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

Pursuing the ARM research strategy (Ch. 4), this chapter summarises, analyses, and contextualises the evidence on aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes and along the Karmsund Strait presented in previous chapters in this book.

In SP I (2000–350 BC) aristocratic presence was introduced and long-distance overseas connections to southern Scandinavia were established. In SP II (350 BC–AD 200) these connections were maintained, warrior burials were introduced, and agrarian production increased, probably leading to population increase. In SP III (AD 200–600) major changes occurred. Princely graves were entombed in the ancient Flaghaug mound, a prominent stone monument was raised, a monumental hall building, a boathouse, and a longhouse were erected; most of these buildings and monuments are without parallel in western Scandinavia, while the stone monument and one of the graves are unique in the whole of Scandinavia. The evidence for aristocratic presence is strong in SP III's first two centuries, somewhat weaker in its latter two centuries. Features are few from SP IV (AD 600–900), the most substantial of which are remains of a palisade, which indicates external threats and hostilities as well as local military capabilities. Near Avaldsnes, the Salhus mound from early SP IV and the Grønhaug and Storhaug shipgraves from late SP IV provide evidence for aristocratic presence in this period. In early SP V (AD 900–1250) food-processing activities in the farmyard increase, and around the turn of the millennium a building appears to have been raised on the location where the hall building stood in SP III. Doubts regarding the historicity of literary evidence for royal residence at Avaldsnes in the 10th–early 11th century are counterbalanced by the surprising consistency among the sources. The archaeological evidence contributes somewhat to this assessment.

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to characterise the extent of aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes along the Karmsund Strait from the Bronze Age to the High Middle Ages. Regarding Avaldsnes, the discussion is based primarily on the results achieved through the 2011–12 excavations in accordance with the five themes highlighted in the ARM research plan. The themes concern various types of indications of aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes, as well as the absence of such (Skre, Ch. 4). The majority of this evidence is presented in text and figures in Chapter 6; in general, reference should be made to Chapter 6, while cross-references to other chapters will be included only for results not mentioned in Chapter 6.

Regarding the land along the Karmsund Strait, the discussion will be based on the evidence presented in Chapters 3 and 21–26. Also, some additional evidence and research results will be introduced (Skre, Ch. 2). The discussion is organised chronologically according to the Site Periods described in Chapter 6.

Clearly, characterising graves, buildings, and other finds as aristocratic necessitates some degree of comparison with parallels at other sites. As will be seen, relevant comparative material has been found along the western coast of the Scandi-

navian Peninsula and in southern Scandinavia, and to a lesser degree in Germanic areas on the Continent. Thus, the comparative perspective involves consideration of Avaldsnes' regional and overseas connections, as will be included in the discussion.

27.1 Site Period I (2000–350 BC, Fig. 6.1):

The land clearing and agriculture introduced in this period fall into a general pattern of agricultural expansion 2700–1700 BC along the western coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula north to Troms (Myhre 2002:67–75; Olsen 2013:129, 135–40). There is nothing out of the ordinary about the traces of SP I agriculture at Avaldsnes; the same types of features have been found in numerous other sites along the coast. Rather extraordinary however, are the two Avaldsnes grave mounds, with Flaghaug dated to the early Bronze Age less securely than Kjellerhaug (Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22:574; Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12:235–41).

The two mounds probably date to the same period as the mounds in Reheia, 1.3 kilometres as the crow flies to the north-west. There, seven Bronze Age mounds lie in a row, the only Scandinavian monument of its kind outside Denmark and southern Sweden. The diameter of the largest of the Reheia mounds (about 30 metres) coincides well with that of Flaghaug (about 34 metres), and both date to the early Bronze Age. In northern Kormt a total of 13 Bronze Age mounds have been known (Myhre 1998:15–16, with two recent discoveries added); we may now increase the number to 15. In addition, one mound lies east of the Karlsund Strait. Furthermore, of the six undated mounds recorded near the Storhaug and Salhus mounds in the late 19th century and now removed, some may have been of a Bronze Age date (Fig. 27.1).

The 16 mounds are all earthen, the largest concentration of such mounds of a Bronze Age date in present-day Norway; the others are found in coastal areas, from Lista in the very south and north to Ålesund. Many of them were constructed in such a way as to be seen by travellers, very much so the ones in Kormt; 15 of the 16 mounds would have been visible from the Karlsund Strait. The vast majority appear to have been built in the early Bronze Age (c. 1700–1100 BC), while some of them have secondary graves from the late Bronze Age (c. 1100–500 BC).

