

Dagfinn Skre

23 The Raised Stones

The spectacular raised stone north of the St Óláfr's Church at Avaldsnes, the so called Jomfru Marias synål (Virgin Mary's Sewing Needle), is the most prominent preserved prehistoric monument at the site. Before its height was reduced c. 1840 from approximately 8.3 metres to the present 7.2 metres, it was the tallest in Scandinavia – the others rarely surpass 5 metres. A similar stone, about 6.9 metres tall, is known to have stood on the southern side of the church until the early 19th century. A 12th–15th-century runic inscription on one of the two stones was described in 1639 but has not been identified since. The stones were mentioned by Snorri in *Heimskringla*, and have received copious scholarly attention from the 17th century onwards.

In this chapter, the existing evidence is reassessed, and the original number of raised stones at Avaldsnes, their sizes, and the location of the runic inscription are discussed. With the aim of arriving at a probable date and original number of stones, the monument is compared to stone settings in the same region and elsewhere in Scandinavia.

It is concluded that the runic inscription was likely incised on the southern stone, which was severely damaged in 1698 and finally was taken down in the early 19th century. Probably, the two existing stones were originally corners in a triangular stone setting – a monument of the 3rd–6th centuries AD. An assumed third stone would have stood in the southeast and would probably have been removed prior to the mid-17th century, possibly around 1300 when masonry buildings were erected there.

The stones were raised in the period when a hall building was erected and prestigious graves were entombed in Flaghaug, one of the two Bronze Age mounds at Avaldsnes. All four monuments were situated along the eastern edge of the Avaldsnes settlement plateau, evidently to communicate the site's past and present prominence to those who sailed the *Norðvegr*.

The raised stones at Avaldsnes are among the very few ancient monuments that are mentioned in the Icelandic sagas. In *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, Snorri Sturlusson describes the stones as still standing – he would have seen them himself when he visited the region in 1218–19 – although he does not give the number of the stones beyond the plural. As Snorri recounts, the stones were raised in memory of King *Ógvaldr*; this story was probably local tradition at the time of his visit. Snorri also mentions that the King had a sacred cow and that the two were interred in their respective mounds there (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 64; *Mundal*, Ch. 3:37).

During his stay in Norway, Snorri became closely associated with the young King Hákon Hákonarson. The king would have become acquainted with Snorri's history of the Norwegian kings, *Heimskringla*, written in the 1220s; therefore, around 1240, when Hákon Hákonarson ordered the erection of a new church at Avaldsnes, he would have been familiar with the story of King *Ógvaldr*, his sacred cow, their grave mounds, and the memorial stones (*Mundal*, Ch. 3:37–8). When the St Óláfr's Church's ground plan and exact location were laid out on the building site, the stones appear

to have been among the many factors taken into account. Before and during the building process, the masons likely encountered considerable difficulty in circumventing the stones, in particular the one that was standing only a metre from the northern church wall (Fig. 23.1); they may also have been tempted to use them for the building. Possibly, the stones were left standing by order of the king, in veneration of his ancient predecessor.

With the awakening of learned interest in the Old Norse sagas in the 16th century (Skre, Ch. 2:12–15), Avaldsnes attracted particular attention as the assumed main residence of the first Norwegian king. Descriptions of the monuments recorded during that period provide ample information on the raised stones; however, although many recent scholars have worked on this evidence (Skre, Ch. 2:30), I believe that insights are still to be gained from systematically exploring the material with the aim of unravelling the history of the raised stones, their height, number, and date, and the location of a 12th–15th-century runic inscription on one of them. Clarifying these issues is the aim of this chapter.

23.1 Bishop Wegner's drawing (c. 1639)

After Snorri, the raised stones were mentioned next by the Bishop of Stavanger diocese, Thomas Wegner. In 1639 Wegner sent to the Royal Antiquarian Ole Worm in Copenhagen 28 drawings of runic inscriptions in Stavanger diocese, one of which was taken from a raised stone near Avaldsnes church. In 1628 Worm had requested that Wegner provide him with information on runes and antiquities in his diocese (Schepelern and Friis 1965:141). In February 1638 Worm still had not received any drawings and he urged Wegner to fulfil his request, listing 17 inscriptions that he knew of in Stavanger diocese, among them one at the Avaldsnes cemetery ('Odevalds Kirkegaard'). Word of the inscription may have reached him through King Christian IV's visit to Avaldsnes in 1627; Worm was the King's personal physician.

Worm included detailed instructions on what types of information he needed, for instance directing Wegner to 'depict the appearance and composition of the monument' ('aftegne selve Mindesmærkets Udseende og Opbygning', Schepelern and Friis 1967:55). In June 1639 Worm wrote that he had received the drawings (Schepelern and Friis 1967:128), which probably were made over the course of the preceding 16 months. They were subsequently redrawn to be printed in Worm's *Danorum Monumentorum libri sex* (Worm 1643:497), the first published study of rune stones.

In 1956, the Runologist Erik Moltke published the Wegner drawings (on which Worm's were based) that were kept in the Arnemagnean Collection in Copenhagen. Since then, a second set of drawings have come to light in the National Library of



Fig. 23.1: Jomfru Marias synål ('Virgin Mary's Sewing Needle') is the tallest of prehistoric Scandinavia's raised stones. It is the only remaining of the two known – probably originally three – raised stones at Avaldsnes. In this profile view, as can be adduced from the difference between the shape of the stone and that of the shadow it casts on the church wall, it is a rather flat slab nearly rectangular in shape. Near the ground it is some 25 cm thick and 92 cm wide. The present height is 7.2 metres; prior to c. 1840 it was c. 8.3 metres.

Photo: D. Skre, 2011.

Norway in Oslo.¹ Professor of Runology James Knirk is currently studying the two sets and has kindly informed me that the Copenhagen set is the one made on site, while the recently discovered set is a copy, probably made on Wegner's initiative before he sent off the field drawings to Copenhagen. Although the newly discovered Avaldsnes drawing renders the Needle in much greater detail than the one published by Moltke, the latter is more trustworthy as evidence of the stone and its inscription, for the reason that it was made on site.

The uniformity of style in the Copenhagen set indicates that they were drawn by the same person. They were probably not made by Wegner personally but rather by someone he employed for the task; Moltke (1956) attributes them to an anonymous artist. For brevity, they are referred to in the following as Wegner's drawings.

The brief text by Worm that accompanied the Avaldsnes drawing in his 1643 publication is of limited interest. He was unable to interpret the inscription; probably inspired by Snorri's attribution of the stone to King Qgvaldr, he assumed that it concerned the king. From his reading of the sagas and publishing of translations (Skre, Ch. 2:15) Worm would have been familiar with the legend of King Qgvaldr and the Viking Age kings that resided at Avaldsnes. The text on the original drawing (Fig. 23.2), however, is quite informative:

These letters are found on a tall stone by Avaldsnes church, although there have been more, they cannot be read because they have worn away. The stone is 10 ½ ells long / 1 ½ ells wide / 1 quarter thick / of granite. The letters face west.²

Although sought after by all antiquarian visitors from 1745 onwards, there is no record of anyone seeing the runes since Wegner. Wegner's drawing and brief text is therefore the only evidence of them.

The collected evidence on the stone and the inscription, as well as the meaning of the latter, is discussed by Magnus Olsen (1954:291–5). Olsen also inspected the stone for runes, unsuccessfully; he had to make do with the version of Wegner's drawing as published by Moltke. Olsen found that the inscription made perfect sense without assuming, as many have done from Wegner's text, that some runes in the inscription had been worn away. Olsen took the inscription to mean 'Michael nearest (after) Maria', referring to the heavenly hierarchy as described in medieval writings. According to Olsen, the completeness of both words and meaning indicates

¹ Ms.4° 95 Monumenta Stavangriensia ad D. Olaum Wormium transmissa ab Episcopo Thomas Wegnero. I am indebted to Professor James Knirk, University of Oslo, who made me aware of this manuscript.

