beginning of the 1200s (Oddr Snorrason *munkr* and Snorri), the king who fells Qgvaldr is called Varinn, in the *fornaldarsaga* he is called Hæklingr, and in *Flateyjarbók* from the 1370s (1:375), which builds upon the older kings’ sagas, he is called Dixin.

The two kings responsible for the Christianisation of Norway were characterised as heroes in the stories told about them both contemporaneously and in later periods. These stories, however, to whatever degree they had been based on historical events, would subsequently attract wandering stories and narratives that perhaps origi-

nally had been connected to other figures. When the tradition began to form, both the selection of motifs and the shaping of certain motifs, including those rooted in historical events, would often be shaped in the direction of a stereotype. We can be certain that the two Christianising kings were both occasionally in residence at the Avaldsnes royal estate, and that the tales about Eyvindr kelda and Ásbjörn connected to the place likely have an historical core, though it may not be possible to find proof. It can likewise be supposed that Óláfr Tryggvason could have investigated the grave mounds at the place, which might have provided favourable conditions for the growth of stories that explain why he did so. It is impossible to determine how comprehensive the historical core of these stories is; what is certain is that a tradition rooted in historical events has been modified and expanded in the process of transmission.

The visitation by Óðinn to one of the kings responsible for Christianisation, or to one of their men, is a motif so common in Old Norse texts that it can be considered a wandering motif.<sup>17</sup> The time of year and location of the meeting can vary by the telling, but is usually set at one of the Christian festivals.<sup>18</sup> The precise nature of the festival seems to be less important. According to Oddr Snorrason munkr, Óðinn turns up on Avaldsnes at Christmastime, while Snorri has this happening closer to Easter, probably because it is a better fit with the king's travel schedule as he describes it. Another common element in the narrative has Óðinn demonstrating knowledge of the distant past with such a knack for storytelling that he keeps the king (in some versions one of his men) awake through the night in order that he will be sleepy in church the next day. The depiction of Óðinn as he appears to Óláfr Tryggvason likewise follows the trope that the god, though not identified by name, is recognisable to the tale's audience in the image of a one-eyed old man wearing a low hat.

As noted, the story of the burning-in of the seiðr-men and the killing of Eyvindr kelda potentially contains an historical core. At the same time, the representation of the magicians exhibits typical stereotypical traits connected with different genres of literature. As many have argued, the saga written by Oddr about King Óláfr Tryg-

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**17** Annette Lassen in her doctoral dissertation provides an overview of the representations of Óðinn, including encounters with Óðinn, in various Old Norse genres. Of special interest here is the presentation of Óðinn in kings' sagas and þættir (Lassen 2011:135–51). Hallvard Lie provides a humorous discussion of the meeting between Óðinn and one of the members of King Óláfr Tryggvason's court at the farm in Reina in Vika in Þátr Þorsteins skelks (Lie 1992:211–216).

**18** It is not only the meeting with Óðinn, but also meetings with dangerous powers and the unknown in general that are traditionally set at a festival. That the meeting with Óðinn was set during the Easter weekend is probably a later development from the Christian period. That the meeting with dangerous powers was set during the Christmas weekend, can also build upon pre-Christian notions. The Christian Christmas was set for the same time as the pre-Christian celebration of mid-Winter; the notion that meetings with dangerous powers are more likely in the darkest time of the year is hardly specific to the Christian tradition. In the kings' saga Ágrip, for example, the narrative begins with King Hálfðan svarti losing his Christmas meal to invisible creatures on Christmas Eve (jólaptann). In the same saga, the meeting between King Haraldr hárfagri and the Sami girl Snæfríðr also occurs on Christmas Eve.

gvason was intended to portray the king as a saint. Whatever the case may be, the saga makes use of clearly recognisable hagiographical tropes connected to Christian literature; for example, the heathens/magicians are blinded by the sight of the holy church. On the other hand, Snorri's representation of the magicians employs a trope common in secular Old Norse texts – the magicians have the power to conjure up thick fog or darkness. In the case of Eyvindr kelda and his followers, the spell of darkness that they had conjured up against the king and his followers backfires, and they are themselves overcome by darkness. Neither Oddr's nor Snorri's accounts of the killing of Eyvindr kelda and the seiðr-men can be called a typical traditional motif. Oddr's presentation of the killing as being in accordance with the law can be interpreted as an authenticating detail, while Snorri's representation should be understood rather as an example of his literary talent and his prioritisation of artistic concerns over fidelity to the sources.

Several motifs in the representation of Ásbjörn selsbani too have likely had their formulation influenced by stereotypes in the oral tradition. When Ásbjörn hacked off the head of Þórir selr, the head fell on the table in front of the king. Such dramatic decapitations carried out as revenge are found in several Old Norse texts.<sup>19</sup>

The scene in which Ásbjörn's mother goads his paternal uncle to take revenge and provides him with the murder weapon has close parallels in many texts, and could have been influenced by both oral motifs and older parallels in written texts. However, women goading their male relatives to vengeance was not an infrequent practice in Old Norse society, so the incident described here is not necessarily a result of the formation of tradition.

Some of the narratives connected to Avaldsnes occur on two temporal planes. For example, in those tales that include the story about King Qgvaldr, the main plot takes place during the 900s or 1000s, alongside another narrative set in the distant past, at the time of King Qgvaldr himself.<sup>20</sup> The story on the more distant plane of time tends to employ traditional tropes similar in degree of stereotyping to those used in stories connected to the Christianising kings.

The king or the hero who, from within the mound, recites a strophe or responds when addressed, as King Qgvaldr does, is also a motif known from other sources. Needless to say, there is no historical core to be found here, though the motif could reflect actual beliefs held in pre-Christian times.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> A close parallel is found in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ch. 155; a variant in which the head that has been struck off speaks while in mid-air is found in the same saga, ch. 158, and in *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 67.

<sup>20</sup> The temporal plane of the author can also emerge in the text, as Snorri says about the boat-shaped ship setting: "those that are still standing", or as Oddr Snorrason munkr says about the skerry where the seiðr-men were killed, that it has been "called Skrattekjær right up until our times".

<sup>21</sup> In the *fornaldarsaga Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, Hervör communicates with her deceased father in his mound, Angantýr, by exchanging strophes with him.



Although the motif of the king who sacrifices to a cow or who has an extraordinary relationship with a cow that accompanies him everywhere and sustains him by her milk is not especially common, it is known from other sources and could serve as indication that Oddr is building upon oral tradition. For example, the motif is found in the *fornaldarsaga Ragnars saga lóðbrókar*, in which King Eysteinn in Uppsala has a cow, Síbilja, to whom he sacrifices. She leads his host into battle, and the king's enemies are driven mad with fear simply from the sound of her bellowing. In the end, the cow perishes in battle against the sons of King Ragnarr. While the written *fornaldarsaga* is more recent than Snorri's text, the motif of the king and the cow can possibly be an older motif in the oral narrative tradition.

King Qgvaldr, sustained by the milk of the cow he always has with him, can thus also be associated with one of the primeval giants in Old Norse mythology – Ymir, sustained by the milk of the primeval cow Auðhumla – and the motif thereby plays a role in raising Avaldsnes to mythical stature.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The written sources show that Avaldsnes as late as the 1300s was occasionally a site of residence for the king and his company and was an important place in central Western Norway. On this account, the sources are contemporary and reliable. The literature of the kings' sagas recounts that Avaldsnes was one of the royal estates of King Harald hárfagri, and subsequently the scene of important events in the reigns of Hákon inn góði, Óláfr Tryggvason, and Óláfr inn helgi. The distance in time between the written sources and the events referred to is considerable here; around these stories a tradition has formed, through which the original material has been mediated and modified. Still, there is reason to search for a historical core in the narratives connected to Avaldsnes. These narratives describe battles in which kings or their sons are killed, attempts to attack the king at the royal estate followed by revenge on the attackers, and conflict between the king and one of the country's most powerful dynasties in which the king is compelled into reconciliation; it is unlikely that narratives involving such dramatic events would have come out of nothing. In cases where the oral tradition is supported by skaldic strophes, the strophes could function as a stabilising factor. In cases where the oral tradition is not supported by skaldic strophes, there is reason to believe that the formation of the tradition could have produced broader modifications.

