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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 *formaldarsögur* 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.¹

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.²

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.³

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

1 “Konning Harald haarfager leffde trij aar ephther att Erich blodøxe fich landitt att raade, och bleff koning Harald haarfager død paa Auellsnes och bleff lagtt 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 varit 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).⁴

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:lxxiii; 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'⁵.

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.⁶

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

⁴ A revised edition was published by Gustav Storm in 1881.

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

⁶ "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.⁷ His education and later duties in Stavanger would have made him intimately familiar with the diocese. The rector at Avaldsnes at the time, Christopher Sigurdsson, 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 Bescrifulse* – 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 Bescrifulse* 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 Norvegicarum*, a history of Norway from the earliest times to 1387.

2.1.2 Tormod Torfæus 1711: *Historia rerum Norvegicarum*

Pormóður Torfason, or Tormod Torfæus (Fig. 2.1) as he came to call himself, was born just outside Reykjavik 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

⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹

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'¹⁰ (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 siktning 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.¹¹

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.¹²

11 "...memorant Halfi Herois et Olafi Tryggvini Regum Historiæ de binis talibus saxis, in Augvaldi Rogii, et vaccæ, qvam vivus ille coluerat, ac prope se post fata contumulari jussit, memoriam erectis: qvi quidem, qvoniã in insulæ hujus Kormtis, ubi ipse habito, sacerdotali prædio Augvaldsnesia, ad suum quisqve templi latus nostrâ ætate, et alter etiamnum conspicitur, et nihil non narrationi priscae respondet, fidem indubiam faciunt, non modô 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 terra longitudinem triginta pedes, alia viginti sex erecta prominuit; prior etiamnum perstat, posterior anno millesimo sexcentesimo nonagesimo octavo, fortuitô 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.¹³

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; Veia 2004).

As Torfæus tells us, 700 years after Qgvaldr's death, the landnámssman 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).¹⁴*

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

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

¹⁴ "...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 ‘Køkling’, which adds credibility to this tradition”.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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

¹⁵ “Colles propinqvi hodieqve ab Hæklingo, qvem propria dialecto Køklingum incolæ pronunciant, nomen sortiti fidem huic traditioni faciunt.”

¹⁶ “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 Skalld.”



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.¹⁷

¹⁷ “...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, Schønning aimed his rationalistic critique at what he took to be unfounded superstition: this 'alleged deity' could not protect Qgvaldr. Schønning'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 Schønning 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.¹⁸

2.2.2 Antiquarians of the 18th and early 19th centuries

In Schønning'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.¹⁹

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 særdeeles 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 316–30²⁰ 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 Skratetskjera, 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 Skratetskjera, 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 "Pibeskjærret", 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

²⁰ 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.²¹

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

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.²² 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):²³

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 kystroverne") 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

²² An overview of research is given in Andersen 1977:40–157.

²³ "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 landsstyrere."

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.²⁴

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 kvinnum 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

²⁴ “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).²⁵

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”²⁶, 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’²⁷ (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”²⁸. 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’²⁹ (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.”³⁰

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

26 “á Haugum við Karmsund”

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. Sóti 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 defensible 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 *Norðvegr*, 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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