² 'Disse Bogstaffue staar paa en Höy Sten, som staar ved Auellsnes Kirke, dog der haffuer veritt fler, mand kand nu iche kiende dem for de er bor[t]slidt. Den sten er 10 ½ allen lang / 1 ½ allen bred / 1 quarter thÿck / af Graasten. Bogstaffuerne vender i Vester.'

that the inscription was preserved in full; he suggests that Wegner's remark about fading runes may rather concern faint traces of other inscriptions on the stone (Olsen 1954:295).

23.2 The height of the Needle c. 1680–2015

There are some interesting discrepancies between Wegner's information on the height and shape of the rune stone and that provided by more recent evidence. The 17th–19th-century reports on the size of the stones could not have been derived from Wegner's drawings – none of the 28 drawings were published until the Copenhagen drawing in 1956, and Worm's book did not list measurements. The earliest reference to Wegner's drawing I have found is by Nicolay Nicolaysen (1862–6:342), who apparently had seen one of the two versions. The measurements supplied by Wegner seem to have been unknown to antiquarians that visited the site prior to Nicolaysen in the mid-19th century.

The first after Wegner to report on the size of the Avaldsnes stones was Tormod Torfæus (1711:4:176; 2008:1:360) in his account of the graves of King Qgvaldr and his cow:

Evidence of their tombs is found in two stone columns which I recently inspected 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.³

He refers a second time to the stones in his recounting of the story of the old man, Óðinn, telling the story about Qgvaldr and his sacred cow to King Óláfr Tryggvason (Torfæus 1711:2:404; 2008:4:93; Mundal, Ch. 3:37):

An intact tombstone, raised in memory of the king, can still be seen undamaged. But on the 14th of August in the year 1698, when the whole of Avaldsnes rectory accidentally 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 footsteps for those who enter the church.⁴

The first of the two stones, the one that according to Torfæus was still standing and measuring 30 feet (15 ells), has for the last two centuries been known as *Jomfru Marias synål* (hereafter 'the Needle', Fig. 23.1, Tab. 23.1); the earliest report that mentions the name is that by Bishop Hansen (1800:264). The other stone must have been located in the cemetery south of the church, between the church and the rectory; otherwise,

³ The Latin text may be found in Skre, Ch. 2:18

⁴ The Latin text may be found in Skre, Ch. 2:19

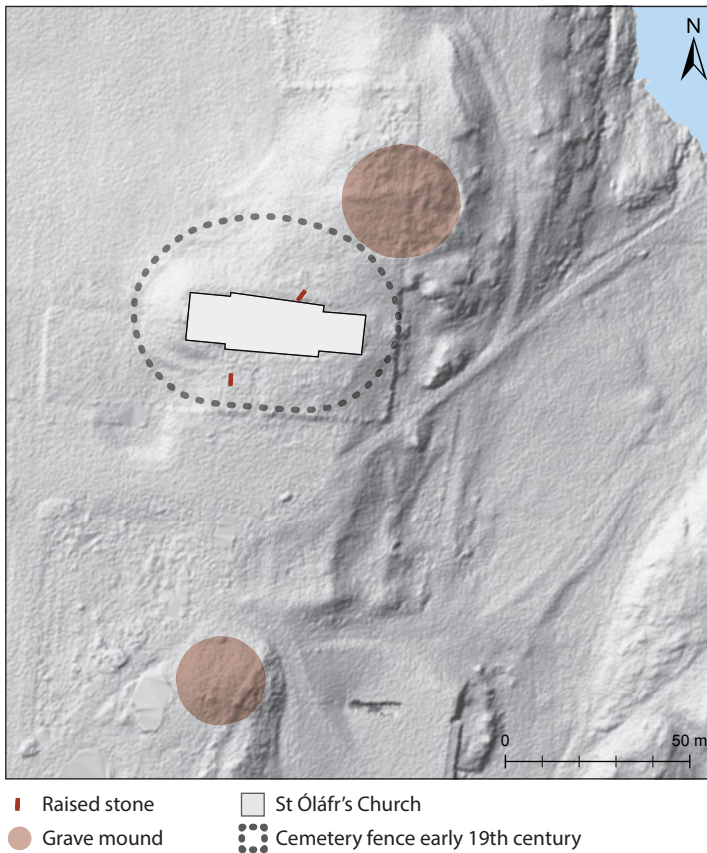


Fig. 23.3: The position of the monuments discussed in this chapter. The location of the southern raised stone is estimated based on Dahl's 1811 drawing (Fig. 23.6). The course of the cemetery fence as it was prior to the expansion of the cemetery in the 1830s–40s is estimated based on Kølle's (1805, Fig. 23.7), Dahl's (1811, Figs. 23.5 and 23.6), and Hertzberg's (1828, Fig. 23.4) drawings. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

the 1698 rectory conflagration would not have damaged it. The rectory buildings lay just south of the cemetery wall (Fig. 23.6; Bauer, Ch. 15). Due to a strong south-easterly wind, heat from the blaze also damaged the nave and tower of the church. This damage led to the structural decay evident in church accounts from the subsequent decades (Skadberg 1950:21, 173) and in Hertzberg's 1828 drawing of the church (Fig. 23.4). The remaining stone base that Torfæus mentioned can still be seen just south of the church on Kølle's c. 1805 painting (Fig. 23.7) and on Dahl's 1811 drawing (Fig. 23.6). It appears to have been taken down rather soon after Dahl's visit, for there is no subsequent account of it.

Torfæus' measurements of the stones deviate significantly from all others (Tab. 23.1); before commenting on them, I will discuss the remaining evidence.

The next after Torfæus to report on the remaining stone was County Governor Bendix Christian de Fine c. 1745. In his description of Stavanger County he states that ‘the huge and mighty stone that stands close by the northern wall of Avaldsnes Church’⁵ is 12.25 ells tall, 1.5 ells wide, and .25 ells thick (de Fine [1745] 1952:114). While the height exceeds Wegner’s by 1.75 ells, de Fine’s measurements of width and thickness correspond with Wegner’s (Tab. 23.1), although de Fine was most likely unfamiliar with the former’s drawing. The fact that Wegner’s and de Fine’s measurements are given to fractions of an ell seems to indicate that both of them actually took the trouble to measure the stone’s height, rather than merely estimate it.

Bishop Peder Hansen (1800:264) wrote that the stone was 26 feet in height, that is, 13 ells (Tab. 23.1). This information was published in an eight-page historical sketch of Avaldsnes in a book intended for classroom use. Hansen writes that he had collected most of the information regarding Avaldsnes through his own first-hand inspection, but some he had copied from manuscripts by Dean Krog in Skudesnes near Avaldsnes (1800:259). The height of the stone was probably measured by Hansen himself, or possibly by Krog. Although it cannot be ruled out, there is no direct indication that de Fine’s manuscript, which at the time existed in four handwritten copies (Thorson 1952:xxv–xxx), was available to Hansen. And while Hansen appears to have been familiar with Torfæus’ *Historia*, he did not copy the height of the stone from that source.

In 1828, in the legend to a drawing of the stone and the church, the priest and antiquarian Niels Hertzberg stated that the height was 13 ells (Fig. 23.4, Tab. 23.1), and furthermore that the distance between the stone and the church wall was 6–8 inches, a decrease of 4–6 inches from what it had been 55 years previously.⁶ He was the first to report information on the stone’s distance from the wall, which suggests that his other measurements of the stone were taken during his visits.

