28 The Warrior Manor

During many of the 3,400 years prior to the royal manor's waning following the fire in AD 1368, aristocratic presence is evident at Avaldsnes and along the Karmsund Strait (Ch. 27). What was the nature and context of that presence, and did it change from c. AD 200 and into the 11th–12th centuries AD? Focusing on this period, this chapter, as indicated in the ARM research plan (Ch. 4), explores these issues from a central-place perspective.

Centrality may be perceived from two perspectives, either from the centre or from outside. From an outside perspective a site is identified as a centre if it serves certain communal functions. Regarding Avaldsnes' centrality from the perspective of a local aristocracy, the following questions need to be addressed: what use did aristocrats make of the Avaldsnes manor and its surroundings, and what type of authority did they exert over the adjacent land and waters?

The main result from these discussions is that there is little or no evidence to indicate that Avaldsnes had communal functions of the types found in the south- and east-Scandinavian central places. Given that such functions are the basis for identifying a central place, Avaldsnes does not appear to have been a site of that type.

Regarding centrality from an aristocratic perspective, late Viking Age Avaldsnes appears to have been the manor of a vast estate comprising about 70 farms in northern Kormt and across the Karmsund Strait. Some 3–4 centuries later, the land rent from the farms in the estate will have sustained 120–170 men, probably not much fewer in the 10th–11th centuries. Through most of the period, Avaldsnes residents deliberately built up the manor's monumental appearance facing the sailing route. The land along the narrowest section of the Karmsund Strait has been used for similar purpose: two monuments in particular, one on either side of the strait, may have connected the site with Þórr, the god that protected society from destructive beings, and the world tree Yggdrasil. Supplied by yield from the estate and bolstered by myth and monuments, military dominance of the sailing route appears to be the primary rationale for aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes and along the Karmsund Strait in the first millennium AD. Thus, Odd Nordland's characterisation in 1950 of Avaldsnes as 'the warrior manor' (krigargarden) seems appropriate.

As indicated in the ARM Project research plan (Skre, Ch. 4), drawing on a rich and varied research strand, a central-place perspective on Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait will be explored in this chapter. What use did the aristocracy who held Avaldsnes make of the site and its surroundings? Why were they there at all?

Centrality is not only a quality perceived from the centre, but also by people living in the vicinity. Which societal role did the aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes play for them? An attempt will be made to identify the possible presence at Avaldsnes and along the Karmsund Strait of the communal functions that have been identified in south- and east-Scandinavian central places. In these other sites, people living in their surroundings ventured to the centres to gain access to and enjoy the benefits of these functions. Did the same happen at Avaldsnes?

28.1 Avaldsnes – a communal assembly site?

Aristocratic presence appears to be at the core of south- and east-Scandinavian central places from the first millennium. But not all aristocratic residences there had central-place functions. Are there any indications of such functions at Avaldsnes? Did people in the vicinity assemble at Avaldsnes to participate in thing meetings, cult, or trade?

A characteristic feature of south- and east-Scandinavian central places is that large numbers of people assembled there, probably annually or on several occasions each year. Central places such as Skiringssal, Gudme, Uppåkra, and Helgö (Skre, Fig. 1.2) appear to have housed assemblies (refs. below and in Skre, Ch. 4:55–7). Some, for instance Uppsala, are named as assembly sites in 13th-century accounts, possibly a valid designation for the Viking Period as well (Skre 2007:446). Such assemblies appear to have been an institution among most Germanic peoples since before AD 1 (Iversen 2013a).

In the 12th and 13th centuries, the Scandinavian assembly, the thing, had not only juridical but also what may be described as administrative functions. Even what could be called political issues were dealt with at the thing. In addition to all of these functions, the thing served as a forum where friendships and alliances were negotiated and confirmed, agreements concerning marriage and other important matters were entered into, and the latest news was shared and disseminated.

Sources revealing the character of thing assemblies in the Viking Age are very scarce. But while crucial factors, such as the religion and the nature of royal power, were different then from what they would be in the 12th and 13th centuries, the thing assemblies were the most important juridical, political, and social assemblies for Viking society (Andersen 1977:247–62; Jørgensen et al. 2011; Ljungkvist et al. 2011).