The information connected to the most distant past, the time in which King Qgvaldr is said to have lived, is obviously of greatest interest for a book concerning the archaeological excavations at Avaldsnes. The temporal distance between the written sources and the events referred to is so great here that one cannot normally have faith that an historical core is to be found in the tradition. However, the crux of the matter is the question of whether the place name Qgvaldsnes has been a stabilising factor

in preserving through the centuries a tradition that a King Qgvaldr once existed and was buried in a grave mound near the estate which was named after him. No solid conclusions can be drawn in this regard. However, as the archaeological excavations indicate, Avaldsnes was in prehistoric times a seat of some kind of leader, which begs the question as to whether the tradition about King Qgvaldr might indeed contain an historical core. Whether or not the name Qgvaldsnes preserves information about an actual King Qgvaldr, the archaeological finds show that the tradition attached to the name is apt. The name Kqrmt, which seems to have been elevated into the mythic sphere at a time before the poem *Grímnismál* came into being,<sup>22</sup> could likewise be interpreted as an indication that this place in central Western Norway was known throughout the whole of the Old Norse culture.

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<sup>22</sup> The dating of eddic poems is often uncertain, and the poems are liable to varying degree to have changed over the course of their transmission through oral tradition until their commitment to writing, which likely first occurred in the 1200s. Most scholars agree that *Grímnismál* is from the pre-Christian period.

Dagfinn Skre

## **4 The Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project's Research Plan and Excavation Objectives**

This chapter provides an outline of the scholarly problems that the Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project was designed to address, the central theme explored being the political institutions and processes in the first millennium AD. The research plan was developed during the 2007–9 pilot project phase, and was adjusted and supplemented during the 2011–12 excavations and the research and publication phase in the subsequent years.

The first of the research plan's two sections, the results of which are presented in the present volume, deals with Avaldsnes, Kormt, and the Karmsund Strait. The research plan included a series of selected themes, taking as a point of departure the rich and varied research strand on so-called central places. The central-place approach informed the choice of objectives for the 2011–12 excavations at Avaldsnes alongside a corresponding excavation and sampling strategy. Relevant specialists were invited to join the project.

The second section of the research plan addresses the first-millennium history of political institutions and processes in the south-western coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The first results from this research are presented in this volume's final chapter, which discusses Avaldsnes in a western Scandinavian context. The preliminary results presented in that chapter will be further developed in the next volume from this project.

Why did kings prefer to reside on the island of Kormt, a modestly fertile and wind-blown island, rather than in the more fertile and more densely populated regions further inland and along the fjords? This is the central question with which researchers of Avaldsnes have grappled for 450 years, and which the Avaldsnes Royal Manor (ARM) Project takes as its point of departure (Skre, Ch. 2). The short answer – proximity to the naval sailing route – can yet be developed to encompass discussions of most aspects of societal and political development in western Scandinavia through the first millennium AD.

Two aspects of this vast field of research are addressed in this project: firstly, to discuss the shifting nature and context of a prominent western Scandinavian aristocratic site; and secondly, to reconsider the history of political institutions and processes in the first-millennium south-western coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula (Fig. 29.3) – both aspects with some potential bearing on the rest of Scandinavia and Germanic areas in general. The present volume will be devoted to the first part of the ARM Project research plan, the second volume to the latter.

The chosen approach pursues a prominent strand of research in Scandinavian archaeology; the exploration of political sites, institutions, and processes in the first millennium AD. This strand can be traced back to the earliest writers of history (regarding Norway, see Skre, Ch. 2), but has been particularly vibrant during the past half-century. The application in the 1970s of anthropological research (notably, Service 1971; Sahlins 1972) introduced evolutionary models and social stratification as

frameworks for discussions of societal hierarchisation and political institutions and processes. The period's large-scale surveys of ancient monuments in the three Scandinavian countries have provided an empirical base of unprecedented volume and quality for this research. In the following two decades, research on political institutions and processes was based primarily on cemetery studies and agrarian settlement history, as well as on special types of sites, such as hilltop fortifications, boathouses, rune stones, and courtyard sites (e. g. Hyenstrand 1974; Magnus et al. 1976; Randsborg 1980; Hyenstrand 1982; Ambrosiani 1985; Myhre 1985; Solberg 1985; Myhre 1987; Ramqvist 1991; Hedeager 1992a).

A shift occurred in the early 1990s towards qualitative and away from quantitative approaches and methods, leading to less model-based research. The Danish project 'Fra stamme til stat' ('From tribe to state', Mortensen and Rasmussen 1988, 1991) was instrumental in that reorientation. By bringing together archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, numismatists, and specialists in Old Norse literature and religion, the project set the path for an increasingly interdisciplinary research practice. Over the following decade a series of productive research themes were introduced or revitalised, most significantly the Iron Age hall (Herschend 1993), warfare (Olausson 1995; Nørgård Jørgensen and Clausen 1997), the history of landed property (Skre 1998; Zachrisson 1998; Iversen 1999), ethnic groups and territoriality (Callmer 1991; Näsman 1999), judicial organisation (Storli 2006; Iversen 2013a, 2015b), and central places (Brink 1996, 1997; Larsson and Hårdh 1998; Näsman 1998; Fabech 1999; Hedeager 2001; Jørgensen 2003; Söderberg 2005; Ljungkvist 2006; Skre 2007b).

To varying degree, all these research strands involve the study of social stratification. Of the various strata, attention has been directed predominantly towards the social elite; this book applies the term 'aristocracy'. The lack of formal nobility in first-millennium Scandinavia gives this term a less precise content than, for example, in high-medieval continental Europe. In the mainly agrarian subsistence economy of first-millennium Scandinavia, food production sufficient to support a group of people who were exempt from production activities is the first basic prerequisite for the existence of an aristocracy; the social group's control of that production is the second. That position provides the opportunity to develop lifestyles and competences that more or less clearly separate that group from the rest of the population.

The aristocratic lifestyle can take forms that are rarely or not at all reflected in the archaeological record – for instance, bodily gestures and oral language – archaeologists need to rely on those that are. Clearly, as indicated by rich depositions and huge mounds with lavish furnishing, these conditions were present in many Scandinavian regions in the Bronze Age, northern Kormt among them. From the early pre-Roman Iron Age, however, very few indications of social stratification are found in western Scandinavia. As at Avaldsnes (Bauer and Østmo, Ch. 8:154), agricultural yield increased during that period, and in the Roman Iron Age, a marked shift occurred. High-status grave furnishings and prominent grave monuments as well as luxury imports and huge buildings are found in most Scandinavian regions with a

predominantly agrarian economy. Although the expressions of an aristocratic lifestyle found in the archaeological record vary through the first millennium, they are always present to varying degrees. They are probably only to some extent representative of the power and relative size of the aristocratic group. In the present context a variety of potentially aristocratic expressions will be considered (below; Skre, Ch. 27).

