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29 Sea Kings on the Norðvegr

In this chapter, Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait are considered in a west-Scandinavian context. Was the manor one of a kind? Why did aristocrats reside there, and what may be inferred about their activities? Topographic, archaeological, and Old Norse literary evidence is analysed to discuss these questions.

In western Scandinavia, Iron Age settlement is found in the rather small patches of rich soil, primarily along the sea, especially where valleys meet the fjord. Only two larger areas of continuous fertile soil exist: Jæren and Trøndelag. However, through the whole 1st millennium AD, settlement also thrived in less fertile areas in highland valleys and in islands on the outer coasts. Unsurprisingly, 33 aristocratic manors are found in the lush inland regions between Rogaland and Møre; less obvious is the existence of 13 Iron Age manors on the outer coast. The latter are found in two zones, one in Rogaland and Hordaland, the other in Møre and Romsdal. Lying in the former zone, Avaldsnes is the site with the richest finds, most numerous monumental mounds, and the longest continuity.

The mountainous landscape presents travellers, especially those with cargo, with few alternatives to sailing along the coast by the sea route known as the Norðvegr, which is protected from the open ocean by thousands of islands and skerries. The need to secure traffic along this sea route, vital to travellers from the whole of western Scandinavia, is identified as the reason why aristocrats settled on the islands. Emerging in the 3rd century AD, the martial character of these island communities is testified in literary evidence regarding the Viking Age. Indeed, Haraldr hárfagri appears to have emerged from this sea-king milieu, probably in Rogaland and Hordaland.

The comparison in Chapter 28 of Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait to the central places of southern and eastern Scandinavia concluded that Avaldsnes was not a central place of that type. Avaldsnes does not share the archaeological characteristics of those sites – the numerous buildings and the deep and find-rich deposits – nor could indications of the diverse communal functions of those central places be identified at Avaldsnes. Rather, Avaldsnes appears to have been a warrior manor.

This final chapter sets Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait in a west-Scandinavian context. The site is compared to other aristocratic manors along the approximately 1,350-kilometre stretch of coast from Rogaland in the south to the northern end of Hålogaland, the northernmost region settled by Germanic-speaking peoples in the first millennium AD. The manors' settings in relation to landscape and communication are analysed. The following discussions should not be taken as final; the numerous questions that arise will be explored in the next Avaldsnes volume.



Fig. 29.1: Along the outer west-Scandinavian coast, west of the quite steep mountain slopes, lies a brim of more level ground, the strandflat (beach plain). Erosion has broken the level landscape up into thousands of islands and skerries, creating a protected sailing route, the Norðvegr, along the coast. In the first millennium AD, Germanic-speaking peoples lived in the southernmost 1,350 kilometres of this approximately 1,800-kilometre strandflat coast, from Rogaland in the south to Hålogaland in the north (Fig. 29.3). While inland communities are found predominantly in fertile land along fjords and in valleys, the landscape along the sailing route is windblown and harsh, consisting mostly of exposed bedrock with shrubs, ling, and grass. But here and there, as in northern Kormt (left) and along the Karmsund Strait, there is some soil cover, allowing cultivation and settlement. Photo: Norske Flyfoto, AS. Owner: Karmøy Municipality.

29.1 West-Scandinavian landscape, settlement, and communication routes

The geography of the west is predominantly shaped by the mountain ridge that runs from the far north towards the south-southwest of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Reaching heights above 2,000 metres, the eastern side of the ridge undulates gradually towards the lowlands in the east, ending at the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Bothnia some 300–500 kilometres to the east, while the mountains in the west fall quite steeply towards the outer Atlantic and North Sea coast some 80–200 kilometres to the west. From the west, several fjords extend from the coast up to 150 kilometres inland towards the central mountain ridge.