In the earlier period, several types of Scandinavian sites have been identified as assembly sites (Semple and Sanmark 2013). Jørgensen (et al. 2011) suggest that the numerous pit houses in several south-Scandinavian central places of the 6th–11th century were temporary lodgings during assembly meetings. In western Scandinavia, two types of sites have been identified. The first type is the so-called cooking-pit sites with remains of hundreds, sometimes more than a thousand earth ovens for preparing meat, normally from the period c. 300 BC–AD 600 (Samdal and Bukkemoen 2008:252–6; Semple and Sanmark 2013:519–24).

The second type of site is the so-called courtyard sites. First occurring in the 1st–3rd centuries AD, they are suggested by various scholars to have had a variety of functions, singly or in combination (overview in Iversen 2015a:2–4). The thing-site function has been explored in more recent literature (Storli 2010; Iversen 2015a; 2015b; Ch. 26). While the eight Rogaland sites appear to have been in use into the 7th century, perhaps even the 8th (Iversen, Ch. 26), some sites in Trøndelag and Hålogaland evidently were used into the Viking Period, a few even to the turn of the millennium.

Turning back to Avaldsnes, there is evidence of thing meetings from the 14th century. In 1322 the thing meeting for Rogaland and Agder was held at Avaldsnes (DN 1:168; Iversen 2015c:215–16); in 1351 and subsequently it was held in Stavanger. The 1322 meeting took place in the period when the king had invested heavily in building up a royal administrative centre at Avaldsnes (Bauer, Ch. 14); the thing probably had been moved there recently.

From the first millennium there is no evidence at or near Avaldsnes for either of the two assembly-site types. The nearest courtyard site is Øygarden (Iversen, Fig. 26.2). Neither the number nor the arrangement of the Avaldsnes cooking pits resemble those found in assumed assembly sites. There, they are heavily clustered, but rarely dug into older pits (Samdal and Bukkemoen 2008:fig. 8.3; Semple and Sanmark 2013:fig. 2), while the Avaldsnes cooking pits are spread here and there along the edge of the cultivated field. The number of cooking pits at Avaldsnes, about 120, and the dense cluster adjacent to the longhouse, where most pits are dug into older pits, is typical of settlements of the Roman and Migration periods in western Scandinavia (Bauer, Figs. 13.1, 13.7). The assembly-place cooking-pit clusters are not connected to settlements. Thus, the Avaldsnes cooking pits should not be taken as indication of a communal assembly place, but were rather used for preparing food for guests on special occasions.

Neither are there remains at Avaldsnes of any of the other communal assembly-place functions dependent on the gathering of large numbers of people. There are no indications of trade and markets before the Hanseatic harbour activities there in the 14th–16th centuries (Elvestad and Opedal 2001; Mehler 2009). The traces of craft activities at Avaldsnes (Østmo, Ch. 9) do not indicate production and processing beyond the needs of the manor's inhabitants. Brink (Ch. 24:675, Fig. 24.4) suggests that *Skeie*, a farm about two kilometres west of Avaldsnes, may have been an assembly place of some sort; the word 'skeið' denotes a place for horse racing. Involving evidence from the 12th–19th centuries, when horse races and horse fights were still organised in parts of Norway, Stylegar (2013) notes that in some districts they involved cattle fights, wrestling, dancing, and heavy drinking, and some activities involved mythological elements. The assemblies were held in a carnivalesque atmosphere that overturned the normal social order and mocked authorities (Stylegar 2013:454–5). Thus, whereas central-place activities at Avaldsnes would have served to reinforce the authority of the manor's residents, the skeið near Avaldsnes probably contributed to the social balance for people living nearby.

The final type of communal function identified in south- and east-Scandinavian central places is the religious. Indicative of religious functions there are sacral place names, like those found in Gudme (Hedeager 2001), cultic buildings, like the ones found in Uppåkra (Larsson 2004) and elsewhere (Jørgensen 2009), or written evidence, like the *disablót* (*disir*: pre-Christian female powers, *blót*: sacrifice) that according to Snorri took place in Uppsala (Sundqvist 2002:100; Skre 2007:446; Ljungkvist et al. 2011).