In his national topographical encyclopaedia Jens Kraft (1829:267; 1842a:124) stated that the stone was 13 ells in height – the same height reported by Hansen and Hertzberg. For the stone’s width and thickness, Kraft cites figures that deviate slightly from those previously published (Tab. 23.1), indicating that he had the stone measured.

⁵ “den store og mægtige Steen, der staar tæt ved Den Nørre Muur af Augvoldsnes Kirke”.

⁶ This indicates that the distance in 1773 would have been 26–37 cm, in 1828 16–21 cm. In May 2015 the distance was 9.2 cm, the same as in 1999 (information kindly supplied by Torbjørn Milje and Marit Synnøve Veia, Karmøy Municipality). However, because more than a metre was removed from the top c. 1840, the stone’s inclination since 1828 must have increased by more than the measurements indicate.

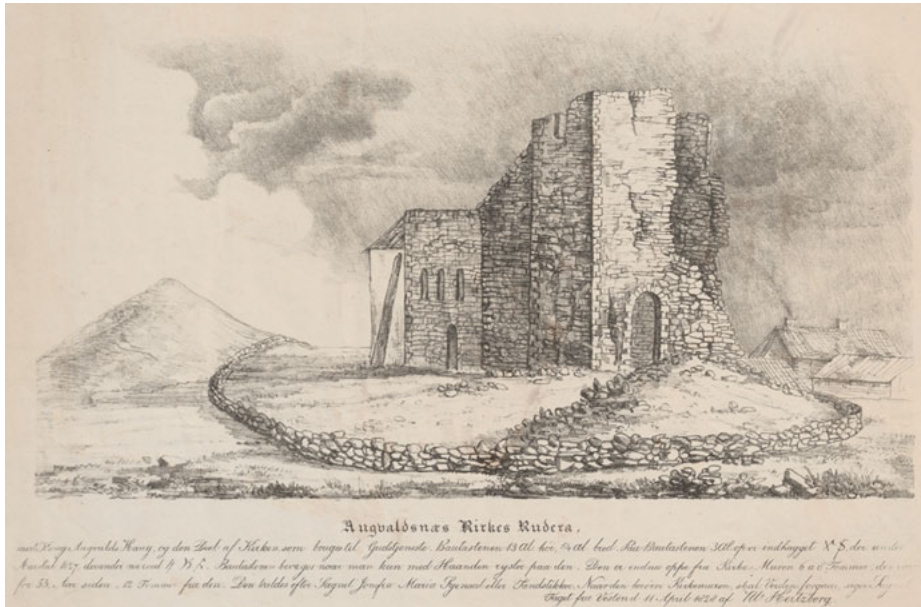


Fig. 23.4: Nils Hertzberg's 1828 drawing of Avaldsnes church. The accompanying text reads: 'The remains of Avaldsnes Church with King Augvald's mound, and the part of the church which is used for service. The raised stone is 13 ells tall, 5/4 ells wide. On the stone 3 ells up is carved XS, thereunder the year 1627, thereunder the name NHX. The stone moves when shaken by the hand. There are still 6 to 8 inches to the church wall; there were 12 inches 55 years ago. Tradition calls it Virgin Mary's Sewing Needle or Toothpick. The legend says that when it touches the church wall, it is the end of the world. Depicted from the west on April 11th 1828 by N. Hertzberg'.⁷ Local tradition has it that the cross marks King Christian IV's height when he visited Avaldsnes in 1627 (Skadberg 1950:141).

Owner: The Directorate for Cultural Heritage's archives.

⁷ 'Augvaldsnæs Kirkes Rudera, med Kong Augvalds Haug, og den Deel af Kirken, som bruges til Gudstjeneste. Bautastenen 13 Al hoi, 5/4 Al bred. Paa Bautastenen 3 Al op er indhugget XS, der under Aarstal 1627, derunder navnet N H X. Bautastenen bevegtes naa man kun med Haanden ryster paa den. Den er endnu oppe fra Kirke Muren 6 a 8 Tommer, den var for 55 Aar siden 12 Tommer fra den. Den kaldes efter Sagnet Jomfru Maria Syenaal eller Tandstikker. Naar den berører Kirkemuren, skal Verden forgaae, siger Sagnet. Taget fra Vesten d: 11 April 1828 af N Hertzberg.'

Tab 23.1: Measurements of raised stone at Avaldsnes 1711–2015.⁸

Source	Year	Height	Width	Thickness	Stone
Wegner	1639	10 ½ ells	1 ½ ells	¼ ells	A stone in the cemetery
Torfæus	1680–98	13 ells			The southern stone
Torfæus	1680–98	15 ells			The Needle
de Fine	1745	12 ¼ ells	1 ½ ells	¼ ells	The Needle
Hansen	1800	13 ells			The Needle
Hertzberg	1828	13 ells	1 ¼ ells		The Needle
Kraft	1829	13 ells	1 ⅜ ells	⅜ ells	The Needle
Christie	1842	13–13 ½ ells			The Needle
Milje, Vea	2015	7.2 metres	0.92 metres	0.25 metres	The Needle

The next piece of information came from the antiquarian and author Johan Koren Christie, in an extensive article (J.K. Christie 1842). Serving as tutor in the Avaldsnes rectory around 1840 (Østrem 2010:208–9), afforded Christie ample time to study the monuments. Regarding the measurements of the raised stone, he refers to Kraft’s 1829 edition, but corrects the height to 27 feet (13.5 ells); in a note on the same page he says ‘between 26 and 27 feet high’ (mellem 26 og 27 Fod høi’, 1842:329). He appears to have made his own measurements.

⁸ One piece of evidence has been left out of this overview. A file labelled ‘From N. Wergeland’s archive’ (*Fra N. Wergelands papirer*) in the Runic Archive at the Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, contains two sets of drawings from *Kornt*, each set consisting of a pencil drawing and a tracing thereof in ink. The two motifs are, respectively, grave mounds and a raised stone at Blodheia, and Avaldsnes Church and the Needle as seen from approximately the same spot as in Dahl’s drawing (Fig. 23.5). The text in the Avaldsnes drawing states that it is drawn from the south-west and that the raised stone, 35 feet tall (17.5 ells), had been moved from a mound 200 paces east of the tower. Two of these pieces of information are definitely mistaken: the motif is seen from the *north-east* and Kjellerhaugen lies 80 metres *south* of the tower – there is no mound east of the tower. The two remaining pieces of information are unique. Firstly, no other evidence indicates that the stone has been moved, and the earliest report (Worm’s 1638 letter to Wegner, above) says that it was standing on the cemetery. Secondly, the height of 35 feet deviates significantly from all of the remaining evidence, and in light of the other mistakes the credibility of this information is likewise doubtful. The drawing does not contribute any information beyond what is evident in Dahl’s drawing, and is therefore not printed here. Nicolai Wergeland (1780–1848) was educated in Copenhagen and moved to Kristiansand in 1806, where he was employed as a priest in 1812; in 1817 he became vicar in Eidsvoll about 50 kilometres north of Oslo where he stayed the rest of his life. The drawings probably came into his possession while he lived in Kristiansand, the seat for the bishopric that encompassed Avaldsnes. The handwriting on the drawing does not appear to be Wergeland’s and it should be attributed to an unknown artist.

23.3 Did Wegner draw the Needle in 1639?

The discrepancies between these numerous measurements (Tab. 23.1) will be considered in the following. The most deviant is that given by Wegner in 1639: 10 ½ ells. Because Wegner's is reported to a fraction of an ell, it is less likely an estimate than the result a measurement taken when the drawing of the runes was undertaken. How can this discrepancy of 1 ¼–3 ells be explained?