Where the mountains meet the sea, the slopes taper off, creating a flat landscape in the outer coastal zone; the Norwegian word *strandflat*, meaning ‘beach plain’, has become the internationally accepted geological term for this landscape formation type (Figs. 29.1 and 29.3). This brim, several kilometres wide, of low-lying land and shallow sea is found along the coast from Rogaland to the Scandinavian Peninsula’s northern



Fig. 29.2: In west-Scandinavian fjords, arable land, here shown for Vik in Sogn, is primarily found where the valleys running from the edge of the high-mountain plain meet the sea. Photo: Petr Šmerkl.

tip. Erosion has broken the strandflat up, creating thousands of island and skerries along the coast, leaving only a few stretches of the mainland unprotected from the open ocean in the west (Ramberg et al. 2008; Olesen et al. 2013). These islands and skerries gave rise to the sheltered *Norðvegr*, the coastal sailing route, by protecting it from strong winds and rough waves.

Arable land, and thus Iron Age settlement, is found where the glacier, as it receded during the final phase of the last ice age, left behind moraines, sand, gravel, and stones, or where ocean, lakes, and rivers left sediments. Cultivable moraines and sediments are found predominantly in valleys – especially where they meet the fjord (Fig. 29.2), and also in places on the strandflat. Thus, settlement in western Scandinavia is largely sea-bound, in some instances extending up into valleys. Most settlement areas are small; many consist of a handful of farms up to a hundred.¹ Only two large stretches of more or less continuous cultivated land exist: in Jæren (Fig. 29.4; Jaðar, Fig. 29.3; about 445 farms) in Rogaland, bordering on Boknafjorden in the north and the North Sea in the west, and in Trøndelag (Prándheimr in Fig. 29.3), especially south and east of the Trondheim Fjord. Only one relatively large inland district exists: Voss (Fig. 29.5; about 250 farms), lying between the Sogne Fjord and the Hardanger Fjord, some 20 kilometres north of the latter.

Mountain ridges between fjords are generally high and passes are few. Therefore, crossing overland from one fjord settlement to another was laborious, although less

¹ For instance, Vik in Sogn has 95 farms and Etne in Sunnhordland has 82. Numbers are based in Rygh et al. 1898–1919.

difficult closer to the outer coast where the mountains are lower. Even so, travelling and transport was mostly done by sea. Because settlement is found mainly along the fjords, in valleys that end in fjords, or around the mouth of fjords, the scattered settlement districts would invariably be connected by the sea. This connectedness appears to be the background for the ancient delineation of regions of western Scandinavia. Defined by the vast mountain ridge in the east, by fjords, and by the mountain ridges between them, we find (Fig. 29.3) from the south the regions Rogaland, Hordaland (Hjørðaland), Sogn, Fjordane (Firðafylki), Sunnmøre (Sunnmœri), Romsdal (Raumsdalr), Nordmøre (Norðmœri), and Trøndelag (Þrándheimr). In Hålogaland (Hálogaland), the northernmost region settled by Germanic-speaking peoples in the Iron Age, agrarian settlement is not as defined by fjords, as they are quite short. There, arable land, and thus settlement, is found predominantly in the strandflat, and the sailing route along the coast connects the communities on this 450 kilometre coastline into one region. The majority of these regions' names contain tribal names, most of them probably originating some time before AD 1 (Indrebø 1932; Brink, Ch. 24:667–8).

29.2 Aristocratic manors in Snorri's Midlands

In Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* the southern regions along the west-Scandinavian coast appear as a unit in several contexts. Most notably, in Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar (ch. 15), Haraldr Gormsson, the King of the Danes, gave Jarl Hákon Sigurðarson overlordship of seven regions (fylki) in the west (Snorri 2011:147):

And King Haraldr handed over all the forces that had come to him in Norway to Jarl Hákon and gave him to administer Rogaland and Hjørðaland, Sogn, Firðafylki, Sunnmœri and Raumsdalr, and Norðmœri – these seven districts King Haraldr gave to Jarl Hákon to administer on the same terms as Haraldr inn hárfagri had given them to his sons.²

These seven regions (Fig. 29.3) comprise what Snorri in *Heimskringla* (e. g. Haralds saga ins hárfagra, chs. 34, 44) calls *mitt land* (the 'central part of the country', in the following called the Midlands).³ When comparing Avaldsnes with other aristocratic manors, the seven regions are relevant as a suitable context. Communication and sea traffic between most of the fertile and populated regions in western Scandinavia would pass through this section of the Norðveggr: from the northern regions Hålo-