Although some farms in western Scandinavia appear to have been large-scale in the late and most likely the early first millennium, the access to foodstuffs sufficient to feed the variety of specialists requisite to maintaining an aristocratic lifestyle – artisans, poets, warriors, servants, carpenters, and the like – will have necessitated access to surplus produce from other farms. The history of landed property has been explored intensively in the literature of the last twenty-five years (for references to Norwegian publications 1995–2008, see Skre 2011a:201–2). Although the number and extent of estates in the early first millennium is tentative, their existence is plausible. Thus, in this volume, the term ‘manor’ is applied to a farm that appears to be an estate-holder’s residence. In addition, political leaders may have had access to produce through the *veizla* institution. Prior to the introduction of royal taxes, fines, and the like in the 10th–12th centuries, the *veizla* appears to be the only redistributive mechanism for foodstuff other than land ownership (Skre, Ch. 29:798).

Political institutions in first-millennium Scandinavia appear to have had both communal and aristocratic aspects; exploring institutions and processes therefore involves studying the communal. For instance, while local thing assemblies in the late Viking Age probably consisted of all land owners in the area, also such that possessed no farm but their own, the literary and judicial evidence clearly indicates that thing assemblies were dominated by the aristocracy. The relation between the communal and the aristocratic will be touched upon in this volume (Iversen, Ch. 26; Skre, Ch. 28) and explored further in the second volume.

## 4.1 Avaldsnes – a central place?

The first part of the research plan, which this first Avaldsnes volume is intended to fulfil, is based primarily on the last 25 years of research into sites that have come to be identified as central places. These decades of exploration have allowed in-depth studies of the site or complex that hosted a variety of essential societal functions, for instance cultic rituals and feasts, thing meetings, and markets, and where aristocratic residences and prominent cemeteries were to be found. The ARM research plan aimed at applying the rich and varied research perspectives within this field, which primarily had been developed on sites in southern Scandinavia, Svealand, Vestfold, and Hedmarken (Fig. 1.2) onto a prominent west-Scandinavian site. A PhD thesis by Arnfrid Opedal (2005) and a Master’s thesis by Håkon Reiersen (2009) have demonstrated the potential of applying a central-place approach onto Avaldsnes and Kormt.

One of the reasons for choosing the central-place approach was to enable critical evaluation of the concept of the 'central place'. The concept has primarily been applied to sites such as Helgö (Arrhenius and O'Meadhra 2011), Old Uppsala (Ljungkvist 2006, 2009), Uppåkra (Andrén 1998), Gudme (Hedeager 2001), and Tissø (Jørgensen 2010). North of Skagerrak in present-day Norway, Åker in Hedmarken (Hernæs 1989; Ingstad 1993; Pilø 1993) and Skiringssal in Vestfold (Skre 2007a, 2008, 2011b) display many of the same characteristics, and are here considered to be of the same type as the former (Fig. 1.2). The archaeological material from these sites consists of remains of numerous houses of which some are apparently aristocratic residences, thick and find-rich deposits often with substantial remains from craft production, and finds in deposits and graves of gold and other exotic materials and types. Together with written evidence and place names, the finds indicate juridical, social, and sacral activities.

The search along the west-Scandinavian coast for central places of the type described above has been modestly successful. Surely, some sites there would have had central functions; however, aristocratic sites along the coast of western Scandinavia generally appear to lack several of the archaeological characteristics mentioned above. For example, find-rich deposits are rare or non-existent, and indications of extensive craft production and market sites are not commonly found in or near aristocratic sites. As opposed to southern and eastern Scandinavia, place names here that indicate sacral sites appear to be utterly few; securely identified theophoric names (i. e. containing names of a god or goddess) may be counted on one hand, while those in the south and east approach 200 (Brink 2007b).

However, numerous aristocratic sites from the first millennium AD did exist in western Scandinavia, from Rogaland in the south to Hålogaland in the north. Some are situated on the outer coast, others further inland along the fjords and in the two areas with continuous stretches of arable land, Jæren and Trøndelag (see maps in Figs. 29.5–5). Apparently, the centrality of these sites differed from that of aristocratic sites in southern and eastern Scandinavia.

Parallels and differences between central places in southern and eastern Scandinavia and potential central places in western Scandinavia merit further exploration. If there are systematic differences, what caused them? Was centrality in the western regions of an entirely different nature from centrality in the south and east, or did the difference lie in the inclusion in central places of particular functions and exclusion of others? Were the differences in central-place features connected to differences in political institutions and processes? Or perhaps the concept of 'central place', or rather the content it has attained in Scandinavian Iron Age research, is in need of refinement (Skre 2010)? A research project centred on a site outside the central-place regions in southern and eastern Scandinavia, but which still appears to have had regional and possibly superregional political significance through much of the first millennium AD, would supply the opportunity to address such questions. Avaldsnes fulfils those criteria.

Some of these questions will be discussed in Section E that concludes this volume; others will be pursued in the second ARM volume. The path towards understanding the nature and extent of Avaldsnes' centrality pursued in the current volume is, firstly (Skre, Ch. 27), to identify the extent of aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes based on the research presented in Sections A–D. Secondly (Skre, Ch. 28), guided by the types of central functions identified in south- and east-Scandinavian central places, an attempt will be made to identify central functions that Avaldsnes may have had for people living in the vicinity as well as for those residing in the centre. Thirdly, the conclusions from these two chapters will be set in a west-Scandinavian context of aristocratic sites (Skre, Ch. 29).

To provide an empirical basis for these analyses and discussions, the excavations at Avaldsnes as well as the exploration of the island of Kormt and the Karmsund Strait will be analysed to highlight a variety of aspects of centrality and aristocratic presence. These aspects and related research questions are outlined in the following.

## 4.2 Excavating Avaldsnes

From the first-millennium monuments and finds in northern Kormt and along the Karmsund Strait, Avaldsnes appears to have been the most prominent manor in the area, at least in parts if not the entirety of that long period. The main aims of the ARM excavations were thus to identify indications of aristocratic presence and central functions at Avaldsnes, as well as the absence of such.

The existing first-millennium archaeological evidence at Avaldsnes consists primarily of grave finds and monuments, some of which clearly indicate aristocratic presence. The vast majority of those that have been dated stem from the first half of the millennium (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12). Evidence of Viking Period aristocratic presence is predominantly literary and documentary. In the process of writing the ARM research plan it became clear that the existing evidence of both the early and the later periods was in dire need of reassessment, as well as substantiation and qualification through additional archaeological evidence (Mundal, Ch. 3; Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22; Skre, Ch. 23).

Although grave furnishings and monumentality supply significant information on aristocratic presence, graves represent points in time rather than trends that span decades and centuries. To identify more continuous trends and to date possible shifts in aristocratic presence and centrality, the Avaldsnes settlement site or sites from the first millennium would need to be identified and excavated.

Furthermore, although it not an explicit component of the original excavation plan, the excavation proved that one additional type of evidence held great potential for exploring long-term trends in the site's development: the history of agriculture at Avaldsnes. The excavation set out to address the following specific themes:

1. The types and numbers of buildings over time. Can periods without buildings be identified?
2. The character of the settlement. Do the functions and features of buildings, areas, deposits, artefacts, or biofacts indicate aristocratic presence or superregional networks?
3. The location of the farmyard. Was it stable, or was it moved at any time?
4. Graves and monumentality. Were there graves and monumental elements in addition to those already known, and can their chronology be outlined in greater detail?
5. Agricultural strategies and output. Can shifts in agricultural strategies be detected? Are there periods of increasingly intensive or extensive production?

To produce an excavation strategy aimed at highlighting themes 1–3, the evidence from existing archaeological and geophysical surveys was analysed to identify indications of first-millennium buildings and occupation (Bauer and Østmo, Ch. 5; Stamnes and Bauer, Ch. 16). Indications such as postholes and cooking pits were found in widely dispersed areas, but the evidence was not sufficiently detailed or precisely dated to decide their extent or to reconstruct buildings or other types of constructions.