A small number of finds substantiate the apparent seaway's connection to present-day Denmark and Skåne, as indicated by similarities shared by the sites' respective grave monuments. Three large depositions of flint objects from around the turn of the millennium have been found in northern Kormt, two in Uvik and one in Hauske (Fig. 27.1); the latter is the largest find of its kind in Scandinavia. The Hauske find consists of 27 daggers, one sickle, four scrapers, one axe, and 214 large blades (S5513–14). Flint of this quality undoubtedly originated in Denmark, most likely northern Jylland (Østmo 2005:63); the high-quality craftsmanship indicates that the production also occurred there.

Fig. 27.1: Monumental graves and flint deposits along the Karmsund Strait. Cultivated soil in modern times, roughly corresponding with the Iron Age situation, is indicated. The extent of the cultivated soil east of the Karmsund Strait, where the modern town of Haugesund is positioned, is estimated on the basis of topography and records of 17th-century assessments of farms there (Skre, Fig. 28.1).

A direct connection between Jylland and Rogaland appears to have been established in this period. Einar Østmo points out that whereas artefact distribution in the Middle Neolithic (c. 2900–2350 BC) indicate that sea routes across Skagerrak followed the coast of western Sweden, a new route was established in the Late Neolithic (2350–1700 BC), when a direct route across Skagerrak from Jylland to Agder and Rogaland was taken up. Crossing the approximately 120 km stretch of open sea was facilitated by plank-built boats with a higher freeboard, Østmo maintains.

The concentration, unparalleled in Norway, of three large flint deposits demonstrates that northern Kormt played a central role in the distribution of weapons, tools, and non-local raw materials. This role probably persisted into the following centuries as bronze took the place of flint. As will be evident in the following, the connection to Jylland was maintained into the later periods.

Evidently, the land along the Karmsund was the seat of prominent communities in the second millennium BC. The Avaldsnes headland was included in this dominion, both as agricultural land and as the site of aristocratic grave mounds. The period's increased emphasis on sea travel (Østmo 2014), the social significance of metal objects imported from the south, and the coincidence between cultivable land and the strategic position along the sailing route appear to be the main reasons for the prominence of the lands along the Karmsund in this era.

27.2 Site Period II (350 BC–AD 200, Fig. 6.2)

At Avaldsnes in this period, the consolidation of cultivated patches into a large and continuous fertilised field would have increased the yield from grain fields. Presumably this was undertaken with the aim of feeding a larger group of people. This population increase may have been connected to social changes. The only other new element introduced at Avaldsnes in this period is the use of cooking pits for preparing food for larger assemblies of people. Both the consolidation of fields and the introduction of cooking pits are normal occurrences in agrarian settlements along the coast of western Scandinavia in this period. Thus, population increase would have been a general phenomenon throughout the wider region in SP II; none of these changes indicate that Avaldsnes played a specific role in the period's social changes.

However, regarding aristocratic presence and connections to Jylland and the Continent, one enigmatic find may suggest otherwise. In the early 19th century, two bronze masks, fashioned to be attached to a curved surface, were found “several ells deep in the soil at Avaldsnes”, probably originating from an aristocratic burial in early SP II. The finds have been lost, but detailed drawings suggest an origin in areas with a Celtic population or under Celtic influence and a date to the first half of SP II, although a later date is not out of the question (Stylegar et al. 2011:14, 20–4; Zahris-

son, Ch. 25:701–2). Several Avaldsnes graves may date from late SP II, but none are securely dated to this period (Østmo and Bauer, Tab. 12.1).

The only indicator elsewhere in Kormt of aristocratic presence in SP II comes from a rare grave find from Kolstø, three kilometres south of Avaldsnes (Haavaldsen 1999; 2000). In the late 19th century, while digging in a grave mound, a farmer found a sword, a scabbard ferrule, a lance, a knife, and the possible remains of an iron torque; thus, a weapon grave from the 1st century BC (Martens 2002:257; 2008). It is the richest of the seven west-Scandinavian weapon graves from that century, the period when the weapon-grave custom was reintroduced after having been absent since the Bronze Age. Of the remaining six graves, five are clustered by the Oslo fjord in the east, and one was retrieved in Trøndelag (Martens 2008). The weapon types and their combination situate these graves in a Continental–Danish context; the nearest region where such graves occurred at the time is Jylland (Martens 1996).

The uniqueness of this grave on the west-Scandinavian coast, as well as its close parallels in Jylland, mirrors the situation in early Bronze Age Kormt. That period's tradition of building exceptional aristocratic grave monuments exposed towards seafarers, while also maintaining close connections to Jylland, is also found in the late 1st century BC. However, there is more than a millennium separating the Bronze Age mounds and the Kolstø grave, and the similarities do not necessarily represent an unbroken tradition. That said, in light of the utterly poor archaeological material of the intermediate millennium, aristocratic presence in Kormt and elsewhere in Scandinavia may be passing unnoticed in the archaeological record.