Equally puzzling is the shape Wegner ascribes to the stone (Fig. 23.2). Neither the curvature of the southern side nor the pointed tip in Wegner's drawing fit with its present shape. Although the shape may have been somewhat altered when approximately one metre was removed from the top c. 1840, neither of the two earlier depictions – those by Dahl (1811; Fig. 23.5) and Hertzberg (1828; Fig. 23.4) – indicates a pointed tip on its northern edge prior to the reduction. Hertzberg's drawing in particular – like Wegner's, facing east – should have incorporated these two characteristics.

Wegner's drawing is a sketch; the runes, not the stone, are the primary motif. At the same time, his drawing renders the stone's shape in greater detail than in most of his 28 drawings of runic inscriptions. Wegner was normally content with providing the shape of the band of runes and then surrounding it with a stylised outline of the stone (numerous examples in Olsen 1954). These stylised shapes tend to be more rectangular than the stones' actual shape, which lends credibility to the distinct curvature he ascribes to the southern side of the Avaldsnes stone.⁹

All of this begs the question: Do these three drawings, Wegner's, Dahl's, and Hertzberg's, really depict the same stone? Actually, as stated by Snorri and Torfæus, there was more than one stone standing on the cemetery at the time when Wegner made his drawing, and he gives no information that would specify on which of them he found the inscription. As mentioned above, the stone on the southern side of the church was destroyed when the rectory burnt down in 1698. Is it possible that Wegner's drawing depicts this southern stone and not the Needle?

⁹ One of the other drawings depicts a stone with a similarly curved and pointed tip, the raised runestone at Bø in Randaberg, Rogaland (Moltke 1956:198, fig. 265; Olsen 1954:238–40). The stone still exists but does not have a pointed tip; it is more squarely cut, rather like the Needle. However, the stone's length appears to have been reduced some time after the depiction, probably when it was taken down to be used as a stepping stone in front of the entrance to the main house on the farm as described by De Fine (1745:108–9) and subsequent antiquarians. Wegner stated that the stone was standing, so it must have been taken down some time during the following century. Wegner measured the stone to be 7 ells tall, and De Fine gave the same height. Such a tall stone must have had its lower end buried rather deep in the ground, at least 0.5 metres down, probably more. Because Wegner and De Fine gave the same length, it would seem that a section that roughly equalled its buried end would have been taken off between Wegner's and De Fine's visits. Possibly, this is when the pointed tip in Wegner's drawing disappeared.

The source for the assumption that Wegner found the runes on the northern stone was probably de Fine in 1745. From his text there is no indication that he considered the possibility that the runes could have been inscribed on the southern stone, which at the time of his visit was only a pitiful stub. Of the many that since have written about the runic inscription, none have questioned de Fine's conjecture.

Thus, the reason de Fine and others found no traces of the runes may be that there were never any runes on the stone they were studying: the Needle. This is all the more plausible when studying de Fine's text more closely. Although he refers to Torfæus twice in his book (de Fine [1745] 1952:40–1, 92), both references are to him as a person, not to his works. There is no indication in de Fine's manuscript that he actually had read Torfæus' *Historia*. And if he had, there is no indication in his text that he had noted the fact that until half a century before his visit, the raised stub south of the church had been of nearly equal height to the northern stone.

Olsen (1954:295) suggested that there was a connection between the inscription, which mentions the Virgin Mary, and the popular name of the stone. Such a connection might logically be seen to speak against the idea that the runic inscription was not written on that stone, but on the southern stone. Yet, the names of prehistoric monuments at Avaldsnes have shown a degree of instability over time; sometimes they even move around. For instance, the northern mound at Avaldsnes has been called by alternating names, among them Flaghaug and Kuhaug. After the 1834–5 excavation failed to reveal any remains of Qgvaldr's cow, the name Kuhaug ('Cow Mound') became a common name for the southern mound, on the assumption that the cow must be buried there instead. In this book the southern mound is called by an alternative name, Kjellerhaug (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12:235–41). These three names also deviate from those reported by Torfæus in the 17th century.¹⁰ Likewise, once the southern stone had vanished, the popular name Jomfru Marias synål may have been transferred from the southern stone to the only remaining stone, the one to north of the church. If so, the sharp tip of the stone in Wegner's drawing may be a reason why the southern stone was called a needle, or a toothpick as reported by Hertzberg (Fig. 23.4, legend).

Torfæus has supplied the one piece of information that appears to contradict the hypothesis that Wegner's drawing depicts the southern stone. As noted above, he stated that the stone destroyed in 1698 measured 26 feet, that is, 13 ells, while Wegner writes that the stone with the inscription measured 10 ½ ells. How can this discrepancy be explained?

¹⁰ The southern mound is said by Kraft to bear the name Dåpshaugen, because that is where King Óláfr Tryggvason had the population baptised. There are also numerous versions as to which mound contained the remains of Qgvaldr, his cow, and other notable figures in Avaldsnes' history (J.K. Christie 1842:330–2).



Fig. 23.5: Johan Christian Dahl's 1811 drawing of Avaldsnes church as seen from the north. Photo: Dag Fosse/KODE Bergen. The image has been cropped.



Fig. 23.6: Johan Christian Dahl's 1811 drawing of Avaldsnes church as seen from the west. Photo: Dag Fosse/KODE Bergen. The image has been cropped.

Torfæus settled at Kormt in 1665 and worked on the *Historia* from c. 1680 until 1706 when illness prevented him from continuing, so he would have had the chance to inspect the southern stone before it was destroyed. At this time there were several standard lengths of an ell; the two most important in the Kingdom Denmark-Norway were ‘the Norwegian ell’ (den norske alen) and ‘the Sjællandic ell’ (den sjællandske alen), the former being approximately 7/8 of the latter (Steinnes 1936:123–6). In metric units the Norwegian ell would equal 55.3 cm while the Sjællandic would be 62.8 cm. In the early 19th century, when the majority of measurements of the Needle were taken (Tab. 23.1), the Sjællandic ell was the dominant unit in Denmark as well as in Norway. However, in the 17th–18th-century, both units were in use in Norway.

Considering Tomod’s and Wegner’s measurements in this light, it appears that Torfæus’ were made using the Norwegian ell and Wegner’s were made using the Sjællandic ell. The height given by Torfæus would then equal 7.2 m while Wegner’s would be 6.6 m. That would reduce the discrepancy to 0.6 m, which is within the same margin of error (0.8 m) as the five measurements of the Needle from 1745–1842.

Why, then, should Wegner and Torfæus have chosen to use different units? Wegner was making his drawings for Ole Worm in Copenhagen for a book to be published there, and he would of course choose the unit in common use in Denmark, the Sjællandic ell. When checked against stones that are still preserved, the measurements given in Wegner’s other drawings of rune stones demonstrate clearly that he applied the Sjællandic ell. Like Wegner, Torfæus was writing on commission; he was employed by the King of Denmark–Norway as Historiograph for Norge (‘Historian of Norway’, Skre, Ch. 2:15–16). Torfæus might have had someone else take the measurements of the two stones, and he might not have paused to consider which unit had been applied, or his nationalism might have moved him to assume it was the Norwegian ell.

This discussion sheds some light on Torfæus’ measurement of the northern stone, the Needle. Assuming that he used the Norwegian ell, his 15 ells would equal 8.3 m. The 1800–42 measurements, which surely were made using the Sjællandic ell, would be 8.2–8.5 m. Only de Fine’s 1745 measurement of 12.25 ells sticks out somewhat. If he used the Sjællandic ell, it would equal 7.7 m.