² “[...] ok fekk Haraldr konungr lið þat alt í hendr Hákonar jarli, er til hans hafði komit í Nóregi, ok gaf honum til forráða Rogaland ok Hjørðaland, Sogn, Firðafylki, Sunn-Mœri ok Raumsdal ok Norð-Mœri – þessi vii. fylki gaf Haraldr konungr Hákonar jarli til forráða með þvílíkum formála, sem Haraldr inn hárfagri gaf sonum sínum” (Snorri 1966:114).

³ In some contexts Sunnmøre, Romsdal, and Nordmøre are not included in the *mitt land*.

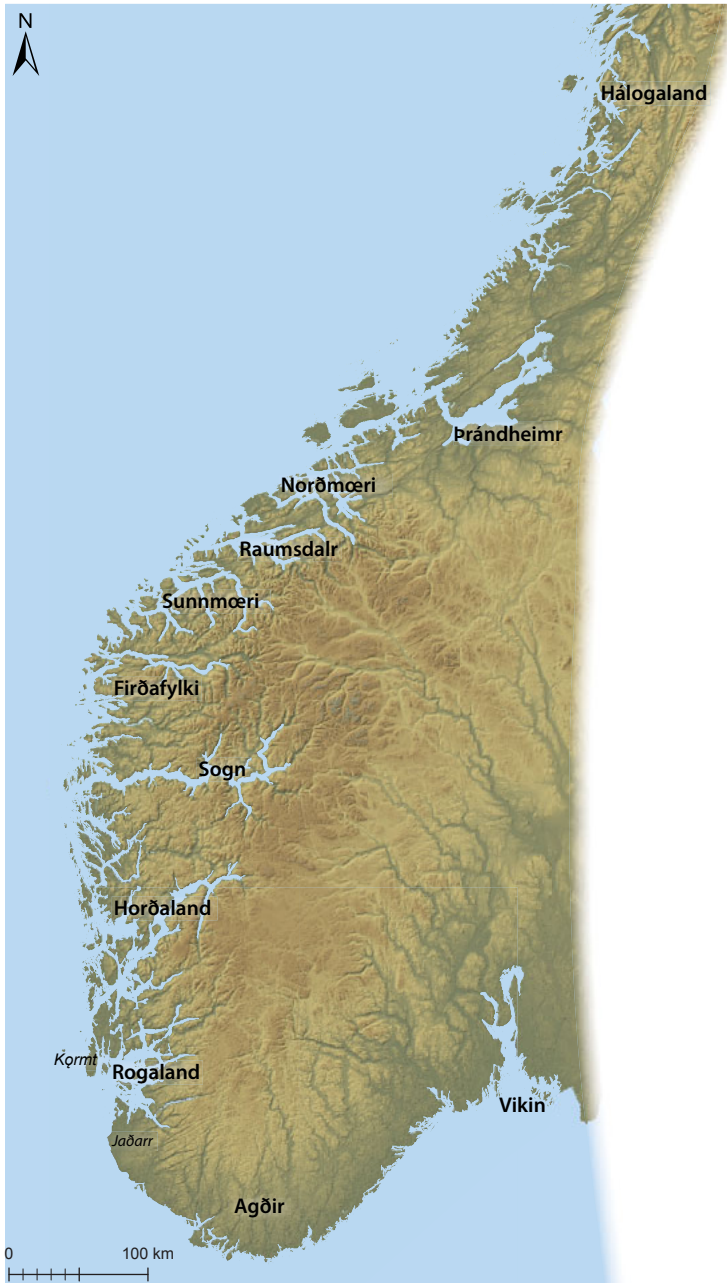


Fig. 29.3: These names of west-Scandinavian regions were in use in the Viking Age; most of them probably originated at a much earlier date. The mitt land (Midlands), a term lent from *Heimskringla*, spans the regions from Rogaland in the south to Nordmøre (Norðmæri) in the north. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

galand and Trøndelag to the Midlands, as well as between regions in the Midlands, and to and from the lands in Jæren (Jaðar), Agder (Agðir), Viken (Vikin), and overseas.