On the basis of our analyses of this material and on a detailed LiDAR scan of the Avaldsnes headland, commissioned by the ARM Project, six areas (Areas 1–6, Fig 5.2) were identified as having potential for containing settlement features and deposits. In the excavation strategy designed to explore themes 1–3, the first step was to conduct initial survey trenching in those six areas followed by the opening up of larger excavation areas where the trenching had revealed settlement features and deposits. The minimising approach to further excavation was aimed at limiting intervention in these archaeological features and deposits to what was absolutely necessary to explore themes 1–3. After excavation, unexcavated features were carefully covered in preservation for future excavation.

In addition to buildings in and around the farmyard, Avaldsnes would be expected to have had boathouses along the shore; the discovery, date, size, and construction of these would be relevant for themes 1–2. Several boathouse features had already been identified through visual surveying, and remains of one assumed boathouse were partially excavated in 2001. To identify and explore first-millennium boathouses, a methodology was designed that combined surface surveying, sea-level datings, and limited trenching (Bauer, Ch. 10).

To highlight theme 4, limited trenching was conducted in the two monumental grave mounds Flaghaug and Kjellerhaug. The latter had not yet been dated, and the trenching was aimed at dating the mound and any subsequent phases of further build-up. This was also the aim of the trenching in the scant remains of Flaghaug (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12).

In Areas 2–4 (Figs. 5.1–2), previous survey trenching had identified postholes and other indications of settlement. As the ARM trenching proceeded in 2011, it soon



became clear that no first-millennium building remains could be securely identified in these areas. However, Area 2 presented excellent opportunities to explore the history of cultivation in the Avaldsnes headland. Because an understanding of this aspect of Avaldsnes' history would contribute to identifying trends and shifts that might be linked to aristocratic presence and central functions, the excavation and sampling of these remains were included in the excavation plan as a fifth theme.

While the project was focused on the first millennium AD, excavations revealed extensive remains from the subsequent millennium. In Area 1, quite unexpectedly, the ruins of a high-medieval masonry building were discovered. Less surprising was the identification in Area 1 of the remains of buildings and garden from the post-medieval rectory, although these were more substantial than anticipated. Following the excavation it was decided that these remains, in particular the masonry building, merited their respective chapters in this publication (Bauer, Chs. 14, 15). This inclusion did not substantially alter the chronological emphasis of the project, other than to extend the survey of the medieval literary and documentary evidence to include the evidence on the 13th–15th centuries (Mundal, Ch. 3).

Because Areas 1, 5, and 6 lay in what was known to be the post-medieval rectory farmyard, excavations there were expected to reveal remains from that period. To improve the prospects of identifying such remains while avoiding unnecessary excavation, the ARM Project commissioned the historian Frode Fyllingsnes to survey public archives and produce a detailed overview of buildings and land use in the post-medieval era. His report (Fyllingsnes 2008) aided the identification of several features that occurred during excavation, in particular in Area 1, and during the writing of the history of the post-medieval rectory (Bauer, Ch. 15).

The research plan included a strategy for scientific sampling of the site. Sampling methods were chosen that could potentially highlight all the themes 1–5 and contribute to dating features and deposits. All postholes and numerous other features were sampled to collect biological material: burnt animal bone fragments, charred plant macrofossils, and wood charcoal. In addition, bone fragments were collected manually during excavation. To solve particular research questions encountered during the post-excavation phase, the scope of biological analysis was extended to include phytolith analysis (silica microfossils of plants) and stable isotopes (Ballantyne et al., Ch. 19). Samples for radiocarbon datings were collected from all relevant contexts; macrofossils and charcoal were taken from biological samples, while charcoal was also collected manually during excavation.

Additionally, extensive sampling from relevant contexts was conducted to map magnetic susceptibility, soil micromorphology, and soil chemistry, the latter samples also from grids. In accordance with research questions and sampling opportunities that occurred during excavation, a pollen profile and a single organic chemistry sample were collected and analysed (Macphail and Linderholm, Ch. 17). Extensive geochemical analyses using portable X-ray fluorescence (pXRF) were conducted on core samples that had been systematically collected prior to survey trenching and exca-

ventions in all areas. Analyses of samples in Area 6 proved particularly relevant to the second of the themes that the excavation was set to address; these analyses are thus published here (Cannell et al., Ch. 18). Further details of excavation methodology and artefact recovery are described by Bauer and Østmo elsewhere in this volume (Ch. 5).

### 4.3 Exploring Kormt

As already noted, surveys and analyses of prominent grave monuments (Opedal 1998, 2005) and certain central-place elements (Reiersen 2009) in Kormt had already been undertaken. Thus, fulfilling these aspects of the research plan did not demand new surveys, but could be based upon existing publications. However, exploration of central functions and aristocratic presence in the area required several additional studies of Kormt. Place-name studies are of demonstrated relevance to central-place studies (Brink, Ch. 24), as are analyses of ritual depositions (Zahrison, Ch. 25). Recent studies have suggested that judicial organisation as it is known from the high medieval period has a great time depth. There is a need for such studies to be undertaken for larger regions than Kormt; to that end, Frode Iversen (Ch. 26) has studied the whole of Ryfylke.

One category of artefacts from the ARM excavations had the potential for highlighting aspects of centrality and aristocratic presence: pottery. Analyses of this material and a reassessment of finds in Kormt and along the Karmsund Strait were thus included in the research plan (Kristoffersen and Hauken, Ch. 21). The results from these chapters are employed in Chapters 27–28, where the research problems in this part of the research plan are addressed.

### 4.4 Researching political dominance in south-western Scandinavia in the first millennium AD

The exploration of Avaldsnes and Kormt presented in this volume is meant to serve as a basis for implementing the second part of the ARM Project research plan, which aims at reconsidering the history of political dominance and institutions in first-millennium south-western Scandinavia – potentially with some bearing on the rest of Scandinavia and Germanic areas in general. The bulk of these studies will be presented in the second volume from the ARM Project, where the corresponding section of the research plan will also be presented.

The final chapter in the present volume (Skre, Ch. 29) develops some of the themes that will be explored in these subsequent studies. The west-Scandinavian landscape sets rather rigid parameters for premodern communication. A communicative per-

spective on aristocratic and communal sites highlights some structural features of settlement, economy, and society that deserve more attention in the historiography of kingship in western Scandinavia and beyond.



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## Section B **Excavation Results 2011–12**