Regarding the connections to Jylland and thus the significance of sea travel, certain sacrificial customs – namely, deposition of pots containing food or parts of ards in bogs – appear to be common features of these two parts of Scandinavia (Zachrisson, Figs. 25.1, 25.2, and 25.7). Elsewhere in Scandinavia, finds are few outside Jylland. These shared customs, probably introduced in both areas around the transition between the Bronze and Iron Ages and perhaps carried into the early Roman Period, suggest that connections may have been more or less continuous during SP II.

27.3 Site Period III (AD 200–600, Fig. 6.3)

Major changes regarding aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes occurred during early SP III. The precise dates of the introduction of the various elements are not altogether clear; neither can the date of the buildings' decline be pinpointed more precisely than within a century or so. It seems clear, however, that within the period's first two centuries an aristocratic manor was established and extended. The manor's monumentality to sea travellers along the Karmsund in the east was expanded with an extraordinary monument of raised stones and a hall building (A10), the latter unparalleled in contemporary western Scandinavia, the former in the whole of Scandina-

via. Flaghaug's revival as a funerary monument possibly involved an expansion of this huge mound. Less exposed and quite normal as a building type, but extraordinary in terms of dimensions, is a longhouse (A13) where people lived and most indoor economic activities would have taken place. A boathouse (A40), outdoor production and processing in Area 6, and a cultivated field west of the farmyard that was occasionally used for digging cooking pits comprise the remaining manorial elements.

27.3.1 An extraordinary longhouse

The precise date of the erection of the longhouse A13 is uncertain, but it was probably built in the 4th century AD and remained in use well into the 6th. The replacement of posts and rearrangement of trestles suggest that the longhouse experienced a period of use longer than these two centuries; if so, it would have been erected at an earlier time. Some of the building's dimensions are easily discerned and compared; others less so. For instance, the building's length cannot be determined beyond the documented 28 metres, due to the truncation in modern times of those areas where additional remains may have existed. The area north of the remains, however, is level building ground, and could have accommodated a longhouse of length at least equal to comparable buildings mentioned below.

Less uncertain than A13's length is the diameter of its roof-supporting posts; in 7 of the 12 posts for which it could be established with any certainty, the diameter was more than 57 cm, and in three trestles around the central hearth and entrance the posts would have been 60–74 cm in diameter. While all of the 12 were more than 30 cm, posts in prominent Rogaland longhouses of the same period are less than 30 cm in diameter (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 7:118, Fig. 7.7).

However, a few of the longhouses found further north along the coast had roof-supporting posts in the same range as at Avaldsnes. The posts in a 57-metre longhouse at Aure in Møre were 45–90 cm in diameter (Ringstad 2005:264), and of the seven longhouses of 43–67 metres in length excavated in Møre and Sogn (Diinhoff 2010), the one at Kvåle had post diameters of 40–80 cm, the others 30–60 cm (Diinhoff, pers. comm.). However, while adequate trees could be found in the close vicinity in the fjord districts of Møre and Sogn, Kormt was more or less devoid of oak, at least of these dimensions (Ballantyne et al., Ch. 19:480), and building materials would need to have been transported by sea from the fjord regions several kilometres to the east. Thus, transporting trees would be a greater investment on Kormt than in Sogn and Møre. Judging from the dimensions of the posts in contemporary Rogaland longhouses, trees of the dimensions found in the Avaldsnes longhouse were not easily found in the region.

The width of Iron Age longhouses is often difficult to determine due to the scarcity or lack of wall remains, but can be adduced by measuring other features in the house,

such as distances between posts and assumed walls.¹ The median distance between the roof-supporting posts and the wall ditch in the Avaldsnes house was about 2.0 metres, and the median distance between posts in the same trestle was about 4.0 metres. Among the best-documented contemporary longhouses in Rogaland are two from Gausel, a prominent site with finds of rich graves and numerous buildings. The maximum inner width of the approximately 40-metre-long House 8E/F was about 5.0 metres, while the median distance between posts in the same trestle is about 2.5 metres. The equally long House 4/10 was about 7 metres wide with a median distance between posts in the same trestle of about 3.0 metres (Børsheim et al. 2002:103–4, 127–32).

Turning to the seven longhouses in Sogn and Møre, Diinhoff (2010) ascertains that four were 6.3–7.8 metres wide and three were 8.5–9.3 metres; however, the identification of wall remains in several of these longhouses was problematic. Only the Aure house, apparently the widest of the seven, had trestles comparable in length to those of the Avaldsnes longhouse (4–4.5 metres, Ringstad 2005:264).