Summing up, it seems likely that Wegner’s drawing depicts the stone that stood south of the church, with a height of 6.6–7.2 m. Thus, this stone was the stone that bore the runic inscription. Regarding the Needle’s height, the conformity between the height measured by Torfæus 1680–98 and the four 1800–42 measurements indicates that throughout that period it measured 8.2–8.5 meters.

The difference between the various measurements may be due to the difficulties of achieving precise measurements of these huge stones, and possibly also due to changes in the ground level, for instance from rubble from the church’s restoration in 1838–40 as reported by J.K. Christie (1842:330, footnote). The soil from the excavation of the Flaghaug mound may have raised the ground somewhat. However, raised ground level cannot explain why the lowest height of the two stones was measured in 1745 by de Fine for the Needle and by Wegner in 1639 for the southern stone. The

reasons for de Fine's deviating measurement, as well as for the discrepancy between Wegner's and Torfæus' of the southern stone, remain uncertain.

Today the Needle measures 7.2 meters;¹¹ thus, it had its height reduced sometime after Christie measured it. The stone's height is said to have been reduced when the church was renovated in 1838–40 (Skadberg 1950:228–9; Lidén 1999b:147); however, the exact time and extent of the reduction is disputed. J.K. Christie (1842:329) stated that only the side closest to the church was damaged, and that the stone's height had not been reduced since Kraft's measurements were taken, probably in the 1820s. Christie agreed with Bishop Jacob Neumann (1842c:240), who visited the site in 1838, that the height had been reduced at some earlier time; J.K. Christie (1842:330, footnote) wrote that a broken-off piece had previously been lying in the cemetery but by then was not to be found. It might be suspected that his guess at its length, 1.5–2 ells, was based in Torfæus' information that the full stone measured 15 ells.

Evidence of higher reliability is found in a report from a visit to Avaldsnes in 1863 by Oluf Rygh, Professor of History 1866–75 at the Universitas Regia Fredericana in Kristiana (since 1939, the University of Oslo), and from 1863 the first Professor of Archaeology in Scandinavia. Rygh claimed that in the cemetery he had found the top that was taken off as a consequence of the roof being lowered during the restoration of the church in 1838–40 (Rygh 1863:11). He estimated its length at 2–2 ½ ells (125–157 cm). Rygh considered himself a strictly empirical scholar who trusted only his own observations, while Christie appears to have taken further steps to reconcile his observations to the previous literary evidence.

However, in light of the correspondence between Christie's and previous measurements, Christie's claim that the Needle's height had not been reduced since Kraft's measurements is probably correct, as is the information on the height being reduced during the 1838–40 restoration. Christie's manuscript was probably completed shortly before the top of the Needle was taken off. If the fragment seen by Rygh really was from the Needle's top, it provides an additional clue as to the stone's height before its reduction c. 1840. A cautious estimate of its pre-1840 height would be 8.3 m. Whether Christie and Neumann were correct that the height had been reduced at some earlier time – before Torfæus – remains uncertain.

This conclusion on the Needle's height lends credibility to Torfæus' measure of the southern stone's height. However, measurements on several of Wegner's other drawings have proven reliable. Although less certain than the conclusion on the Needle's height, I would suggest that the height of the southern stone was somewhere between Torfæus' 13 Norwegian ells (7.2 m) and Wegner's 10 ½ Sjøllandic ells (6.6 m) – that is, approximately 6.9 m.

¹¹ The height was measured from the highest point perpendicular to the ground. Measured along the slanting stone, the height is 7.3 m. The foot stands 83 cm from the church wall. Measurements kindly supplied by Torbjørn Milje, Karmøy Municipality, May 2015.

23.4 More than two raised stones?

Per Hernæs (1999:125) has claimed to have found indications in Christie's text of a third stone to the north of the Needle, on the northern periphery of the cemetery. This hypothesis has since been supported by Bjørn Myhre (2005a; 2005b). However, neither Christie nor Kraft spoke of three stones, only two. Both were familiar with Torfæus' report of the two stones, and relate their own reasoning to Torfæus' information. It is clear from their texts that they assumed the stone destroyed in 1698 stood north of the church, as did the Needle. This misunderstanding seems to have been committed by Kraft when preparing his 1829 edition. A closer examination of the relevant texts and drawings supports this assumption.

Kraft was familiar with the earlier texts on Avaldsnes. Although several of them mention the stone that crumbled in 1698, none of them provide clear indication of its location. Bishop Peder Hansen (1800:263–4) stated that the Needle and the northern mound, Flaghaug, were raised over King Qgvaldr's deity, the cow, and that Qgvaldr was buried in the great mound south of the church; that is, the mound now called Kjellerhaug. Further, he wrote with reference to Torfæus that the stone raised over Qgvaldr had been destroyed by fire in 1698. Implicitly, by connecting Qgvaldr's stone to the southern mound, he placed this stone further south from the Needle – that is, south of the church. He visited the site and would have seen the stub as it stood at the time.

Jens Kraft, who was familiar with Torfæus', Worm's, and Hansen's texts, first described the Needle, then the second stone (Kraft 1829):

The stone which according to history was raised over Augvald, and is said to have been 15 ells tall, is now not to be found; however, a considerable stone lies overturned by the cemetery fence, likewise on the church's northern side.¹²

13 years later, in his second edition, he had modified the text on the whereabouts of the remains; it no longer lies north of the church, but north of the cemetery fence (Kraft 1842a:125):

... since a large stone, which in recent times was lying overturned, likewise on the northern side of the cemetery fence, and which was assumed to have been this stone, is now crushed.¹³

¹² 'Den Steen, som ifølge Historien var opreist over Augvald, og skal have været 15 alen høi, findes derimot nu ikke mere; imidlertid ligger en anseelig Steen kuldkastet ved Kirkegaards-Indhegningen, ligeledes på Kirkens Nordside.'

¹³ '... da en anseelig Steen, som i den nyere Tid laa kuldkastet, ligeledes paa Nordsiden af Kirkegaards-Indhegningen, og som antoges at have været denne Steen, nu er knust.'

Kraft was continually collecting information for his multi-volume topographical-statistical overview of Norway by corresponding with local officials. That would most likely have been how he came by the information, for example, that the Needle was 33 inches wide by 9 inches thick. The measurements of and other information about the crumbled stone probably reached him from a source such as the Avaldsnes vicar. Kraft appears to have misinterpreted the whereabouts of the remains of the stone destroyed in 1698, mistaking ‘the cemetery fence’ to mean the northern fence. Seen from the rectory, it would have been technically true to describe the crumbled remains as lying north of the cemetery fence – the southern fence, that is, inside the cemetery.¹⁴

Therefore, the remains Kraft described must be from the stone that crumbled in the 1698 fire. The remaining stub of this stone, about 3 meters in height,¹⁵ was still visible around 1805 and in 1811 (Figs. 23.7–6), but was not included in Hertzberg’s 1828 drawing (Fig. 23.4); most likely it had fallen over or was taken down in the period 1811–28. The chronology of the stone’s decay fits well with Kraft’s statement that it had been lying overturned in recent times but was ‘now’ (1829) overturned and subsequently (1842a) crushed.¹⁶

J.K. Christie (1842:329) refers to Kraft’s 1829 edition, and carries forward the latter’s misunderstanding regarding the location of the destroyed stone, mentioning alleged remains of this stone north of the church. After describing the Needle, Christie writes:

Some paces further north, straight opposite Mary’s Sewing Needle, stood earlier (see Kraft l. c.) a colossal raised stone north by the cemetery fence; but several years ago it fell over and is now crushed and covered with gravel.¹⁷

There is nothing in Christie’s text to indicate that he actually saw these remains for himself; Kraft’s 1829 text appears to be the sole source of his information. Although Christie served as tutor in the rectory, the vicar at the time, Johan Lyder Brun, arrived at Avaldsnes in 1832; that is, after the remaining stub of the southern stone had been

14 If this assumption is correct, this is not the only piece of information Kraft has gotten wrong. He also confused the height of the two stones as given by Torfæus, who clearly stated that the one measuring 30 feet (15 ells) was still standing. Kraft, though, claimed that this was the size of the stone that was destroyed. This misunderstanding was perpetuated by Hernæs (1999:125).