Egil Lindhart Bauer and Mari Arentz Østmo

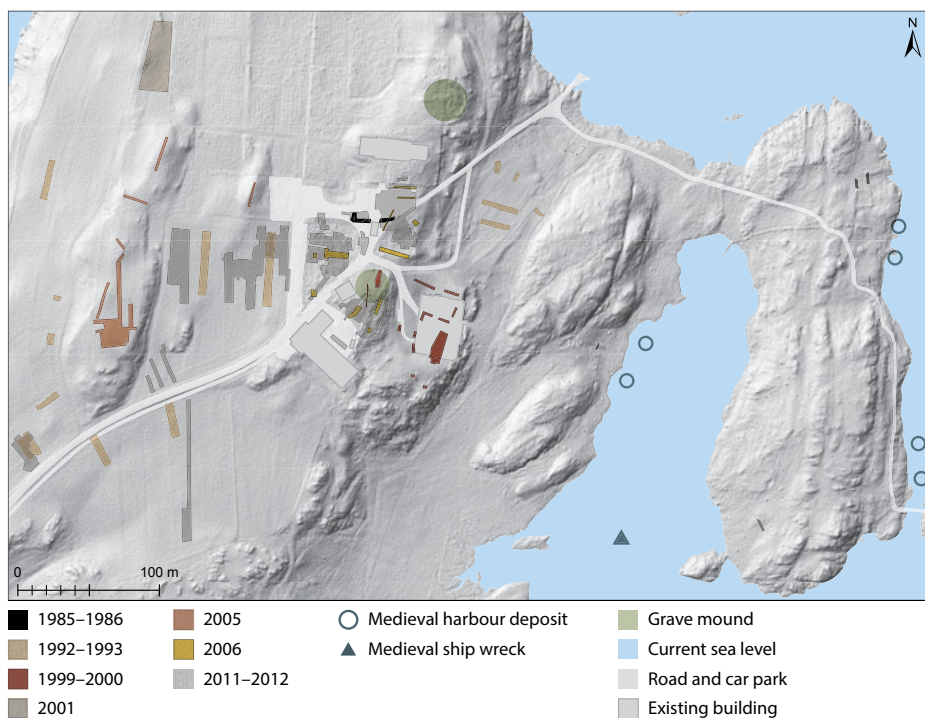
## 5 Excavations and Surveys 1985–2012

Surveys and excavations carried out at Avaldsnes 1985–2012 are described in this chapter, the main focus being on the Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project 2011–12 excavations. In sum, the campaigns conducted surface surveys, metal detecting, soil coring, test trenching, open-area excavation, as well as geophysical surveys and scientific sampling. Following a brief account of the extent and results of the 1985–2006 campaigns, the methodology and extent of the ARM excavations are described. Also addressed are the challenges related to investigating a site with such complex history including continuous activity in central areas as found at Avaldsnes.

This chapter has two main aims. The first is to clarify the state of knowledge prior to the Avaldsnes Royal Manor (ARM) Project excavations by providing an overview of previous surveys and excavations. These are presented below in chronological order, each survey to a certain extent representing different focus and objectives related to Avaldsnes as a historical and archaeological site. The second aim is to describe the methodology of the ARM excavations in terms of artefact recovery from topsoil, the combination of trenching and open-area excavation, the excavation of deposits and features, the digital documentation, and the sampling strategy. The scholarly objectives of the project are also briefly outlined (see Skre, Ch. 4 for details).

In 1985 the first modern archaeological excavation was conducted at Avaldsnes. Prior to that year, except for a small excavation of a grave by Jan Petersen (1934), only amateur excavations were undertaken with accidental finds made during cultivation and groundworks. Additionally, visual surveys of monuments were undertaken (Skre, Chs. 2, 23; Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22; Zachrisson, Ch. 25). Geophysical surveys are described and discussed elsewhere in this book (Stamnes and Bauer, Ch. 16) and thus mentioned here only in brief.

Figure 5.1 provides an overview of all areas excavated or investigated by test trenching from 1985 to 2012. Detailed accounts on the individual field campaigns may be found in the respective reports (Hemdorff 1985; 1993; Rønne 1999a; Elvestad and Opedal 2001; Sjurseike 2001; Hafsaas 2005; 2006; Bauer and Østmo 2013). All radiocarbon dating results from these campaigns have been recalibrated and are supplied in Appendix II, together with all ARM calibrated radiocarbon dating results (for details regarding calibration and citation in text, see Skre, Ch. 1:7–9).



**Fig. 5.1:** Overview of all excavations at Avaldsnes, 1985–2012, including the results of the 1998–2000 surveys indicating the presence of medieval harbour facilities. The numerous non-intrusive geophysical surveys are treated by Stamnes and Bauer (Ch. 16); a map of these surveys can be found there (Fig. 16.1). Minor test pits from surveys are not included. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

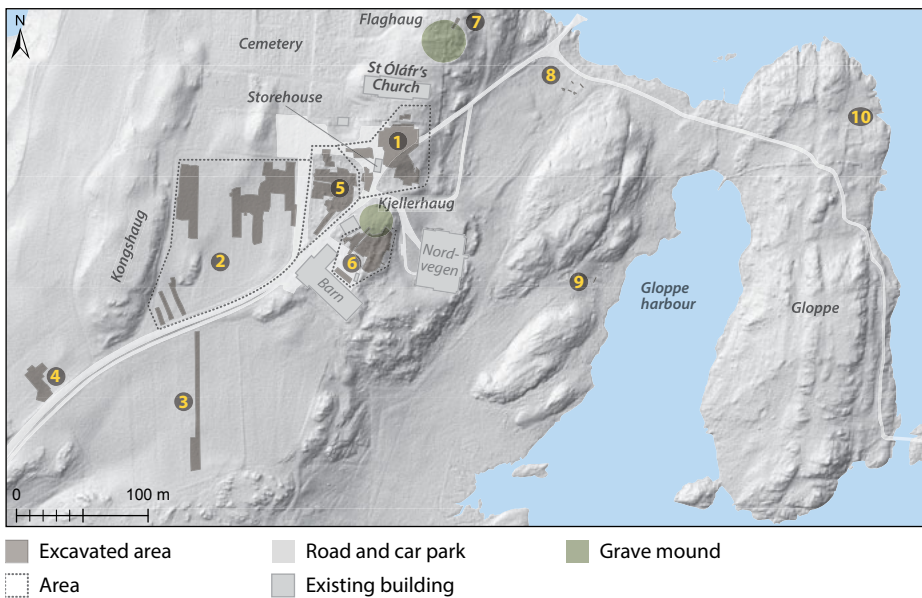
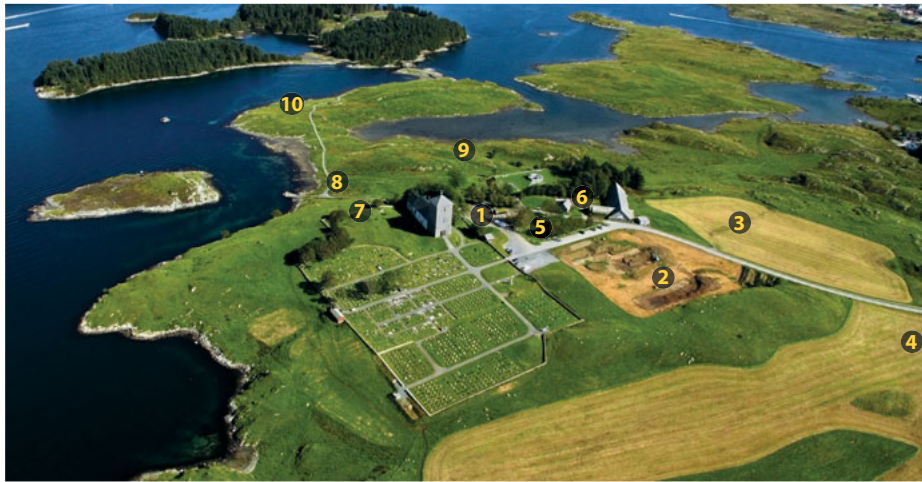
## 5.1 Surveys and excavations 1985–2006

### 5.1.1 Excavations 1985–6: Subterranean passageway

The subterranean passageway was known from local tradition and was observed in 1923 during restoration work on St Óláfr's Church, as documented in letters to the National Antiquarian Harry Fett from the parish priest Hove and the architect Moestue, who were in charge of the restoration (Hove 1923; Moestue 1923). In 1982, locals contacted the Archaeological Museum in Stavanger when the subterranean passageway was thought to have been rediscovered during the digging of a ditch for an electrical cable (Utvik 1982).