Elsewhere in Scandinavia, Løken (2001) found only three longhouses that exceeded the width of the Avaldsnes house. Since these data were collected (for Sweden in 1995, Denmark in 1988), several huge longhouses have been found, the one in Gudme probably the widest of them all: close to 10 metres (measured from Herschend 2009:fig. 119A). Still, longhouses wider than 8 metres appear to be rare in early Iron Age Scandinavia.

The extraordinary dimensions of A13's roof-supporting post may have been relevant in terms of the construction. Along with the building's large width, this may indicate that A13 was an unusually tall longhouse. The Avaldsnes plateau is exposed to very strong winds, and substantial dimensions in the main constructional element, the roof-supporting posts, may have been necessary for the building's durability. Nevertheless, the dimensions clearly exceeded what was necessary. Thus, the investments made to obtain such tree trunks, apparently rare in the region, support the impression that the posts, the building's height, width, and possibly other features of the building, were meant to be conspicuous, intended to impress visitors and bolster the identity of residents.

Summing up, the width and the post diameters in the Avaldsnes longhouse are unparalleled in Rogaland. In the fjords further north along the coast, however, houses with similar and even greater dimensions may be found; this is also the case

¹ Wall posts are rare, while wall trenches are more frequent. The latter were created to accommodate a sill on which wall posts and planks would have rested; post and planks may also have been set directly into the ditch. Wall ditches are sometimes confused with trenches created by water dripping from the roof, or dug to drain that water (below, note 2). To avoid such mistakes, the distance between the roof-supporting posts in the same trestle as well as their distance to the assumed wall traces must be considered, as will be attempted in the following.

in a handful of sites elsewhere in Scandinavia. As these features demand significant investments and access to exclusive resources, they may be taken as indications of aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes during SP III. Thus, when passing Avaldsnes or visiting the site, residents of aristocratic manors in Rogaland would marvel at the extraordinary longhouse, whereas those from Møre and Sogn, and from certain other locations in Scandinavia, would recognise the longhouse as one befitting a peer.

A few other features in the house may support its aristocratic character. As was the case in the hall building A10 (below) and in some cooking pits just west of the longhouse, oak was the primary fuel used in the two longhouse hearths, possibly an indication of conspicuous consumption (Ballantyne et al., Ch. 19:507–8). Additionally, a posthole was found to contain a polecat/ferret's tooth and two other teeth, possibly from the same animal. Ballantyne (et al., Ch. 19:499) point out that furs from such animals were used in high-status fur clothes.

27.3.2 Exquisite graves

The exquisite Grave 2 in Flaghaug, in which a military commander was interred, possibly accompanied by a woman, firmly dates the aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes to the 3rd century AD; that is, the earliest part of SP III (Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22:574–614). Of the remaining three, possibly six, Iron Age graves in the mound, at least two may be dated to SP III, both of them male cremation graves. Grave 4 may be dated to the 3rd century as is Grave 2, and Grave 3 to 4th century, while Grave 5 cannot be given a more precise date, although a SP III date seems likely.

While the furnishing of Graves 3–4 has several Scandinavian parallels, Grave 2 is among the richest late Roman-Period graves in Scandinavia. The stone monument close to Flaghaug, probably erected in SP III, is even more unique. Consisting of two stones of about 8.3 and 6.8 metres tall (originally there were probably three stones), it is by far the tallest multi-stone monument known to have been erected in Scandinavian prehistory (Skre, Ch. 23). Numerous such monuments are not associated with a grave. However, assuming it was a triangular stone setting, the monument would have a parallel at Norheim on the opposite side of the Karmsund Strait. In its centre was found a well-furnished cremation grave of the 3rd–4th centuries AD. The Avaldsnes monument may have been a funerary monument of the same type, thus bringing the number of aristocratic SP III graves on the northern tip of the Avaldsnes settlement plateau up to four – or five, if Flaghaug Grave 5 is included. Several other graves at Avaldsnes may be dated to SP III (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12), but their outer shape or furnishing is not such that they would indicate aristocratic presence.

27.3.3 A dedicated hall building

Just south of the stone monument was situated a building (A10) that constituted the third monumental element along the ridge of the Avaldsnes plateau. The 18–20 m long and approximately 6 m wide building appears to have been erected in the mid- or late 3rd century AD and remained in use until the early 5th. Probably, it consisted of one room 108–120 m² in area with a hearth in the centre. To the extent that the scant remains of the building permit assessment, A10 satisfies Herschend's criteria for identifying hall buildings (2009:252, criteria 1–4 of the five in note 202).