15 Assessed on the basis of Dahl’s drawing (Fig. 23.6).

16 In 1925 the archaeologist Jan Petersen saw a stone by the cemetery fence that he supposed was a section of the fallen stone (Hernæs 1999:125). Around 1950 a stone that was assumed to be a fragment of the stone was found south of the cemetery fence. The vicar had it raised in a location based on Dahl’s drawing. There it still stands, some 1.8 metres tall (Utvik 2010).

17 ‘Nogle Skridt længer nord, ligeoverfor Marias Synaal stod før (se Kraft l. c.) en kolossal Bautasten nordved Kirkegaardshæget; men den er for flere Aar siden omstyrtet og nu grusdækket og knust.’



Fig. 23.7: Catharina Hermine Køllet's (1788–1859) watercolour painting of the Avaldsnes church and rectory seen from the east. The Needle is clearly visible, along with the stub of the raised stone south of the church. The painting was probably made in the period 1803–7, when Køllet's family lived in Kopervik, only 8 km as the crow flies south of Avaldsnes (Alfsen 2009). In that period she painted other motifs from the area (Kopervik, Utstein, and Stavanger). Anka Ryall and Jorunn Veiteberg (1991:155, no. 33), who have published a catalogue of Køllet's 251 known paintings, assume that the Avaldsnes painting dates from c. 1805. Owner: UMB.

removed. Therefore, Brun would not have had first-hand knowledge regarding the location of the stub.

Evidently, Hernæs' assumption, supported by Myhre, that the remains of a third stone were present in the Avaldsnes cemetery in the early 19th century, is based on Kraft's mistaken location, perpetuated by Christie, of the remains of the stone destroyed in 1698.

The possibility remains that before Torfæus' time, there may have been more than two standing stones by the two mounds. Although the masons managed to leave two stones standing, probably at the behest of the king, they may have been forced to remove other stones as they struggled to fit the ground plan of the huge church onto the narrow building site. Alternatively, additional stones may have been taken down at another time. The likelihood of such possibilities is discussed below.

23.5 The stone monument at Avaldsnes

In archaeological terminology, a raised stone (bautastein) is distinguished from other stones in prehistoric monuments by having a height greater than its maximum width.

In Scandinavia, stones were raised as individual monuments (monoliths) on flat ground, on grave mounds, or as elements in various types of geometric stone monuments (Skjelsvik 1953:1–3; Løken 1974:54; Andréén 2004:406). Monoliths are quite frequent along the western coast of Scandinavia, as are raised stones in triangles, rectangles, ovals, and circles, while pointed ovals ('ship settings') are rare.¹⁸ Can the two Avaldsnes stone have been components of any of these types of monuments?

The occurrence of tall stones in various types of monuments is difficult to investigate for the reason that the heights of raised stones have rarely been rendered in surveys and publications. For instance, regarding Østfold and Vestfold, Løken (1974:162–3) notes that of the 29 monuments with raised stones, 23 are monoliths (18 of them on circular mounds), 3 are raised in rectangular monuments, 2 in triangles, and 1 in a circular stone monument, but he does not supply information on the height of the stones.

Heights have nonetheless been obtained for raised stones in the vicinity of Avaldsnes. Within a 12-km radius from Avaldsnes several stones of modest height are known, but only eight stones in four monuments exceed 2.5 metres. Above ground, these measure 2.7 m (monolith, Skjøllingstad A-ID 53393–2), 2.8 m (monolith, Vårå, A-ID 34395–1), 4.0 m (monolith, Åkra, A-ID 33957), 4.0–4.7 m (five stones in a triangle, Norheim, A-ID 34377), and approximately 5.1 m (monolith, Reheia A-ID 34378–2, information on its pre-1875 height kindly supplied by Aadne Utvik). Thus, in the vicinity of Avaldsnes the taller stones are either monoliths (N=4) or elements of triangular monuments (N=1), but the sample is small.

The scope of possible monuments types to which the two raised stones at Avaldsnes could belong can be narrowed by considering the sites in the vicinity where the different stone monument types occur. Triangular monuments appear to be the type with the clearest connection to prominent sites. The two sites in Kormt and along the Karmsund with four triangular monuments appear to conform to this pattern. One of these, the so-called Fem dårlige jomfruer ('The five foolish virgins', A-ID 34377), can be found at Norheim across the Karmsund from Avaldsnes, some 2.2 kilometres as the

18 In Sunnmøre, Trude Knutzen (2007:21) identified 39 monoliths, the tallest of them 3.4 metres. No complete survey has been undertaken in Rogaland and Hordaland, but Per Fett (1954–76) mentions 88 stones in Hordaland. In Rogaland, monoliths are particularly common in Jæren, Kormt, and along the Karmsund (Reiersen 2009:44–5). At Avaldsnes there was one monolith in addition to the two discussed here; it was standing until c. 1860 in the centre of a low mound in Kongshaug, some 200 metres west of the church (Nicolaysen 1862–6:806; Rygh 1863:10). There are 152 geometric stone monuments in Rogaland: 78 triangles, 20 rectangles, 17 ovals, 17 circles, and 3 ship settings (Skjelsvik 1953:16–17; Kuhnle 2013:27).

crow flies to the north–north-east. In addition to the three corner stones, two stones are still standing near the centre of the triangle; the tallest of the five is 4.7 metres, the others are slightly lower. Near the two centre stones a 1901 excavation uncovered a Roman bronze vessel containing cremated human bones and bear claws. The finds date the monument to the 3rd–4th centuries AD. At the time of excavation the monument included a modest triangular cairn with slightly concave sides (Skjelsvik 1954; Reiersen 2009:37). The monument is located on a small, elevated plateau about 50 metres from the narrowest passage between Kormt and the mainland; it would have been well visible to sailors navigating the 4–5-knot (maximum) tidal current.¹⁹ As is the case with the many subsequent prestigious graves along this narrow strait (Skre, Fig. 27.1), the monument's exposure towards the sailing route underlines its prominence.

Three triangular monuments could formerly be seen at Stava near Ferkingstad in western Kormt, 15 kilometres southwest of Avaldsnes. When they were recorded in 1842, they were low cairns with somewhat concave sides that measured 19–21 paces, with raised stones up to 1.3 metres high at one or two of their three corners (Neumann 1842c:215–18, pl. IX). But for two of the stones the monuments have since been removed. In 1842 they were already quite fragmentary, and it seems likely that originally they included raised stones in all three corners, possible also in the centre. Ferkingstad is a prominent site with two huge boathouses dating to the Roman or Migration periods, as well as a unique house complex and prestigious grave monuments and finds (Zachrisson, Ch. 25:704–5).

Thus, all four triangular monuments in the vicinity of Avaldsnes are to be found at the two most prestigious sites in the area. In the Rogaland and Hordaland regions, Kuhnle (2013:117, 137) records only two additional triangular monuments with raised stones in the corners; one at Hå (25 m) and one at Nord-Kolnes (about 14 m), both prestigious sites in Jæren (Nicolaysen 1862–6:293, 307). Thus, four of the six such triangular monuments in Rogaland and Hordaland are found in Kormt and along the Karmsund strait – a distinct concentration.