The latter observation led to the museum undertaking an excavation in 1985–6. In Area 1 in the ARM Project's excavation, the passageway ran about 30 m east to west, before turning north towards St Óláfr's Church's western tower (Figs. 5.1–2; Bauer,





**Fig. 5.2:** The ARM Project excavation areas 2011–12 with names of topographical features and buildings mentioned in the text. Photo: KIB media. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

Figs. 14.9 and 14.11–12). The passageway was cut into weathered bedrock – saprolite – that could easily be removed for the purpose of constructing the passageway. The cut for the passageway was 0.5–0.6 m wide, about 1 m deep, and covered with large stone slabs, occasionally with slabs lining the walls. The 1985–6 investigation focused mainly on tracing the layout and direction of the passageway; it was not fully excavated. The depth and width of the cut were measured where the covering slabs were out of original position or provided small openings into the passageway (Haavaldsen 1987). The feature could not be securely dated, but was assumed to be from the Middle Ages (Hemdorff 1985; 1986). At the western termination of the investigated trench, where the passageway ran northwards, traces of two separate buildings, assumed to be more recent than the passageway, were found (Hernæs 1997:216). The passageway is discussed by Bauer elsewhere in this volume (Ch. 14:304–6).

### **5.1.2 Surveys 1990–3: Settlement remains**

In 1990, the Archaeological Museum in Stavanger conducted an extensive phosphate survey resulting in the identification of likely areas of prehistoric or medieval settlement (Forsberg and Haavaldsen 1990). In 1992–3, the museum carried out test trenching to search for settlement traces based on these phosphate indications (Hemdorff 1993). In Area 2, postholes, hearths, and cultural deposits were exposed. Ceramic sherds from the late Roman Iron Age and the Migration Period were recovered. Postholes and hearths were also found in Areas 3 and 4. The latter area contained ard marks, as well. In the area east of Area 1 and southwest of Area 8, Stone Age cultural deposits and flint artefacts were found (Hemdorff 1993:3).

Most features located in 1992–3 were only recorded in plan and only a very small selection was cross-sectioned and dated. The main conclusion of the surveys was that all the elevated surfaces around the Kongshaug ridge bore traces of prehistoric settlement, possibly chronologically distributed with the older traces located furthest west and the younger (ranging from Roman Iron Age to the early Middle Ages) lying closer to the church (Hemdorff 1993:3). Results from these surveys are discussed in this volume (Østmo and Bauer, Chs. 6:89 and 7:103–4, 129, 131); some have been reinterpreted in light of the 2011–12 excavation results.

### **5.1.3 Excavations 1999–2000: Graves**

The excavations were conducted prior to construction of the Nordvegen History Centre, that is, in the northernmost part of Area 6, as well as east of that area. The main excavation was undertaken in the 20th-century rectory garden, east of Area 6. A restoration of the Kjellerhaug grave mound, including removal of certain recent constructions disturbing the mound, was also carried out (Rønne 1999a; Sjurseike 2001).

The excavations in the rectory garden revealed three circular stone packings with charcoal and cremated human and animal bones. Though human bones were not present in all three features, the secure presence of human remains in one and possible human remains in another led to the interpretation of the features as cremation graves. The three graves were radiocarbon dated to the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12:245). Underneath the graves was a possible cultivation deposit dated to 1261–1125 BC (Beta-145267) (Bauer and Østmo, Ch. 8:141; Sjur-seike 2001:6–7).

#### 5.1.4 Surveys 1998, 2000: Harbour

As part of Karmøy Municipality's Avaldsnes Project, established in 1993, the search for a harbour and trading site from the Iron Age or Middle Ages was initiated. In cooperation with Stavanger Maritime Museum, surveys were undertaken in 1998 and 2000, both on land and underwater. Land surveys included surface surveys, phosphate prospecting, auguring, and excavation of test pits and small trenches close to the sea at Avaldsnes, as well as the neighbouring farms Bø and Utvik (Elvestad and Opedal 2001). Complementing previous surveys carried out by the Maritime Museum in the late 1970s and early 1980s, sub-sea surveys and minor trenching were targeting the inner and outer Gloppe Harbour, around the Gloppe Peninsula as well as the northern part of the Avaldsnes headland (Elvestad 2001:46–59).

Finds both on land and under water indicated that a rather busy medieval harbour was located in the Gloppe area. Pottery dating from around AD 1250 to the middle of the 16th century supplied the time span for the activity. A substantial proportion of the pottery was dated to the 14th–15th centuries, suggesting an intense period of activity. Finds on land included building remains, boathouses, roads, and cultural deposits from the Middle Ages and the post-medieval period. Some of these possible boathouses were examined closely in 2012 for evidence regarding their construction and date (Bauer, Ch. 10:183–4). Underwater, foundations for piers, bridges, or sailing blockades were found, as well as cairns of ballast stones dumped from boats and thick waste deposits. Several loading sites were identified. A shipwreck from the High Middle Ages (AD 1224–63, T-14818) was discovered in Indre Gloppehavn – possibly sunk as foundation for a pier (Opedal et al., 2001:110). Most of the artefacts originated in what is now Germany or the Netherlands, testifying to the importance of the Hanseatic trade in western Norway. The finds lend credence to the previous assumption that the Hanseatic trading port called Notow/Nothau was located at Avaldsnes (Elvestad and Opedal 2001:6–7).

### 5.1.5 Surveys and excavations 2005–6: Graves and settlement remains

A second round of survey excavations for the Avaldsnes Project in cooperation with the Museum of Archaeology in Stavanger took place in 2005–6; the main goal being to locate traces of the Viking Age royal manor (Hafsaas 2005; 2006). In 2005, the areas of investigation were Kongshaug and the harbour area east of the settlement plateau, at the Gloppe Peninsula. At Kongshaug, several graves, probably ranging in date from the 1st to the 10th century AD, were exposed (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12:243–5). Traces of settlement suggested that several buildings had stood at Kongshaug, probably in the pre-Roman Iron Age or earlier. Cultivation deposits were also exposed and excavated in the trenches dug at Kongshaug (Hafsaas 2005:14). In parallel with the 2005 survey, the Kongshaug ridge was surveyed using metal detectors, resulting in the recovering of multiple modern finds but also a 1.8-gram gold ingot (S12222a) from redeposited cultivation soil (Hafsaas 2005:14–15; Zachrisson, Ch. 25:701).

The other part of the 2005 survey, at the Gloppe Peninsula, resulted in the discovery of three possible boathouses, four cairns, of which three were possible grave monuments, as well as other building remains, a road, and two wells or watering holes, probably from the post-medieval period (Hafsaas 2005:20–5; Bauer, Chs. 10 and 15; Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12).

A geophysical survey was carried out in 2006 in and west of the modern farmyard (Areas 1, 5, 6), considered to be the likely location for the Viking Age royal manor (see overview of all geophysical surveys in Stamnes and Bauer, Ch. 16:328–9 and Fig. 16.1). The surveys were followed by trenching providing the possibility to compare the results (Hafsaas 2006). The finds included postholes, wall ditches, cooking pits, cultural deposits, and a large stone packing, demonstrating that the prehistoric settlement remains extended over most of the early 20th-century farmyard. Artefacts and radiocarbon dating results placed the settlement traces in the period from the Roman Iron Age to the early Middle Ages (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 7). In other trenches, possible remains from the high medieval farm were discovered (Bauer, Ch. 14). In addition to the investigations in the present-day farmyard, a limited excavation of a disturbed secondary inhumation grave within the stone packing at Kongshaug, mentioned above, was carried out (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12). The island Fårøy was surveyed with no findings, and test pitting within the possible boathouse remains located in 2005 did not provide definitive results (Hafsaas 2006).