Analyses of several post-200 BC longhouses along the western coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula (Rogaland: Løken 2001; Sogn og Fjordane: Diinhoff 2011) indicate that these regions were included in the development in Scandinavia of a hall section in the longhouse (Herschend 2009:252–3). To date, however, the Avaldsnes hall is the only separate pre-AD 600 hall building that has been identified in present-day Norway.² The assignment of hall functions to a dedicated room in prominent longhouses appears to have been the common solution in that area throughout the early Iron Age; in some sites, as at Borg in Lofoten, up to the 9th century (Munch et al. 2003). However, the scarcity of parallels to the separate hall at Avaldsnes is probably due to the problems of identifying these often apparently insignificant buildings (Herschend 2009:252–3); thus, in the coming years additional examples of separate hall buildings of the 3rd–6th centuries are likely to turn up along the coast.

27.3.4 Aristocratic presence and overseas connections in SP III

Summing up SP III, regarding building types and functions, boathouse A40 and longhouse A13 are normal occurrences along the west-Scandinavian coast. However, the two dimensions that may be securely discerned in the longhouse – the diameter of roof-supporting posts and the width of the building, together indicating an unusual height – are both extraordinary. In the Rogaland and Hordaland regions they are unique, in a broader Scandinavian context they are among the largest.

Conspicuous buildings such as this may be regarded as an indication of aristocratic presence. This interpretation is supported by less secure indications, for instance the use of oak as fuel in hearths and cooking pits and the presence of teeth

² Løken's (2001:76–81) identification of a building at Forsandmoen in Rogaland as a separate hall of the 3rd–5th centuries is not altogether convincing; the position of hearths and posts indicate rather that it is a longhouse. The position of posts in the end walls suggest that the house's maximum width is about 2 m less than the 9.1 m suggested by Løken, and that the trenches assumed to be wall trenches were instead eroded by water running from the roof, or were created to keep that water away from the building.

from an animal that was the source of costly furs. Although substantial remains from iron-smithing and the smoking or curing of meat (Area 6) are not common occurrences in west-Scandinavian manors, they cannot be taken as indicative of aristocratic presence, but may reflect the site's specific needs. This aspect will be discussed in Chapter 29.

Additional indications of aristocratic presence are found along the Karmsund Strait. Kristoffersen and Hauken (Ch. 21:540–6) connect skilled craftsmanship to elite farms. From the large quantities of gold in and around Avaldsnes during SP III, nearly 800 grams including two gold ingots, Reiersen (2009:87) argues that a goldsmith's workshop existed in the Avaldsnes area in the 3rd–4th centuries. Kristoffersen and Hauken argue that highly skilled potter's and goldsmith's workshops were closely connected (Fredriksen et al. 2014), and suggest that such a workshop milieu existed in the Avaldsnes area. Whether this milieu may be connected to metal processing and possible remains of pottery production in Area 6 (Østmo, Ch. 9:180) remains inconclusive; however, shards of pots produced in this milieu have been identified there.

In SPII no huge mounds were built along the Karmsund Strait. However, probably during early SP III, a different type of conspicuous monument, consisting of raised stones, was erected at Avaldsnes. A similar monument, dated to early SP III, was built at Norheim across the Karmsund Strait some 2 kilometres further north. Exposed towards the strong tidal current in the narrow sound, which hampered traffic while facilitating military control of the strait, the Norheim monument is likely to have signalled to travellers the presence of the authority residing nearby.

Burials in early SP III were also connected to the Bronze Age monuments: secondary graves were interred in the ancient mounds. This was the case with Graves 2–4 in Flaghaug, all of which were set down within a century. In addition to connecting to the past, Grave 2 introduced new burial customs, possibly inspired by Roman practices. It was an inhumation, and one of the very earliest stone cists ('hellekiste'), both features common along the western Scandinavian coast the subsequent period (Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22:623).

In the final 150–200 years of SP III, the production of pottery of the very highest quality continued in the area. At Avaldsnes, the longhouse and boathouse remained in use and production and processing in Area 6 continued. However, the hall building appears to be gone by this time, and no aristocratic graves seem to have been interred, following a general trend in Kormt. Nevertheless, the continued activity at Avaldsnes may suggest that a aristocratic presence did exist, but was no longer expressed in the building of monumental graves and buildings.

27.4 Site Period IV (AD 600–900, Fig. 6.4)

The scarcity of features hinders the assessment of aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes in this period. Except for a boathouse (A41), few or no remains of buildings were identified. However, the substantial remains from processing and storage of food and the more fragmentary remains of a palisade in Area 6, as well as the seemingly continuous cultivation, indicate permanent settlement. Together, the dating of these features covers the whole of SP IV, and settlement thus appears to have been continuous. Some graves may date from the period, but this remains less certain.