Stefan Brink (Ch. 24) finds no securely identifiable sacral or cultic place names in Kormt, along the Karmsund Strait, or on the adjacent island and mainland; the only exception being Helgaberg ('the holy rock'), a conspicuous rock protruding about 50 metres from the flat island some five kilometres south of Avaldsnes. The name is known elsewhere in Scandinavia and Iceland. Myths were often connected to such extraordinary topographic features (Brink, Ch. 24:674, 684–5, Figs. 24.3, 24.4), but they appear not to have been connected to assembly places.

Thus, there seem to be no indications at Avaldsnes or in the vicinity that communal assemblies were held there in the first millennium AD.

28.2 The nature of the aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes

It appears that Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait did not accommodate communal assemblies or other central-place functions for the population there. However, an aristocracy seem to have been present there for a longer period than elsewhere in western Scandinavia; many of their number were buried there. Thus, the manor and the strait seem to have played a prominent role for the resident elite – the site and the waters were central to their concerns. Which central functions did the manor and the strait have for the aristocracy? Which needs, central to their position and power, did the manor and the strait fulfil? Some aspects of aristocratic centrality at Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait, and the changes it underwent through the first millennium, will be discussed in the following.

28.2.1 Landed possessions

While written evidence concerning ownership of land in most of medieval Norway is quite substantial from the 13th century onwards, the evidence from south-western Norway is not significant before the mid-17th century (Brink, Ch. 24:665). From that late period there are complete land registers containing value assessment and information on ownership. Based on these registers and patterns of ownership and transfers of landed possessions in the 11th–16th centuries, supported by the few 13th–16th-century documents that have been preserved, conclusions regarding estates of the Viking Age may be attained.

Applying these methods to the evidence from Kormt and the nearby mainland, Halvard Bjørkvik (1999:9–19) has analysed land ownership there. He finds that the vast majority of farms in northern Kormt and along the Karmsund Strait were in royal possession in the 10th–11th centuries (Fig. 28.1). Only two small clusters of farms, a total of seven, were less securely in royal possession; documents from 15th–17th

centuries indicate that at that time they were owned by nobles. Bjørkvik (1999:39) suggests that at some point prior to that, they comprised a royal fief held by the king's local governor, and that the fief in time came to be considered as separate hereditary possessions. Parallels to such developments are known elsewhere. Thus, nearly all farms in northern Kormt and along the Karmsund Strait appear to have been a single, continuous royal estate in the late Viking Age.

The extensive royal estate in northern Kormt stands in contrast to patterns of ownership nearby. In southern Kormt, many farms were privately possessed (owned by farmers or nobility) in the mid-17th century. Along Førresfjorden, the fjord just 4–5 kilometres east of the Karmsund Strait, 76 % of the land was privately possessed, predominantly by the farmer himself. Such late Viking Age clusters of royal ownership on the outer coast and private ownership further inland are a general pattern in western Scandinavia; the clusters were connected to the royal estates, which are found primarily in that zone (F. Iversen 2007).

It is difficult to form a qualified opinion as to when this estate was created. Based on excavated settlements, the occurrence and absence of graves, and general developments in other Germanic areas, scholars have dated the first establishment of estates to the 3rd–6th centuries in some regions and the 9th–11th centuries in others (Skre 2001; Iversen 2008). The scarcity of 7th–11th-century graves in northern Kormt (Hernæs 1997:194; Opedal 2010:48–50), except for the princely ship graves in the Storhaug and Grønhaug mounds and the huge cenotaph of the Salhusaug mound (Skre, Fig. 27.1), may indicate that few or no farms there were owned by the farmer in that period. The background for this assumption is the fact that only a minority of the population received a burial of the types found by archaeologists; the majority of furnished graves appear to have been connected to inheritance. Burial rituals and the building of grave mounds appear to have involved the transfer of land from the deceased to the heir (Skre 1997; Iversen 2008:65–71), and the general lack of graves within what was evidently an estate in the following centuries would indicate that those who worked the farm did not have hereditary rights – they were not the owners of the land. Moreover, the 7th–8th-century princely graves at farms that according to Bjørkvik's results were part of the Avaldsnes estate in the 10th–11th centuries would imply that those who possessed the Avaldsnes manor were the owner of those farms.