## 5.2 The Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project 2011–12

The ARM excavations constitute the most extensive fieldwork conducted at Avaldsnes (Appendix I: ARM staff). The field work extended over two seasons and encompassed several excavation areas (Areas 1–10; Figs. 5.1–2). The aims and general strategies for the excavation are discussed in detail elsewhere in this volume (Skre, Ch. 4:57–60). In accordance with the excavation plan and the excavation permit from the Directorate for Cultural Heritage, excavated areas were minimised and deposits were left intact when possible. The main excavation areas (Areas 1–6) covered 5,228 m<sup>2</sup>, while minor trenches in other areas (Areas 7–10) amounted to 40 m<sup>2</sup>. In the excavation plan, the selection of excavation areas was based on results and interpretations from the 1985–2006 campaigns and on studies of the local topography, combined with knowledge gained from geophysical prospecting. A high-resolution LiDAR (Light Detection And Ranging) scanning (20 first-returns/m<sup>2</sup>), commissioned by the ARM in 2008 and conducted by Blom Geomatics AS on the Avaldsnes headland and the islands to the east to serve as a pre-excavation search for archaeological features, such as banks and depressions from prehistoric boathouses. The scanning results were of assistance in planning the field work in the harbour area; supplying high-quality documentation of features such as the Flaghaug grave mound remains and providing data for terrain models and illustrations of excavation results included in this volume.

The choice of the main areas for excavation was based on the project's scientific aims, namely the investigation of the settlement's buildings, possible function-specific areas, changes in the farmyard, and monumentality towards the Karmsund strait in the east (Skre, Ch. 28). Thus, based on the available evidence, the main excavation effort was concentrated within the present-day farmyard (Areas 1, 5, and 6) and the adjacent field (Area 2), together assumed to comprise the main settlement area.

During the 2011 season, Areas 1 (central part) and 2 were most intensely investigated. Towards the close of the excavation season, several new survey trenches were opened in Areas 5 and 6, as well as in other parts of Area 1, for the purpose of planning the 2012 season. Specifically, the goal of these surveys was to gain an overview of the potential for prehistoric settlement traces in areas not previously surveyed, as well as to assess the results of earlier surveys. As a result, early in the 2012 season, continuous excavation areas were opened in Areas 5 and 6. Furthermore, trenches were opened in the cemetery (the northernmost part of Area 1), in the former rectory garden (southeastern part of Area 1), in Areas 3 and 4, in the Flaghaug grave mound (Area 7), and in the harbour (Areas 8–10). At the conclusion of the ARM excavations, all exposed and remaining features were covered by fibre cloth before the excavated soil was redeposited in the trenches and the surface cover re-established.

The depth of cultural deposits in the different excavation areas varied greatly, as did the stratigraphic complexity. In particular, Area 1, the north-eastern part of Area 5, and the southern part of Area 6 were heavily truncated by recent activities, leaving

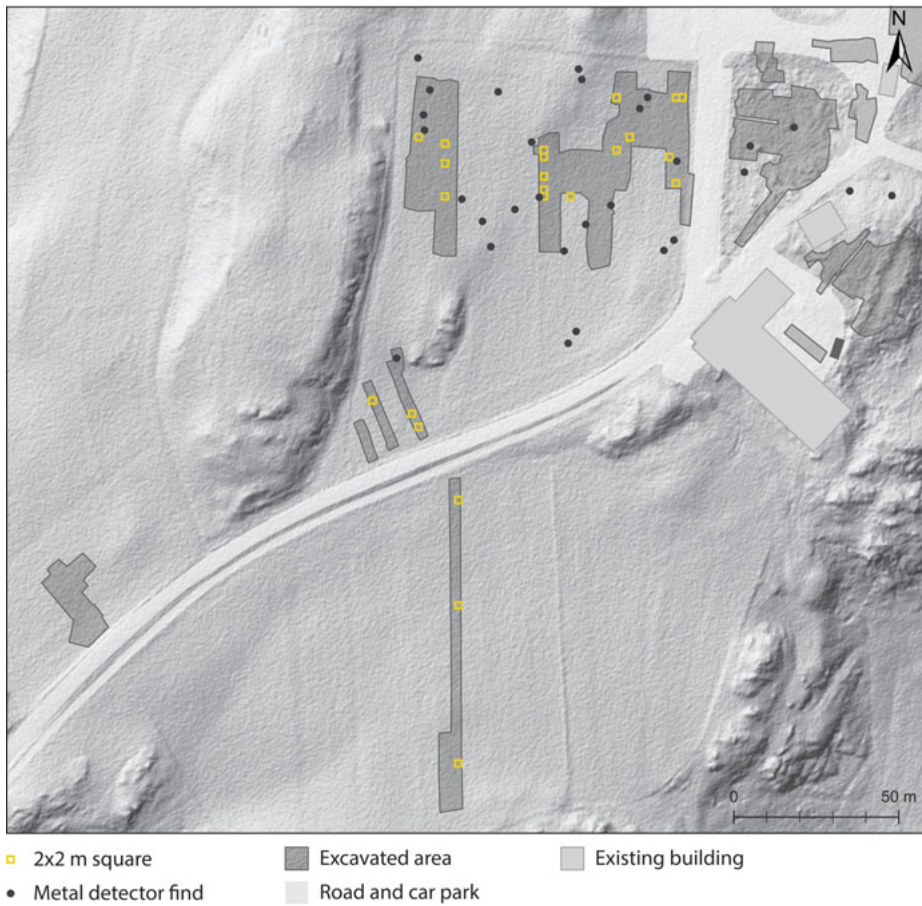
the prehistoric remains disturbed and fragmented. As a consequence, a larger proportion of these areas had to be excavated to ascertain a cohesive image of them.

There has been substantial activity at Avaldsnes since the late Stone Age. Throughout prehistory and in modern times buildings have been constructed, repaired, torn down, and rebuilt – in the same areas or in new locations. The central settlement plateau – Areas 1–2 and 5–7 – has seen the most intensive activity, resulting in large amounts of features and artefacts from vastly different periods, but consequently also truncation of older features. Truncations were especially visible in Area 1, where buildings from the post-medieval rectory and garden and the post-World War II construction of a car park led to significant damage to building remains from the 4th–5th, 10th–11th, and 13th–14th centuries. Truncation of prehistoric features has caused mixing of material from different periods, resulting in diverging radiocarbon dating results between contextually related features or even within the same feature. In addition, bioturbation and vegetation movement, such as worm activity, erosion, and growing tree roots, has disturbed many features. What remained in Area 1 were shallow deposits between the bedrock and the makeup of the car park. Certain areas, like those between Areas 1, 2, 5, and 6, were unavailable for excavation due to standing buildings, vegetation, or infrastructure such as roads or cable ditches.

### 5.2.1 Artefact recovery from the topsoil

Prior to the 2011 excavations, organised and supervised by ARM staff, a crew of metal detectorists from Rygene Metal Detector Club surveyed Areas 2 and 5 in a 20-by-20-metre grid. The Kjellerhaug and Flaghaug grave mounds were also surveyed. An equal amount of time was spent on each square in the grid in Areas 2 and 5, thereby ensuring a complete and equally intensive survey of all areas. Only artefacts located in the disturbed topsoil (the top 20 cm) were excavated during the metal detector survey. The survey yielded many artefacts; an assessment of the full assembly identified 29 artefacts as archaeologically significant (Fig. 5.3). The remainder were predominantly modern coins, nails, or other iron objects, quite similar to the 2005 metal detector survey at Kongshaug that resulted in only one prehistoric artefact. Apart from an 11th-century silver coin (Østmo, Ch. 20:518), no precious-metal objects were discovered. The meagre results from the 2011 metal detector survey were probably a reflection of previous illegal metal detecting; such activities are known to have taken place at Avaldsnes, on one occasion leading to a police investigation. Throughout the 2012 excavation, metal detector searches were sporadically carried out by the on-site staff.