Fortified settlements, in Iron Age Scandinavia found only in the eastern part of the peninsula, must be regarded as a phenomenon distinct from the fortified hilltop refuges found in the hundreds in both the east and the west of the peninsula. The latter are normally found at some distance from settlements, sometimes several kilometres; warriors and others would have evacuated from nearby farms to take shelter there. Hence, these fortifications would have been built for the purpose of protecting people against occasional overwhelming threats against which warning had been given sufficiently in advance in order for evacuation to happen. The remains of three such 3rd–6th-century fortifications exist in Kormt, one in the very south of the island, one in the centre, and the small fortification in Bårholmen ('Fortification islet') about 2.5 kilometres west of Avaldsnes.

Fortifying a settlement would be quite a different matter, in particular at site with topography less suited for the purpose. At Avaldsnes, the top of the steep escarpment east of the settlement plateau is ideal for building a palisade, the southern and northern edge less so, but still adequate, while the undulating land in the western perimeter is quite inconvenient. A palisade there would allow defenders to be protected, but would deny them the advantages offered by a slope: the longer range and heavier punch of spears and arrows for the defenders and the difficulties for the attackers in protecting themselves and wielding weapons while climbing the slope (Skre 1998:391–7).

The building of a palisade that enclosed the settlement, rather than relying on evacuation and shelter in more easily defensible fortifications, would indicate that Avaldsnes residents lived under continual threat of being attacked on short notice. The warriors needed for defence would probably be living in the fortified settlement. The only other indication of such threats is a spearhead, probably of a late 8th- or early 9th-century date, found about 50 metres north-west of the palisade (Østmo, Ch. 20:521–2). Østmo (Ch. 9:178–9) holds that the storing and processing of cereals just inside the palisade, also evidenced in east-Scandinavian fortified settlements, may suggest that securing provisions was a prominent motif for building the palisade.

Whether the palisade formed a full enclosure or was built to help ward off swift attacks from the sea in the east, it speaks of hostility from without as well as of military strength and capability among Avaldsnes residents.

Less ambiguous aristocratic presence is evident 1–3 kilometres north of Avaldsnes. Across the sound for the Norheim monument, the Salhus mound was built, 43 metres

in diameter, apparently as a cenotaph. The date stems from a ^{14}C sample from one of the wooden spades found deep down in the mound. The sample (T-5129), assessed to have been taken from the 10–15 year rings from the bark, resulted in a date range of AD 534–656 with a 64 % probability. Two centuries after the building of the Salhus mound, in the late 8th century, two ship graves were set down about 1.2 and 3 kilometres north of Avaldsnes, respectively, and the Grønhaug and Storhaug mounds were built over them. These monuments, clear indications of aristocratic presence, will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 28.

27.5 Site Period V (AD 900–1250, Fig. 6.5)

Through the 10th century the remains of the Avaldsnes manor become less elusive than in the preceding Site Period. In Area 6 the dates of features from the transition period and early SP IV are copious; two features and five postholes are dated within the period AD 872–986 (Østmo, Figs. 9.1, 9.8). For all seven features the probability is distinctly higher for the period AD 910–70 than for the preceding four decades (Appendix II). There are much fewer dates in Area 6 from the earlier and the later centuries: a total of five features are dated to the three-century SP IV and two features are dated to the remaining part of SP V, the 10th–early 13th centuries. Thus, compared to SP IV, the activity in Area 6, mainly from processing and storage of food, increased significantly in the early or mid-10th century, and subsequently declined in the following two.

Significantly, in Area 1, what appears to be a building (A14) was erected in the 10th or early 11th century (Østmo and Bauer, Fig. 7.9) on the same spot as the hall in SP III. Four of the radiocarbon dates from the postholes are surprisingly uniform (AD 901–1021); the highest probability lies in the later part of the period (AD 970–1021), possibly signifying the term of the building's construction. The material that produced the remaining four dates (AD 985–1154) may have entered into the composition of the respective features during the assumed building's period of use.

The correspondence between these features and those from the hall that stood there some 600 years earlier appears too close to be coincidental. However, it is difficult to conceive how the correspondence between the constructions might have been achieved, so coincidence cannot be ruled out. The choice of building ground, however, was no coincidence. With the remaining area along the eastern edge of the settlement plateau taken up by the three grave monuments of Flaghaug, Kjellerhaug, and the raised stones, this was the only position where the assumed building would be exposed towards the sea route.

In Area 5 two postholes, a fence, and a midden with fire-cracked stones indicate that the site of the farmyard was the same as in SP III, as was the border between the farmyard and the cultivated field in the west. The postholes are dated to the early 11th

to mid-12th century. The midden overlay them and is thus more recent; from the finds it appears to have been in use in the 11th century.