The quite distinct pattern of 7th–11th-century burials in northern Kormt – that is, the presence of princely burials and near-absence of others – is contrasted by areas of inland Rogaland and Hordaland where farmer ownership was the norm in mid-17th-century evidence. In this type of area, averagely equipped burials in modest monuments are numerous (Skre 1998:258–60; Iversen 2008:71–4). In some areas, that pattern goes back to the 3rd–6th centuries. This is also the case in northern Kormt, and it cannot be excluded that the establishment of the Avaldsnes estate began in that period.

The yield from the Avaldsnes estate as reconstructed by Bjørkvik would be quite substantial. The system of land assessment that was developed in the 13th century

Fig. 28.1: The probable extent of the Avaldsnes estate in the 10th–11th centuries, based on Halvard Bjørkvik's results (1999:9–29). Farm value was expressed as the rent that a tenant was expected to pay to the owner. Although given here in grain, measured by units of skippund (185 kg), the rent could be paid in products like fish, butter, or hides. The manor in the estate, Avaldsnes, was considerably larger than the approximately 70 other farms; its value was probably about 20 skippund of grain (Bjørkvik 1999:29). Regarding the extent of cultivated land, see legend to Fig. 27.1. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH

indicated the value of the farm by stating the land rent that a tenant would need to pay to the owner – normally one-sixth of the farm's total yield. The assessment was based on all resources that were exploited from the farm, including hunting, fishing, and other maritime resources. In the 17th century some farms in Kormt paid their land rent in fish.

Land assessment could be made in a variety of units, in Rogaland normally in grain or butter, the two main products from farming. In the *leidang* system, the royal military organisation of the realm that probably originated in the 10th century, the unit applied was the *mánaðarmatr*, literally the food needed to feed one man for a month. Rates for conversion into other units were quite fixed; one *mánaðarmatr* normally equalled 15.4 kg of butter or 92.5 kg of grain (Bjørkvik 1967).

Based on these conversion rates and the 17th-century evidence, Bjørkvik (1999:28–9) has produced an assessment of the early 14th-century land rent from all farms in Kormt and in the nearby mainland. From Bjørkvik's results, the Avaldsnes estate would provide a land rent of about 1,500–2,000 *mánaðarmatar*; to this total, the Avaldsnes manor would contribute about 40 *mánaðarmatar*, far more than any other of the 70 or so farms comprising the estate.¹ Through the year's twelve months the land rent from the estate would suffice to sustain 120–170 persons that did not engage in agrarian production. The total number of people that could live off the estate, including those that ran the farms, would be six times this, some 750–1,000 individuals.

These figures must be treated with great caution; they are estimates based on stipulated premises. Furthermore, it is difficult to gauge these figures' relation to the situation in the Viking Age, let alone in the 3rd–8th centuries; the yield in both periods would probably be somewhat lower than in the 14th century, although not necessarily by much. However, because the land rent did not include the total normal surplus from the farm, the number of persons which might be exempt from the agrarian production would be higher than that indicated by the land rent alone.

Although insecure, the figures indicate that several dozen men – for instance a substantial military force – could be sustained at Avaldsnes in the Viking Period, possibly in the 3rd–8th centuries as well. Although the figures indicate that Avaldsnes and northern Kormt were quite fertile, they are dwarfed by analogous figures from the inland regions.

¹ Although he does not supply details, Bjørkvik appears to have applied standard agrarian-historical methods to obtain these results. One critical assessment is the relation between land rent recorded in 1647 and that reconstructed for the early 14th century; he appears to have multiplied the former by 4.5 to obtain the latter. Although the factor is tentative, it is in accordance with other assessments in the region (e. g. Iversen 2008:122).