To retrieve artefacts from cultivated areas, a selection of 2-by-2-metre squares in Areas 2 and 3 were mechanically sieved. A custom-built, machine-driven sieve was utilised (Fig. 5.4). The modern topsoil and underlying cultivation deposits were sieved separately. During the two excavation seasons, 23 such squares were selected for



**Fig. 5.3:** Distribution of all metal-detector finds from 2011 and the location of the squares selected for sieving of plough soil. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

sieving, equalling approximately 3.2% of the total opened ploughed area. The original goal was for 10–15 %, but in areas with thick cultivation deposits (soil depth varied greatly within each square), the sieving was very time consuming; it soon became apparent that it would be impossible to keep pace with the excavation targets. Following an evaluation of the recovered artefacts, it was decided to reduce the amount of soil sieved. Subsequent squares for sieving were only selected from areas likely to contain archaeological features.

The deposits were dry-sieved with a mesh size of either one or two square centimetres, depending on the soil condition. Clayey and often wet soil decreased the sieving's efficiency. The smaller mesh was impossible to use where the soil was wet. Conversely, the larger mesh allowed a large amount of the soil to pass straight through the sieve without revealing potential artefacts. The artefacts generated from sieving





**Fig. 5.4:** Machine-driven sieve in use. Photo: Cathrine Glette (upper), MCH (lower).



consisted mainly of modern ceramics, glass shards, clay pipe fragments, iron fragments, some slag and sintered clay, anthracite, a few lead fragments, flint, and other stone artefacts. Small amounts of burned bones were also recovered. Most of the material was discarded as it was of recent origin, corresponding with the results from the metal detector survey (Fig. 5.3).

### 5.2.2 Trenching and open-area excavation

The excavation began with trenching or open-area excavation using a mechanised digger. Trenches between two to six metres wide were initially opened, taking into account previous survey results and topography. Most trenches were then expanded, based on the location and presumed continuation of exposed features (see Fig. 5.2 for the extent of excavation areas). In the harbour area, the investigations were sufficiently limited for the trenches to be dug by hand.

The character of the overburden varied greatly from area to area. In the car park in Area 1, the overburden consisted of hard-packed gravel over thin cultural deposits and bedrock, while in the prehistoric field in Area 2 there were deep colluvial deposits covering stony subsoil, the upper strata of which had been truncated by modern ploughing. To preserve the integrity of particularly important monuments, some trenches in the interior of the Kjellerhaug grave mound and in the fortification remains were not dug all the way down to the subsoil or bedrock (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12; Østmo, Ch. 11).

Earlier survey trenching (Hemdorff 1993) in Area 2 suggested that cultural deposits were quite thin. However, due to undulating bedrock, the ARM excavations revealed that between the survey trenches dug two decades earlier, the cultivation deposits were up to 1.3 metres thick, containing numerous archaeological features in different strata. Consequently, the soil in Area 2 had to be removed gradually in artificial horizons. While different stratigraphic levels were distinguishable in the trench profiles after excavation, this stratigraphy could not be discerned during excavation. Instead, once a feature appeared, the current horizon was maintained throughout the trench, thus exposing all features at that level. These artificial horizons simply represent the plough depth of younger cultivation and not the surface from which the archaeological features originally were dug; for this reason, features belonging to a wide time range occur at the same level. A similar approach, but on a smaller scale due to shallower deposits and a smaller excavation area, was applied to the colluvium in Area 6.

Following excavation and documentation of the features in one horizon, mechanical soil stripping was resumed until a new horizon appeared. Generally, large constructions were only partially excavated. This applied to an almost 30-metre long stone construction uncovered along the eastern side of Area 6. After exposing its extent, crosscutting sections were established to reveal information about the feature's con-

struction method and stratigraphy, as well as provide suitable places for sampling deposits in and beneath the construction. Apart from the sections, the remaining parts of the construction were left intact (details in Østmo, Ch. 11:210). The Kjellerhaug grave mound was treated similarly; after uncovering stratigraphic information and exposing sections for sampling, the main part of the mound was left intact (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12).

### 5.2.3 Single context excavation and sectioning

The main excavation method employed on deposits and features was single-context excavation, although in most areas it was applied in a simplified version. Single-context excavation – as outlined by Edward C. Harris (1989 [1979]) – entails excavating individual contexts (deposits, cuts, and features) in reverse chronological sequence of their deposition, truncation, or construction. Deposition and construction may vary greatly in manner and duration, and can constitute anything from the momentary deposition of a part of a midden or the construction or repairing of a wall to the gradual accumulation over years and decades of a floor deposit inside a building or in a cultivated field. Separate events related to the same feature are treated as separate contexts. A posthole, for example, consists of multiple events and contexts, including but not limited to the hole dug for the post, remains from the post itself, stones and soil supporting the post, and deposits filling the posthole after the removal or decomposition of the post.

Throughout most of the investigated areas at Avaldsnes, excavation consisted of topsoil stripping and exposure of features cut into cultural deposits, colluvia, or subsoil. In areas where individual features lay clearly delimited, the single-context method was simplified. Consequently, all events related to such individual features were recorded as part of the same context, called an archaeological object. Features containing separate contexts of importance for interpretation or sampling, for instance Kjellerhaug grave mound, were excavated and documented according to standard single-context methods. In areas with complicated stratigraphy, with multiple deposits and intersecting features, all contexts and their stratigraphic relationships were distinguished, excavated, and recorded.

Delimited features such as postholes, cooking pits, hearths, ovens, and wall ditches were sectioned, allowing profile documentation. The fill from the excavated half was removed context by context whenever such sub-division of stratigraphic sequences within the feature had the potential to provide further information. The fill from selected features and deposits was wet-sieved with a mesh size of either 2 or 4 mm, depending on the feature and soil type. The fill of many features was sampled in its entirety for macrofossil recovery, thus eliminating the need for sieving. In addition to sectioning single features, several long profiles were left standing in areas with thick cultural deposits or complex stratigraphy. These profiles allowed rechecking of

the interpretations made during the course of the single-context excavation. Furthermore, the profiles were used for comprehensive sampling (see below).

### 5.2.4 Digital documentation

Features, finds, samples, profiles, excavation areas, and topography were recorded using a Trimble TSC3 total station with millimetre accuracy. The data was imported into *Intrasis* (Intra-site Information System) version 2.2 b103. *Intrasis* is “a GIS designed for a combination of complex information data and geographical data” ([http://www.intrasis.com/intrasis3\\_system.htm](http://www.intrasis.com/intrasis3_system.htm)). *Intrasis* Analysis version 1.2.12 and ArcMap 10 were used for data analyses and map production, respectively.

Field documentation employed contexts sheets on which features were drawn and described. Certain compulsory fields in the context sheets, such as colour, texture, and construction elements, provided consistency in the documentation. This allowed features to be sorted and organised, for example based on size, depth, or presence of certain material such as charcoal or fire-cracked stones. After recording in the field, the context sheets were transcribed to *Intrasis*, thus compiling a comprehensive GIS (geographic information system) of the excavation data.

All features recorded in the field were automatically given the next available number in a consecutive sequence, serving as that feature’s unique identity. The feature denomination consists of an ‘A’ (archaeological object) followed by 4–5 digits, depending on how far into the sequence the features were recorded. After importing to *Intrasis*, errors in the recorded data were corrected, and features’ stratigraphic and contextual relationships to one another were entered. Meta-features, also called superstructures, such as buildings, which included several excavated features, were manually created in *Intrasis* (Fig. 5.5). The excavated features interpreted as components of the meta-feature were then related to it. The meta-features were assigned low numbers, for example building A10.

Finds were coded similarly as features, with an ‘F’ (finds) followed by the next available number and a coded relation to the archaeological object from which they originated. Six-digit numbers were assigned to finds, samples, and features created post-excavation, in order to assign a unique identity to context-less artefacts or to artefacts found during sieving and therefore not recorded in situ. Six-digit numbers were also assigned to provide unique identities in cases where finds were divided, for example from burnt clay into sintered clay and burnt clay.