A fifth monument of this type at Avaldsnes would fit into this general regional, indeed Scandinavian pattern. Regarding Sweden, Anders Andrén (2004:416) asserts that triangular monuments, in particular the huge ones, tend to occur at prominent manors and in cemeteries with large grave mounds. Although the possibility remains that the Avaldsnes stones are two separate monoliths raised independently at different times, their similarities in height, thickness, and width – to the extent that these features are known – suggest that they were parts of the same monument. Monuments with two stones are not known; a triangular monument seems possible. As will be discussed below, the distance between them is within the range of what is recorded for triangular monuments in Scandinavia.

¹⁹ The prefix 'nór-' in the site's name means 'narrow', obviously alluding to the strait (Rygh and Olsen 1915:143, 410).

Thus, only triangular configurations will be assessed in the following as the likely type of the stone monument at Avaldsnes. To explore the possibilities of arriving at an approximate date of the monument, the subtypes, distribution, and chronology of triangular stone monuments in Scandinavia and in Kormt will be summarised and a conclusion suggested.

23.5.1 Triangular stone monuments in western Scandinavia

In Scandinavia, triangular stone monuments were constructed in the period c. 500 BC–AD 1050, although the time frame is narrower in some regions. A triangle's sides are normally demarcated by stones lying flat or set on edge; some of the monuments have raised stones in corners, some also in the centre. The interiors of some of the triangles are covered with stones or low cairns. Triangles are rare in Denmark and quite common in southern Sweden, where around 900 triangular monuments with concave sides are known (Hyenstrand 1984:78–83; Andrén 2004:407). In Norway, fewer such monuments are known than in Sweden, but the surveys are still incomplete. The only national survey to date is Elizabeth Skjelsvik's (1953:12, 16); it lists 137 triangular monuments. More recent surveys have been undertaken in the two regions where the type is most numerous. In Trøndelag, Ellen Johanne Grav Ellingsen (2003:9) recorded 84 monuments, 50 more than Skjelsvik, and in Rogaland Ina Kuhnle (2013:27) identified 78 monuments, 4 more than Skjelsvik.

Triangles with straight sides date from the period 500 BC–AD 550, and from c. AD 200, triangular monuments with concave sides appear, continuing until Christianisation in the 10th–11th centuries. The curvature of the sides appears to have increased over time, culminating in star-shaped monuments with distinct 'arms' extending from a central point (Hyenstrand 1974:19–22; Andrén 2004:411). Additional archaeological features of the monuments with straight and concave sides – for example, the small number of burials, all of which are cremations – are quite similar and appear to be closely connected in terms of symbolism (Andrén 2004:411). Thus, the utility of distinguishing between such features is relevant mainly for chronological purposes.

Regarding the chronology, Løken (1974:146, 174–7) notes that triangular monuments in Østfold and Vestfold date from the entire Iron Age. However, those with raised stones – the same goes for all types of grave monuments with raised stones, including monoliths – date from the early Iron Age, primarily the Roman and Migration periods (Løken 1974:162–4). The same tendency is quite clear in Sweden (Hyenstrand 1984:69, 72). In Kuhnle's survey of triangular monuments in Rogaland and Hordaland, all three dated triangular monuments with raised stones date from the Roman Iron Age and Migration Period (Kuhnle 2013:120, 154–5; Norheim, see above; two monuments at Østre Eide, Vindafjord, excavated 1865). Dating the raising of the Avaldsnes stones to the early Iron Age, primarily the Roman and Migration periods, seems well founded.

The problem of placing the Avaldsnes monument within the typology of monuments with either straight or concave sides is that nothing is known of the shape of the Avaldsnes monument's sides, or indeed whether the sides were marked at all. The construction of the stone church and the continuous digging of graves over the last millennium would have removed any traces of such elements. Thus, the only features available for dating are the height of the stones and the distance between them. However, no typology of triangular stone monuments is based on the occurrence and shape of raised stones. The reason is fairly obvious: raised stones, in particular tall ones, are prone to fall over or be taken down and used as foundations, stepping stones, benches, and the like. Moreover, their height may have been reduced, as indeed has happened to the Needle and to other raised stones in Kormt. For instance, none of the 84 triangular monuments in Trøndelag have standing stones today, although 6 of them are known to have had one or more. Some of the 6 are mentioned in written evidence, others testified through excavations that have revealed fallen stones and pits where stones are assumed to have stood (Ellingsen 2003:63, 123–57).

Due to the paucity of triangular monuments that have been excavated, the height, presence, and absence of raised stones are not sufficiently durable elements for inclusion in monument typology. Thus, we are left with less systematic and quite fragmentary information regarding the spatial and chronological occurrence of raised stones in triangular monuments. Still, an attempt will be made to extract some tendencies from the information at hand.

23.5.2 The stone monument by Flaghaug

The first question to ask is whether the original location of the two raised stones can be determined. It is natural to assume that the Needle has always stood where it stands, but there is also the possibility that it was moved in the mid-13th century to make room for the masonry church. Certainly, the masons would have had the means and the skills necessary to move the stone. However, a peculiarity regarding the church's ground plan, noted by Nicolaysen (1862–6:341), makes this possibility less likely:

...the nave's northern wall has a noticeable obliquity that may be caused by sloppiness, which is often the case elsewhere, but which may also be related to the desire when building the church to spare the stone standing close by. It is quite certain, though, that if the nave's northern wall was laid out in parallel to the southern, it would have been placed where the stone stands.²⁰

20 '...skibets nordre vegg viser en paafallende skjevhet, som maaske har sin grunn i skjødesløshed, hvad der ellers ofte er tilfæillet, men dog ogsaa kan hidrøre fra, at man ved kirkens bygning vil de skaane den tæt derved staaende bautasten; vist er det i alle fall, at dersom skibets nordre vegg var trukken parallel med den søndre, saa vilde den have gaaet hvor stenen staar.'

Assuming, then, that the Needle has not been moved since it was first raised, it remains to consider the exact location of the southern stone. Judging from Dahl's 1811 drawing (Fig. 23.6), it appears that Hernæs' (1999:125–6 and fig. 3) suggested location of the southern stone – about 3 metres from the church nave's south-western corner – is mistaken. Dahl drew the stub at a distance from the nave of about half the tower's width, that is, about 7 metres. This accords well with Kølles' drawing (Fig. 23.7). Although the perspective in the latter is somewhat skewed, the stub would not have been visible at all from where she made the drawing if Hernæs' suggestion was correct. Furthermore, from Dahl's drawing, the impression is created that the stub was standing slightly east of the alignment of the nave's western wall. Thus, the place chosen when a replacement stone was raised c. 1950 appears to be fairly accurate. Based on this assessment, the original distance between the Needle and the southern stone appears to have been about 30 metres (Fig. 23.8).

If the two Avaldsnes stones were corners in a triangular stone setting, the third stone would have stood either to the south-east or the north-west. The lengths of the three sides are not necessarily identical in these monuments; more often two are the same length while the third deviates, although rarely by more than a metre. For instance, in the triangular monument in Fjære, Aust-Agder, two sides are 13.8 m while the third is 13.0 m (Skjelsvik 1954:33–4). Taking variations in side length on this scale into account, a third stone to the south-east would stand on the same level as the other two, while a third stone to the north-west would stand on much lower ground, more than 3 metres beneath the other two. Such monuments are always erected on rather even ground, so we can discard the north-western option. The south-eastern is still possible; the ground lies within the same 0.5 m elevation as that where the remaining two stones stood (Fig. 23.8). A stone there could have been left standing when the church was built; however, it would have been removed when masonry buildings were erected there some time in the decades around 1300 (Bauer, Ch. 14:296–7).