28.2.2 Monumentality

Evidently, in some periods, the Avaldsnes residents have staged the manor's appearance as seen from the sailing route nearby. The development of Avaldsnes' monumentality towards that sailing route is portrayed in Figure 28.2 and the monuments along the Karmsund Strait are mapped in Figure 27.1. Although some elements in both figures are more securely documented and dated than others (see figure legends and caption), periods of monumental expansion may be distinguished from periods of stagnation or retraction.

SP III (AD 200–600)

Clearly, monumentality was introduced the Early Bronze Age both at Avaldsnes and along the strait. These monuments continued to exist, but no additional monuments were built through the rest of SP I and in SP II.

The following period, SP III, saw a swift and forceful building up of monuments along the eastern edge of the Avaldsnes settlement plateau. The conspicuous stone monument was raised, a hall building was erected, and the repeated burials in the Flaghaug mound connected the present aristocracy there to those that were entombed in the great mound in the legendary past. The Avaldsnes plateau is the highest-lying and dominating headland along the western side of the Karmsund Strait, elevated some 25 meters above sea level. Therefore, the Avaldsnes monuments would be visible from the moment southward-bound sailors entered the strong current at Norheim until they passed the headland near Helgaberg in the south (Brink, Fig. 24.3). Conversely, ships sailing along this c. 7 kilometres stretch would be visible from Avaldsnes.

Erected in early SP III, or slightly earlier, the triangular stone settings at Avaldsnes and Norheim, as well as the Avaldsnes hall, were monument types new to western Scandinavia. Both monument types appear to have had clear connotations; those of the triangular stone settings would have been mythical (below), while the hall would have been associated with the entertainment of elite guests (Skre, Ch. 27:757).

Herschend (2009:251–2) links the emergence among Germanic peoples of separate hall buildings to the role that the *basilica* had attained among the Roman aristocracy – as a banquet hall and meeting room. The *basilica*'s 'distant echo' (2009:252) among Germanic peoples was a modest building space devoid of the household activities found at sites spanning from the richest centres to farms somewhat above average size. Since the 2nd century BC such building space was accommodated within the longhouse, until the first separate hall buildings in Scandinavia were erected in the 3rd–4th centuries AD. Compared to other halls of the 3rd–4th centuries, the 108–120 m² Avaldsnes hall is around the middle of the size range spanning from the large Gudme hall (about 250 m²) to the smaller ones at Vallhagar (about 90 m²), Uppåkra

(about 70 m²), and Övetorp (about 70 m²) (measurements taken from Herschend 2009:figs. 80B, 81, 82, and 119A).

The Avaldsnes hall was erected within a period of a few decades in which the Flaghaug Grave 2 also was interred. This grave, as well as Graves 3 and 4 of the 3rd–4th centuries, speak of intimate connections to Continental Germanic and Roman customs over these centuries. Stylegar and Reiersen (Ch. 22:621–5) note the extraordinarily high number of Roman objects in these graves. The Roman vessel in the grave at the Norheim monument's centre is of the same type (E58) as that in Flaghaug Grave 4; in fact, all four finds in Norway of this vessel type have been retrieved in Rogaland (Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22:619), within a 70-kilometre radius. Whether or not Shetelig (1912:58–9) was correct in his suggestion that Avaldsnes had been a centre for the distribution of Roman vessels in this period, these finds indicate close connections between the sites, in particular between Avaldsnes and Norheim.

The richest of the Flaghaug graves, Grave 2, belongs to a small group of princely-class graves north of the *Limes*, of which all but Grave 2 are located outside Scandinavia. It has been proposed that these graves were associated with the alliance networks established outside the *Limes* by the Romans after the end of the Marcomannian wars in AD 180. Stylegar and Reiersen (Ch. 22:623) suggest that the burial custom, particularly Grave 2's stone chamber and inhumation burial, which introduces new burial customs along the west-Scandinavian coast, follows a Roman model found in other contemporary Germanic princely graves.