While landed estates, each with a manor (residential farm), would have been numerous in the Midlands (Skre, Ch. 4:55), the relevant parallels for comparison with Avaldsnes are first-millennium manors that appear to have belonged to the higher aristocracy. No comprehensive overview of such manors is possible; the archaeological record is too fragmentary and some manors may have been short-lived or never displayed noteworthy archaeological features. However, use of several types of evidence in combination should allow for somewhat less conjectural results.

Indicated in Figure 29.4 are sites with large mounds (>20 metres in diameter), most of them also with rich finds (accumulated from Myhre 1978:figs. 19–20 regarding Jæren; Ringstad 1992:figs. 10–11 regarding the Midlands north of Jæren).⁴ According to Icelandic saga tradition, Haraldr hárfagri had five main manors, all in Rogaland and Hordaland. Of these, Avaldsnes and Seim display prominent archaeological features, while Alrekstad, Fitjar and Utstein do not; all are included in the map on the basis of the saga evidence (Skre, Ch. 27:762–3).

In Figure 29.5, the information from Figure 29.4 is generalised into zones. By comparing these zones to Myhre's mapping of rich finds from the early Iron Age (1987:fig. 10), the same concentrations and lacunas stand out.⁵ Found within these zones are sites with aristocratic buildings excavated since 2000 in Sogn, Fjordane, Sunnmøre, and Romsdal (Diinhoff 2011:fig. 2), more precisely those in inner Fjordane, inner Sogn, and Romsdal. Likewise, the occurrence of large boathouses in the Midlands as mapped by Grimm (2006:abb. 6; redrawn in Bauer, Fig. 10.7) coincides closely with the zones in Rogaland and Hordaland.

Turning to the high-medieval written evidence, Iversen (2008) has identified a number of royal and baronial (*lendr maðr*) manors and estates in the Midlands. Although great changes in ownership and estates would have occurred in the 10th–12th centuries, Iversen argues that most of these manors had already been prominent in the early Viking Period and probably before. The vast majority of these manors are found within the zones in Figure 29.5 (Iversen 2008:fig. 4), the only notable exception being a possible royal manor in Atløy along the sailing route in Sunnfjord. The manor is mentioned in Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar (chs. 43, 95) as belonging to Haraldr hárfagri's son Eiríkr blóðǫx. Ringstad (1986:295–6) finds no huge mounds or rich finds there, and Iversen (2008:382) counts the manor as possibly royal.

⁴ The archaeological features that justify each of these signatures are not necessarily found within a manor's perimeter. For instance, at Avaldsnes, the grave monuments along the narrow part of the Karmsund Strait are included in the assessment of the site as aristocratic, although they are found on farms such as Norheim, Bø, and Gunnarshaug (Skre, Ch. 27:759–60). These farms are assumed to have been incorporated within the Avaldsnes estate (Skre, Fig. 28.1).

⁵ Myhre's study includes regions from Rogaland to Fjordane.

The high degree of overlap between concentrations and lacunas in these four datasets strengthens the credibility of the zones in Figure 29.5. However, the data for the 3rd–6th centuries are much more comprehensive than that of the later period; changes occurring during the later period therefore might not be reflected in the data.

Bearing these reservations in mind, concentrations of aristocratic manors are found in the most fertile regions: in Jæren, inner southern Hordaland (Sunnhordland), inner Sogn, and in inner Fjordane. However, settlement in the first millennium AD existed not only in fertile areas, but also in relatively remote and marginal sites, for instance in the mountain valley Valldalen on southern Hordaland (Odner 1974), or the outer coast. Agriculture at such sites often had to be supplemented by exploitation of the relatively wider variety of wild resources available, for example by fishing and hunting.

Evidently, of the marginal landscape zones, the outer coast is the only zone where aristocratic manors could be found in the first millennium AD (Figs. 29.4–5). Here in the Midlands, along the protected sailing route, comparatively small stretches of pasturage and arable land allowed production of subsistence plus a surplus sufficient for aristocrats to keep their household and subjects. The richer resources inland sustained a much larger population than that on the islands, and also allowed the production of a variety of trade goods.