In the plough layer by the midden was found a silver coin struck AD 1046–56 under the Holy Roman Emperor Henry III (Østmo, Ch. 20:518, Fig. 20.2). The coin is quite worn and may have circulated 2–3 decades before it was lost. The Norwegian king at the time, Haraldr harðráði, had ascended the throne in 1046; his reign ended when he fell in the battle of Stamford Bridge in 1066. Arriving in 1046 after 12 years as a military commander in the Eastern Roman Empire, Haraldr imposed strict control over coinage in his kingdom. This policy was upheld by his successor Óláfr kyrri (reign 1066–93). Only coins issued by the king were allowed; foreign coins had to be changed into the domestic. These regulations appear to have been quite successful; foreign coins from their reigns are rare finds in Norway (Gullbekk 2011:95–7). This is especially the case with stray finds like the one from Avaldsnes; only three mid- or late 11th-century single coins from the Holy Roman Empire have been found in Norway. Stray finds are normally accidental losses, suggesting that these were sites where coins were handled. The find of a foreign coin in a royal manor located along a route where many travellers arrived from abroad, may indicate that this is one of the sites, set up by the king, where foreign coins could be changed into domestic currency.

Summing up, the 10th century saw increased activity at Avaldsnes. In early SP V food processing and storage in Area 6 increased markedly, and was reduced again in the decades around the turn of the millennium when a construction (A14), possibly a building, was raised further north on the eastern edge of the plateau. While this assumed building was in use, in the 11th–early 12th century, a midden was built up in Area 5. Probably, remaining buildings in the farmyard were lying in the heavily truncated area between the midden and A14. A coin lost in the mid- or late 11th century indicates that the manor at the time housed royal administrative functions. The only feature dated to late SP V is a corn-drying kiln in Area 6 dated to AD 1033–1152, with about 40 % probability 1081–1128.

27.5.1 Royal presence

The literary evidence connects kings to Avaldsnes from the transition between site periods IV and V and into the 1020s (Mundal, Ch. 3). Thereafter, despite occasional reference to the land along the Karmsund Strait, the texts are silent concerning the presence of kings at Avaldsnes until around 1250, when Hákon Hákonarson (reign 1217–63) initiated the building of the St Óláfr Church (Bauer, Ch. 14:278).

The archaeological evidence indicates that activity at Avaldsnes increased in the early 10th century, that is, during the reign of Haraldr hárfagri (reign c. 872–932) or that of his son Hákon inn góði (reign 934–60). The building activity in the decades around AD 1000 spans the reigns of several kings; however, the saga accounts mention two of them as residing at Avaldsnes: Óláfr Tryggvason (995–1000) and Óláfr

inn helgi (1015–28). Although not recorded in texts, the coin find suggests that royal administration was carried out at Avaldsnes in the late 11th century.

As Mundal (Ch. 3:51) writes, all the saga accounts that mention Avaldsnes involve kings: “it is unlikely that narratives involving such dramatic events would have come out of nothing”. All the stories, summarised and analysed in her contribution to this book, are based on significant events involving actual historic persons, and there is good reason to search for a historical core in them, despite transformation by tradition and saga authors. In the present context the essential issue is not the details of the stories, but whether they are correct in connecting the kings in question to Avaldsnes, in particular whether the king possessed the manor or resided there.

The eastern shore of the Karmsund Strait is mentioned as Haraldr hárfagri's burial site in Ágrip (c. 1190), Fagrskinna (c. 1220), Heimskringla (1220s), and Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar (c. 1240). Snorri's description of the site in Heimskringla appears to be an eye-witness account, and supports the impression that he spent time by the Karmsund Strait and perhaps recorded local tradition (Nordland 1950:31–2). Heimskringla and Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar list Avaldsnes among the five manors where Haraldr resided when he reached old age, probably in the early 900s. In his Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar, written around 1190, Oddr Snorrason munkr does not explicitly connect Haraldr to Avaldsnes, although it may be argued that such connection is implied in his statement that before King Óláfr, kings had resided in Avaldsnes from ancient times, and that King Ógvaldr had lived there long before the reign of Haraldr (Nordland 1950:21–7; Mundal, Ch. 3:37).

These stories were committed to parchment more than 250 years after Haraldr's reign, and their original historic content may have been heavily transformed through the generations of oral transmission (skaldic verses were less affected). However, there appears to have been a coherent tradition, definitely in Iceland and perhaps locally, that Haraldr was buried on the eastern shore of the Karmsund Strait. The listing of Avaldsnes among his five preferred manors is attested in fewer and more recent sagas, but the tradition on his burial site across the sound seems to strengthen it, at least concerning Avaldsnes. The skaldic poem Haraldskvæði from c. AD 900, which according to Magnus Olsen (1913) mentions Kormt as Haraldr's residence (Skre, Ch. 2:27–8), is the only contemporary piece of literary evidence on the issue – Olsen's reading, however, is not conclusive (Fidjestøl 1993).