Thus, the erection of the separate hall building A10 and the apparently rather contemporary interment in Flaghaug of Grave 2 connects the Avaldsnes site to a Continental Germanic network of alliances with the Roman Empire and a pan-Scandinavian style of organising the manor's reception and feasting space, influenced by Roman customs and building types. Both features were innovations in their respective areas, and they will have come about because the man buried in Grave 2, possibly also those in Graves 3 and 4, had spent time in the lands along the *Limes* or inside the Roman Empire, probably serving in the Imperial Roman army as *auxili* (regular troops of non-citizens) or *numeri* (non-citizens supplying their own dress and weapons).

The Roman diplomatic tactic for establishing connections deep into Germanic areas was to turn the ruling classes into loyal allies by giving them access to Roman goods and ways of life. By doing so, they also separated them from their fellow inhabitants in the north; the Romans also equipped and motivated the Germanic aristocracies for repressing any initiative to raid or conquer Roman areas. For Romanised Germanic aristocrats, subduing other aristocratic pretenders and breaking free of traditional communal restrictions on aristocratic power would have been rational aims to pursue (Thompson 1965:73, 88–108; Heather 2009:81–90).

The clear evidence at Avaldsnes of direct contacts with Roman and Germanic elites sets the mid-3rd-century Avaldsnes residents among a handful of contemporary Romanised Germanic military entrepreneurs in northern Germanic areas. Taking possession of the Avaldsnes headland and thus the ability to restrict and secure traffic

SP I-II

SP III

SP IV

Fig. 28.2: The monuments along the eastern edge of the Avaldsnes settlement plateau in the various Site Periods, as seen from the sea. Monumental features, some less securely dated and defined than others, are mentioned in Chapters 6 and 27; the former contains references to detailed descriptions and information on datings. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

SP V

SP VI

along the sea route that passed the manor appears to be part of their entrepreneurial project. These moves would contribute to subduing contenders and to weakening traditional checks on aristocratic power. Military and naval proficiency and capacity would have been crucial to pursue this strategy.

Following the 3rd–4th-century monument building at Avaldsnes, a more stable period appears to have commenced. Farming activities, the longhouse, and craft production were maintained into the sixth century. However, the hall building appears not to have been used after the early fifth century; perhaps it was taken down. The longhouse and the boathouse went out of use around AD 600. Whether these changes indicate stable military dominance of the strait or a decline in military capacity and power remains uncertain – both are possible.

SP IV–VI (AD 600–1368)

The palisade that was built very early in SP IV was clearly visible from the sea, and may be regarded as monumental. Building remains from the 7th–10th centuries have not been identified – a common problem in this region, probably the result of the way

buildings were constructed. Thus, it cannot be assessed whether monumental buildings exposed towards the sea were erected in this period.

However, monumentality was expressed along the Karmsund Strait (Skre, Fig. 271). Around the time when the palisade was erected, the huge Salhus mound was built 2.5 kilometres north of Avaldsnes and across the sound from the raised stones at Norheim. At 43 metres in diameter and 4 metres high, it was apparently a cenotaph (Ringstad 1986:66–8, 187; Opedal 1998:41). The spot was chosen as it would be visible from the narrowest part of the strait and indeed from the waters to the south. It was built over a smaller mound, thereby connecting the person it commemorated to the past.

In the late 8th century two monuments were built. The Grønhaug mound, 30 metres in diameter and 4 metres high, was built in AD 790–5 in the east-northeast continuation of the straight line through the seven Bronze Age mounds in Reheia (Skre, Fig. 271). The Grønhaug mound was visible from the sea, but its setting near the shore of the Bøvågen bay made it less exposed to seaways travellers (Opedal 1998; Stylegar and Bonde 2009). In the choice of the site, the connection to the ancient mounds appears to have been more significant than exposure to travellers.

The Storhaug mound, 40–45 metres in diameter and 5–6 metres high, was built in AD 779 on a spot that supplied maximum exposure towards the strait. In this area, where the Salhusaug mound was also located, 14 huge mounds each 20 metres or more in diameter could be seen in the 1860s – Those with a known location are indicated in Figure 27.1. Most of the 14 have since been destroyed; the majority appear to have been of a Bronze Age date (Opedal 2005:47; 2010). The spot that was chosen for the Storhaug mound forged a connection with the past while placing it in full exposure towards seaways travellers.