In the following discussion, aristocratic manors in the outer coastal zone – all are situated along the coastal sailing route – will be called the *coastal manors*, while those in the fertile districts will be called the *inland manors*. Predominantly situated on islands, coastal manors in the Midlands are clustered in two areas. Five manors are found over a 170-kilometre stretch in Rogaland and Hordaland, followed by a 200-kilometre lacuna in Sogn and Fjordane, and then another eight manors are found in a 150-kilometre stretch in Møre and Romsdal. There are several possible reasons for the lacuna; these include a lack of suitable locations, that is, sites along the sailing route with sufficient arable land to sustain the number of armed men requisite to restrain or secure sea traffic.

The vast majority of boathouses are found in the two zones with coastal manors as well as in the nearby inland-manor regions in Sunnhordland and Rogaland (Bauer, Fig. 10.7). The lacuna in outer Sogn and Fjordane is evident in the distribution of boathouses, whereas the coastal-manor region in Møre and Romsdal has several boathouses (Grimm 2006:abb. 6).

Looking beyond the Midlands, aristocratic sites in the neighbouring region to the north, Trøndelag, are found inland – south and east of the fjord (Ystgaard 2014:85–92). In Hålogaland in the far north, aristocratic manors are found in the only fertile zone: the outer coast (Hansen 1999). Along the coast of Jæren and eastward along the coasts of Agder and Viken, the sailing route is less protected by islands, and few sites there are positioned to allow control over sea traffic.

Among the 13 coastal manors in the Midlands, Avaldsnes and the land along the Karmsund Strait are the only area that displays huge mounds and rich finds from

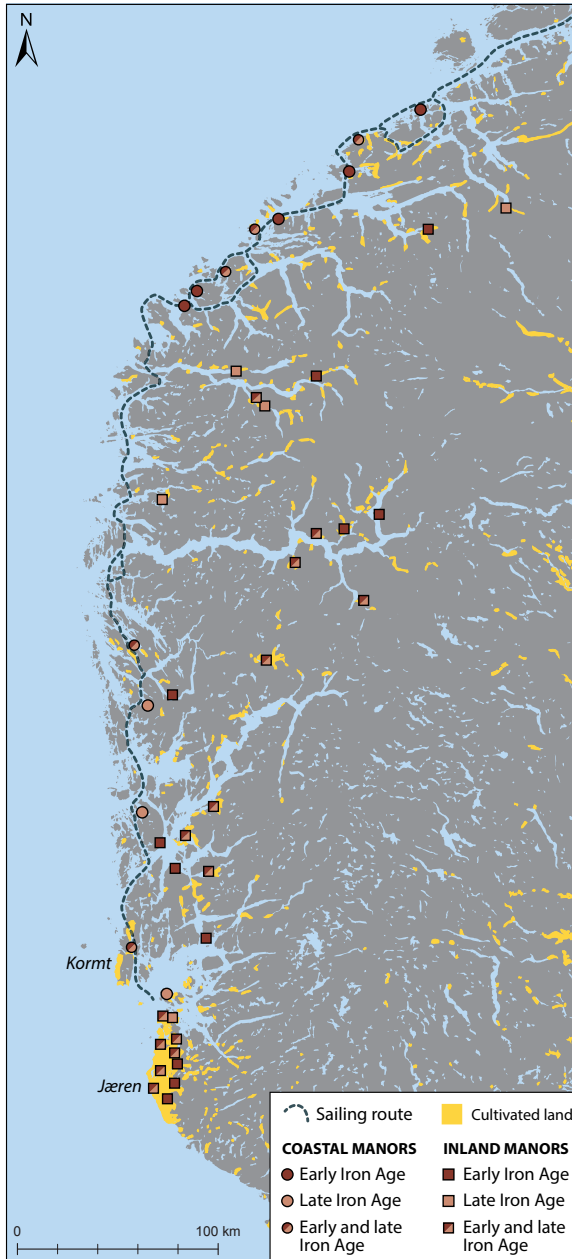


Fig. 29.4: Aristocratic manors in the Midlands are found in two landscape settings. The inland manors are found in those regions variable size that feature stretches of fertile land. The coastal manors are found in the comparatively few patches of cultivable land amidst the generally much harsher and windblown landscape along the protected sailing route. Currently cultivated land is indicated in yellow, roughly reflecting areas with cultivated soil in the Iron and Viking Ages, although not necessarily their precise extent. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