23.6 Four monuments along the Norðvegr

If indeed, as has been argued here, there was at Avaldsnes a triangular monument of raised stones, some 6.9–8.3 metres high and about 30 metres apart, it would be the largest of its kind in Scandinavia. In terms of the distance between the stones, it lies on the extreme end of the scale,²¹ and neither stones in triangular monuments nor any monoliths were taller. The second tallest is the so-called 'Balder stone' (Balder-

²¹ Both Skjelsvik (1953:58) and Andrén (2004:413) record 30 metres as a maximum. Kuhnle (2013:140) finds one of the three triangular monuments at Ullandhaug, Jæren, to be larger. This star-shaped stone paving without raised stones measured about 34 m between the corners.

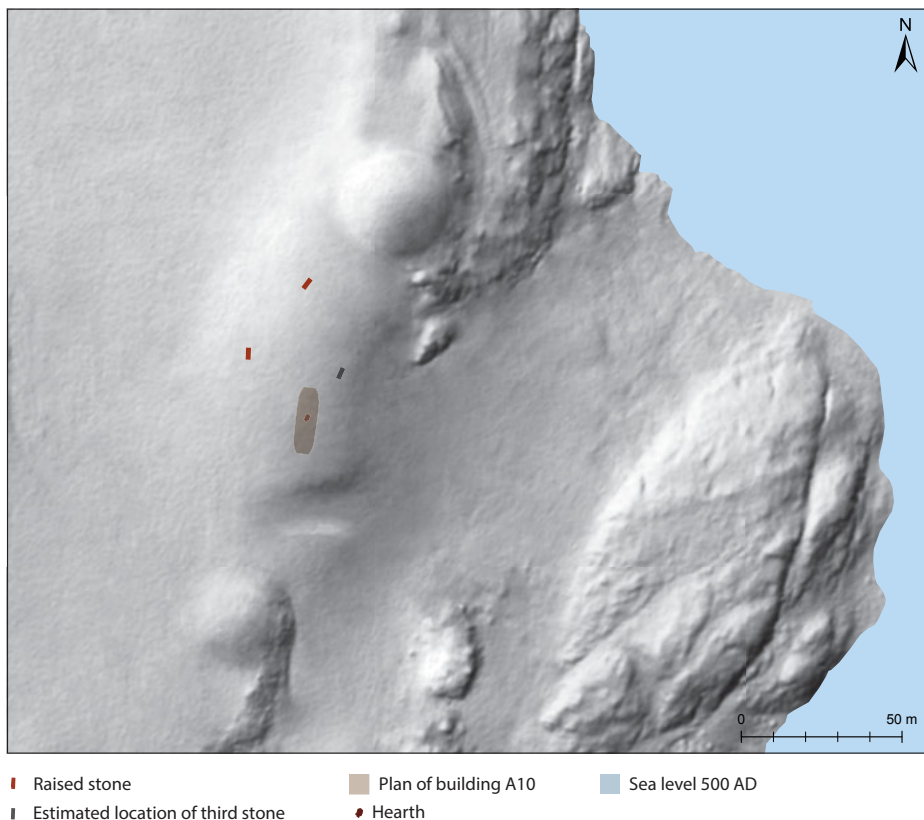


Fig. 23.8: Assuming that the two known raised stones at Avaldsnes were corners in a triangular stone setting, the monument would have had this layout. In this map, the topography around the two known raised stones is reconstructed, meaning that the substantial filling that the church tower rests on is removed and the grave mound Flaghaug is reconstructed. As is evident, the ground drops quite substantially to the north-west, more than three meters, and a possible third stone would not have been placed there. To the south-east, however, the ground is on the same level, and the entire monument could be accommodated within the ridge's rather flat top.

Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

steinen, 7.8 m) in Sogn, western Norway. In Rogaland, a stone raised in a cairn at Bø in Randaberg appears to be the second tallest; according to de Fine ([1745] 1952:115) it measured 9 ells (5.3 metres). The tallest raised stone in Sweden appears to be one of about 5.3 metres (Bruzelius 1874) in the Merovingian Period ship setting *Ales stenar* near the southern tip of Skåne.²² I know of no Danish stones that reach a height above 4 metres. With the exception of the Balder stone, the Needle appears to have been more than 50 % taller than any other stone raised in prehistoric Scandinavia.

²² I am grateful to Professor Anders Andrén who has made me aware of this monument.

A triangular monument of that size at Avaldsnes would have had the maximum distance between the stones, which could be accommodated on the rather even top of the north–south-oriented ridge that constitutes the highest ground on the eastern part of the Avaldsnes plateau. At the northern end of this flat top, the Flaghaug mound was built, and in the southern end, some 20 metres south–south-west of the mound, the nearest stone in the triangular monument would have stood. About five metres south of the monument’s southern side, the excavated hall building (A10, Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 7:108–17) would have stood, and about 40 metres south of the hall lay the Kjellerhaug grave mound.

The two grave mounds are probably the most ancient of the four monuments. Kjellerhaug, and probably Flaghaug, date from the Bronze Age (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 12:235–41; Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22:574), while the hall was built in the mid-3rd century and probably taken down in the early 5th century AD (Østmo and Bauer, Ch. 7:110–12).

The horizontal stratigraphy between the monuments may suggest that the stones were raised before the hall was built. The latter was built on a slightly lower-lying spot than the former, possibly because the higher-lying and more exposed – and hence more prominent – spot closer to Flaghaug was already occupied by the raised stones. That would mean that the stone monument was built before the mid-3rd century. Given that the early Iron Age period of prestigious graves and buildings at Avaldsnes, SP III, starts c. AD 200 with the first Iron Age grave in Flaghaug, the stones would have been raised in the first half of that century.

This early date may appear likely in light of Anders Andrén’s (2004) interpretation of triangular monuments as representations of Yggdrasil, the world tree in Norse mythology, to which the Gods ventured every day to their thing meeting. Yggdrasil had three roots that spanned the earth, and the monuments’ three corners would represent the roots. Andrén finds that many of the triangles that occur in burial grounds, often only one in each, seem to be the focus point of the cemetery in question. Also, cremations appear to be the dominant form of burial in these cemeteries. The triangular monument in Borre in Vestfold is a case in point (Andrén 2004:413–14). There, the enormous 7th–9th-century mounds, all of them cremation graves, appear to surround the triangular monument on three sides, the beach making out the fourth. If this is indeed a conscious arrangement, the triangular monument in Borre will have been among the earliest monuments there.

A parallel sequence of the Avaldsnes stone monument and the five Flaghaug cremations would support a dating of the stone monument to the early 3rd century. Stylegar and Reiersen (Ch. 22:613–16) date the two earliest of the four cremation burials in Flaghaug to Lund Hansen’s (1988) period C1b/C2; that is, to the early 3rd–early 4th centuries. Following Andrén’s line of argument, the triangular stone monument should be contemporary or slightly predate these two.

However, neither of these two attempts to pin down the sequence in the build-up of monumentality at Avaldsnes is definite. A more cautious assessment would con-

clude that the triangular stone monument was raised in the period when most raised-stone monuments were erected in western Scandinavia: the Roman and Migration periods (1st–mid-6th centuries AD, Løken 1974:162–4).

This triangular monument of stones that rose to more than 1.5 times the height of all other triangular stone monuments in contemporary Scandinavia was a major addition to Avaldsnes' monumentality. In the millennium that elapsed until the stone church was built, the stones would have dwarfed anyone who approached them. Those that sailed the *Norðvegr* just east of the monuments will have seen the raised stones, the two mounds, and at times also an impressive hall building. Even during the bright Scandinavian summer nights, sailors would have seen their silhouettes towards the sky in the west, and were thus reminded of the king who resided in the hall, as well as his predecessors commemorated by the grave monuments, whose names they undoubtedly knew.