As did the monuments of early SP III, these three grave mounds introduced new customs while also connecting to the past. The construction of the Salhus mound reintroduced the Bronze Age custom of building huge mounds along the Karmsund Strait. However, the most conspicuous new burial feature was the ship burial custom. Preceded in northern Europe only by the early 7th-century Sutton Hoo Mound 1 and 2 burials, the two Kormt graves are the earliest ship graves in Scandinavia. Stylegar and Bonde (2016) hold that the custom was conveyed from East Anglia to Kormt, from whence it spread to southern and central Scandinavia (see also Bill 2015). In the prelude to the 9th–10th-century surge in Scandinavian seafaring to the Continent and the British Isles, this indication of intimate contact across the North Sea sets the two persons buried in ships by the Karmsund in an entrepreneurial role.

As in early SP III, and possibly when the Salhus mound was built, it appears that in the late 8th century, on the threshold to the first Viking raids in the west, aristocratic entrepreneurs lived along the Karmsund Strait, connecting to the past, exploring new seaways, and introducing new customs. An additional innovative technological leap in this period was that from rowing to sailing ships. While the two ships from Kormt appear to be rowing ships but are too fragmentary to allow secure assessment, the Oseberg ship, which has been proven to have been built c. 820 in the

same region (Stylegar and Bonde 2009), is the earliest securely identified Scandinavian-type sailing ship. The leap from rowing to sailing ships in Scandinavia is difficult to date, and while the Oseberg ship cannot be taken as definitive proof that the shift originated in this region, it nevertheless demonstrates that proficiency in building sailing ships existed in the Avaldsnes region early in the sailing era.

The grave monuments here were self-evidently built to commemorate those entombed within them, but probably also to express their successors' supremacy over the sailing route. Both the Avaldsnes palisade and the three monuments along the Karmsund Strait speak of military dominance over the strait in the 7th–8th centuries, although not necessarily continuously.

The two centuries of monument-building preceding the Viking Age were followed by a century or more with no new monuments. However, farming and processing activities continued at Avaldsnes, increasing in the 10th century. It seems that in the 10th or early 11th century a building was erected at the spot where the SP III hall stood – evidently the building ground with the maximum exposure towards the sea. That suggests that it was a prestigious building, possibly a hall (SP V in Fig. 28.2). Written evidence indicates that a church was built in the early 11th century, and in the mid- and late 13th century the masonry St Óláfr's Church and additional masonry lodgings, store rooms, and the like were erected (SP VI in Fig. 28.2). The 10th- and early 11th-century building-up of monumentality appears to have been undertaken by the Norwegian kings, who in that period had Avaldsnes in their possession. The 13th-century monumentality build-up was without question a display of royal dominance.

28.2.3 A mythical landscape

The emergence of aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes in early SP III (3rd century AD) introduced a decisive change in cultic practices. Zachrisson (Ch. 25:690–8) understands each individual deposition of pots and ard shares in Scandinavia as representing a household; thus, they were not communal. These depositions ceased as the aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes became evident around the transition between SP II and III. A parallel shift away from individual offering of pots in bogs occurred in the same period in southern Scandinavia; there, communal military offerings of weapons began (Pauli Jensen 2009).

Such communal weapon offerings have not been testified in western Scandinavia in this period. From Zachrisson's analysis (Ch. 25:702–13) it appears that depositions at Avaldsnes and along the Karmsund Strait in early SP III continued to be related to individuals or household; however, they attained a clear aristocratic character. Gold items, some of them in graves, others as single items elsewhere, are clustered at Avaldsnes, but are also found scattered in the vicinity (Zachrisson, Fig. 25.9). Zachrisson suggests that there was a goldsmith workshop near the Karmsund Strait in early

SP III; a possible location of such a workshop would be Area 6 at Avaldsnes. Remains found there from metalworking and possibly from pottery production (Østmo, Ch. 9:180–1) may indicate that this was a multi-craft workshop, which appears to have been a normal way for organising crafts at the time (Fredriksen et al. 2014).