both the first and the second halves of the millennium. In addition, Avaldsnes is one of only three sites with huge mounds and rich finds from the Bronze Age. Thus, Avaldsnes has a much stronger and longer continuity than the remaining coastal manors. Finally, the richness of the Flaghaug burials (Stylegar and Reiersen, Ch. 22), the two ship graves from the late 8th century (Skre, Ch. 27:760), and the connection to the early Norwegian kings in the late Viking Age (Skre, Ch. 27:761–4) all contribute to make Avaldsnes stand out as the most prominent among the coastal manors in the Midlands.

29.3 The communal and the aristocratic

A comprehensive comparison among the manors will not be conducted here. The questions of whether Avaldsnes shares any common features with the 12 other coastal manors in the Midlands, and whether the coastal differ from inland manors will be discussed in greater depth in the second volume from the Avaldsnes Royal Manor Project. The only issue that will be touched upon here, to be discussed further in the second volume, is the relation between communal and aristocratic institutions in first-millennium western Scandinavia.

It is widely accepted that the west-Scandinavian ‘courtyard sites’, semi-closed circles of buildings around a yard, were communal assembly sites of the first millennium AD, although scholars disagree as to the activities of the assembly (Stylegar and Grimm 2004; Iversen 2015b; Ch. 26). The courtyard sites’ affinity to aristocratic manors is evident. However, the courtyard sites are not necessarily found in the manor or near the aristocratic monuments. For instance, whereas the Dysjane courtyard site in Jæren is found amidst several huge mounds (Stylegar and Grimm 2004:119–20), the distance from the Steigen and Bjarkøy courtyard sites in northern Hålogaland to the aristocratic monuments in the vicinity is 1–2 kilometres (Johansen and Søbstad 1978:13, 28). Distance equal to or greater than the latter are the more common, and it seems that communal assembly sites in western Scandinavia are less strongly tied to aristocratic sites than assembly sites in south- and east-Scandinavian central places.

In the Midlands, courtyard sites are found in districts that also have aristocratic manors: Jæren, Voss, inner Sogn, and inner Fjordane (Figs. 29.4–5). Notably though, all these districts are found inland; no courtyard sites are found at coastal manors, although the latter constitute nearly a third of the aristocratic manors marked in Figure 29.4 (13 out of 43). The only possible exception from this pattern is the less secure courtyard site at Hustad, Nord-Møre, which is situated near a coastal manor.

This contrast in terms of location of courtyard sites between coastal and inland manors applies only to the Midlands, as this is the only part of western Scandinavia where there are aristocratic manors both along the outer coast and in the interior. Hence, the clear distinction in the Midlands is all the more interesting, and it seems