Thus, the literary evidence that Avaldsnes had been in royal possession since Haraldr's time appears to be strong, but may be contested. This is also the case with the account of Hákon inn góði's battle against the sons of Eiríkr blóðox at Avaldsnes, first mentioned in Ágrip, subsequently in Heimskringla (Mundal, Ch. 3:38). Neither Historia Norvegiæ (1160–80) nor Fagrskinna (c. 1220) mention any battle between them at Avaldsnes, but two clashes elsewhere (Nordland 1950:28). Whether such a battle took place at Avaldsnes remains uncertain; even if it had, that would not imply that Hákon resided at Avaldsnes. Of the five early royal manors, he seems to have been more inclined to stay at the three northern ones: Alrekstad, Seim, and Fitjar.

The stories that connect Óláfr Tryggvason to Avaldsnes, recounted by Oddr and Snorri, all have fictional elements; Óláfr captures sorcerers and receives a visit from Óðinn. However, local details such as the grave mounds, the raised stones, and the tale of the ancient King Qgvaldr add credibility to Óláfr having stayed there. The fact that Snorri, not Oddr, mentions the stones may support the hypothesis that Snorri collected information locally during his visit in 1218–19. Furthermore, the leader of the pack of seiðr-men, Eyvindr kelda, is said to be a descendent of Haraldr hárfagri and occurs elsewhere in the literature. Oddr claims that Eyvindr was mentioned in Sæmundr fróði's lost history of the Norwegian kings (c. 1120). Eyvindr appears to be a historical person. The factual components of the stories add credibility to the information that Óláfr Tryggvason actually resided at Avaldsnes.

The story of Óláfr inn helgi's steward Þórir selr being killed by Ásbjörn selsbani can be found in the Oldest Saga from the late 12th century as well as the early 13th-century Legendary Saga; they say that these events took place in an island in the west and do not mention Kormt or Avaldsnes (Nordland 1950:17; Bagge 2015:567). These sagas were available to Snorri when he wrote *Heimskringla*, in which he sets the events at Avaldsnes. His grounds for doing that are not known; however, he may have had access to family traditions in Iceland (Nordland 1950:18) or he may have recorded traditions when he visited the region during his stay in Norway in 1218–19.

Summing up, the evidence on Hákon inn góði's connection to Avaldsnes is weak. Oddr Snorrason munkr is the first to place Óláfr Tryggvason at Avaldsnes and seems to imply that Haraldr hárfagri resided there as well. In the literary evidence, *Heimskringla* is the first to state that he actually resided there and to set the stories involving Óláfr inn helgi at Avaldsnes.

If Snorri and Oddr both were incorrect in connecting Haraldr and the two Óláfr to Avaldsnes, the manor must have come into royal possession sometime between the death of Óláfr inn helgi and before Hákon Hákonarson built his church there c. 1250. There is no other indication of royal acquisition of the farm in that period, and there is no indication of the manor being in the possession of others. Neither is there any evidence indicating that the events described by Oddr and Snorri happened elsewhere, and there is no evidence to directly contradict that they were correct in setting them there. The archaeological evidence on increased activities in the 10th and early 11th centuries does not in itself indicate royal presence; however, neither does it contradict the saga evidence, but offers some support. The coin find offers some support to Avaldsnes being a royal manor in the late 11th century.

In conclusion, regarding the saga accounts about Haraldr hárfagri, Óláfr Tryggvason, and Óláfr inn helgi residing at Avaldsnes, the stories were no doubt transformed and elaborated through the 150–300 years that elapsed before they were written down. However, they probably reflect real events involving actual historical persons. Also, it appears that these events more likely took place at Avaldsnes than anywhere else. Although this conclusion cannot be definite, the evidence on Avaldsnes being

in royal possession since Haraldr hárfagri reached old age, that is, in the early 900s, outweighs the doubts.

27.6 Site Periods VI–VII (AD 1250–1900, Figs. 6.6–6.7)

The written as well as the archaeological evidence on Avaldsnes being a royal manor in SP VI is undisputable (Bauer, Ch. 14). According to his saga, King Hákon Hákonarson built his church there in the transition between SP V and VI. The church became one of his grandson Hákon Magnússon's fourteen royal chapels and among the four that were collegiate churches and thus housed royal administrative functions. The ARM excavations revealed that masonry buildings were erected, likely in Hákon Magnússon's time. These probably housed the clergy, and possibly the king when he resided there, as he did on several occasions in the early 14th century. A subterranean passageway and a paved walkway were elements in the royal manor in this period. After the manor's buildings burnt in 1368, Avaldsnes passed into the church's possession as rectory for the priest of the St Óláfr's Church.

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