A stanza in the skaldic poem *Grímnismál*, probably composed in the very late first millennium AD, indicates that Kormt and the Karmsund Strait had a sacral aura. The stanza says that the god Þórr waded across the River Kǫrmt, possibly a reference to the heavy current of the Karmsund Strait, to reach the gods' meeting place by the sacred ash tree Yggdrasil. Discussing this stanza, Mundal (Ch. 3:36) suggests that the island Kormt at some time in the first millennium AD acquired a mythical dimension.

The stanza's mythical motif may be directly connected to the triangular stone settings at Avaldsnes and Norheim. Andrén (2004; Skre, Ch. 23:663) suggests that the raised stones in the corners of triangular stone monuments represented the three roots of Yggdrasil. The standing stones in the centre of some of these monuments, as at Norheim, would have represented the trunk of the tree. Such triangular monuments existed on either side of the Karmsund Strait; these two were the monuments with the tallest raised stones in Scandinavia (Skre, Ch. 23:657–8, 661).

Evidence from south- and east-Scandinavian central places demonstrates that cult sites and practices could be essential elements in aristocratic residences and identity (Jørgensen 2009). In written evidence from the early 13th century, Þórr is portrayed as the god of strength who protected men and gods from chaos and destruction, primarily from the Jötunn, the giants that lived in the wilderness and mountains in Jötunheimr and Útgarðr (Steinsland 2005). If the stanza in *Grímnismál* should be taken as an indication of the self-perception of the Avaldsnes residents, it might imply that they saw themselves – and perhaps were regarded as – protectors of communities in the vicinity from destructive forces from elsewhere. And – in light of the gods' meeting by Yggdrasil – they may have seen themselves as god-like.

Although connections between the monuments and the *Grímnismál* stanza are conjectural, a myth involving the god Þórr crossing a waterway to reach Yggdrasil would fit well in the monumental and aristocratic environment at Avaldsnes and along the Karmsund Strait, perhaps as early as the 3rd century. Alternatively, the mythical motif found in *Grímnismál* may have been introduced at some later time in the first millennium AD.

28.3 The warrior manor

From these discussions it appears that Avaldsnes' centrality has not been of the same nature as that of south- and east-Scandinavian central places, the essential difference being that Avaldsnes did not host communal assemblies. None of the communal functions of such assemblies – markets with craft production, thing meetings, and

cultic practices – may be identified at or near Avaldsnes. That absence would explain why archaeological features such as a high number of buildings or thick and find-rich deposits with remains of craft production and trade, characteristic for sites like Gudme, Uppåkra, and Helgö, are not found at Avaldsnes.

Rather, military dominance over the Karmsund Strait and the neighbouring waters, supplied by yield from the estate and bolstered by myth and monuments, appears to be the main rationale for aristocratic presence at Avaldsnes and along the strait. Based on the possibilities offered by the maritime topography and the agrarian resources, the first-millennium centrality of Avaldsnes from an aristocratic perspective is expressed in the building-up of estate and monuments, and the possible composition of myths.

From this, Odd Nordland's term for characterising Avaldsnes, 'the warrior manor' (krigargarden, 1950:38; Skre, Ch. 2:26–7), seems very appropriate. Supported by connections to the Roman Empire and Continental Germanic aristocracy, the military presence appears to have been introduced in the 3rd century AD. Subsequently it was maintained through much of the first millennium AD. In the 10th century Avaldsnes appears to have been a foothold during the building up of the Norwegian kingdom, and thereafter the manor was integrated in the royal administration of the realm.

These analyses and discussions demonstrate that the range of available concepts to characterise sites in Iron Age and early medieval Scandinavia is in dire need of extension. While the concept of 'central place' was a welcome addition to scholarship in the 1980s, it has come to be used more loosely to characterise most sites that display some type of buildings, activities, or finds that seem to be out of the ordinary. However, extraordinary sites differ substantially from each other, as do seemingly ordinary sites. Exploring such differences – applying the concept 'central' only when actual indications of specified types of centrality is evident – is a gateway to a deeper understanding of the structures and dynamics of Scandinavian societies in the first millennium AD.

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