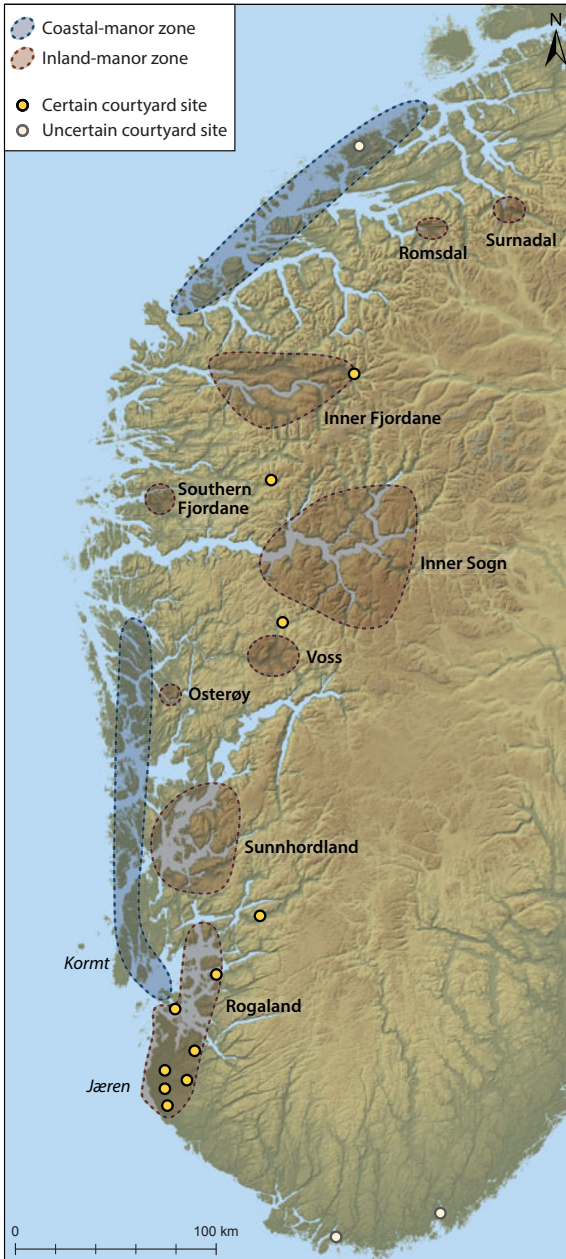


Fig. 29.5: Most of the 43 aristocratic manors in the Midlands are found in six concentrations, most of them internally connected by the sea. The 13 coastal manors are distributed in two zones along the Norðveggr, while most of the remaining 30 are found in four zones in the inland. In addition, single manors are found in Osterøy, Voss, southern Fjordane, Romsdal, and Sunndal. Evidently, the courtyard sites are all found in or near areas with inland manors. The only possible exception is the less secure courtyard site at Hustad in Nord-Møre. Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

worthwhile to explore the possibility of whether the coastal manors are special-purpose settlements whose societal position differed from that of inland manors.

That special purpose should probably be related to the characterisation of Avaldsnes coined by Odd Nordland (1950:38) and explored in Chapter 28: the warrior manor. While aristocratic lineages in the inland appear to have based their power on control of resources and interaction with communal institutions, those in coastal manors were more narrowly martial in competence and activities. A term from the Norse literature, *sækonungr* (sea king), may be relevant in this context.

29.4 Haraldr hárfagri and sea kings of his time

The word *sækonungr* occurs sporadically throughout Old Norse prose text; 19 occurrences are listed in the ONP, most of them in *fornaldarsögur*. With one exception (below), the prose texts are less informative in the present context.

However, names of *sækonungr*, most of them appearing in kennings in skaldic verses, are quite numerous and rather informative. The vast majority are conveyed in *pulur*, strings of rhymes, in the *Snorri Edda*. Additionally, a small number of sea-king kennings occur in skaldic poems, for instance *Geitis vegr* ('Geitir's highway') in one of the *lausavísur* by Haraldr hárfagri's skald Þjóðólfr ór Hvini's, meaning 'the sea'; Geitir being a sea king (Snorri 2011:81, note 171).

From the *pulur* and the poems the names of more than 90 sea kings are known (Sigfússon 1934:125). For the kennings to convey the intended meanings, these names would have to be known to the poem's audience. Hence, it may be inferred that when these verses were recited, that is, in the Viking Age and in the following few centuries, names of numerous sea kings, past and present, were commonly known, at least by the audience for the skaldic verses.

But what distinguished a sea king from other kings and from any leader of a Viking ship or fleet? Under the *sækonungr* entry in his Old Norse dictionary, Johan Fritzner (1886:638) refers to only a single occurrence of the word, in the *Snorri Edda*, which he defines as a 'Viking chieftain of royal descent'⁶. However, in the few occurrences of the term in sagas, royal descent is not mentioned as one of their attributes. For example, in *Ynglinga Saga* Ch. 30, Snorri discusses the term in the course of describing the situation in the land of the Svíar at the time when Eystein ruled there and Hrólfr kraki, a legendary king of the Danes, fell at Hleiðra; that is, several generations before the Viking Age (Snorri 2011:33):

⁶ *Vikingehövding af Kongeæt*.

At that time kings, both Danes and [Northmen], raided the realm of the Svíar a great deal. There were many sea kings who commanded large troops and had no lands. It was considered that a man could properly be called a sea king only if he never slept under a sooty beam and never drank in the hearth corner.⁷

From this passage, the impression is that the sea kings were those who commanded many armed men, owned no land, and preferred to stay outdoors. The latter is probably a periphrasis for being on the move, mainly by ship. Rather than lineage, as Fritzner assumed, their naming as kings in Snorri's text appears to be based on their command of armed, seaborne men.

Analysis of the sea kings' names in the kennings is informative as to what distinguished sea kings from a leader of a Viking ship or fleet. Björn Sigfússon (1934) identified three groups of names. The first group consists of recent (12th–13th centuries) and fictitious names. The second group consists of common male names, most of which had gone out of use at the time they were used in skaldic verses; they date from the 9th century and earlier, Sigfússon holds (1934:139). These constitute nearly half of the total. The third group consists of about 25 names that occur in poems from before AD 1000, and must date from the 9th–10th centuries; some of them may be older. They are “miniature historical pictures”, Sigfússon states, and differ significantly from those of the second group in that they seem somewhat churlish and unsuited for a king. Rather, they resemble nicknames found in the Icelandic sagas that appear to be given to Vikings. These are names like Mœvill (‘seagull-like’), Geitir (‘goat-like’), and Grípnir (‘robber’). Sigfússon suggests that sea kings content to be called by such names had a humble origin (1934:140–1).

Haraldr is called by two names in skaldic verses: Lúfa and Haraldr hárfagri. The latter appears to have been given to him after the former, possibly after he had gained control of considerable land – or even after his death (Fidjestøl 1993:16). Lúfa, that is ‘Shaggy-locks’ or ‘Mop-head’, occurs in two skaldic verses by two of Haraldr's skalds, one probably by Þórbjörn hornklofi (Haraldskvæði, stanza 10), the other probably by Þjóðólfr ór Hvini (Poem about Haraldr hárfagri, stanzas 4 and 5; Fulk 2012:60). While hárfagri appears to be an epithet suited for a king, Lúfa would be a name from Sigfússon's third group and would accordingly identify Haraldr as a man of humble descent.

However, the literary evidence indicates that Haraldr might have been of rather noble birth. Haraldskvæði calls him konungr inn kýnstori (‘the high-born king’,

7 “Í þann tíma herjuðu konungar mjök í Svíaveldi bæði Danir ok Norðmenn. Váru margir sækonungar, þeir er reðu liði miklu ok áttu engi lǫnd; þótti sá einn með fullu mega heita sækonungr, er hann svaf aldregi undir sǫtkum ási ok drakk aldregi at arinshorni” (Snorri 1966:24). This edition's translation of *Norðmenn* to ‘Norwegians’ has been changed to ‘Northmen’, as the national connotations of ‘Norwegians’ are anachronistic.

stanza 7).⁸ Thus, rather than indicating humble descent, names like *Lúfa* might be the kind that would be given in a rough male group, for instance among a band of warriors, where descent was less important than personality and skills, and leadership was based on the latter.

Stanza 6 in *Haraldskvæði*, probably composed by Haraldr hárfagri's skald Þórbjörn hornklofi (Fidjestøl 1993), is interesting in this regard (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 15; Snorri 2011:65):

He will drink Yule at sea
if he decides the matter,
the prince forward-looking,
Freyr's game he will play;
bored from youth, by fireside
basking, indoors sitting,
with ladies' warm bower
and wadded downy mittens.⁹

The characterisation of Haraldr in this stanza corresponds well with the *Ynglinga Saga* text about sea kings: he will drink Yule in his ship and enjoys combat (Freyr's game); since his youth he has been bored by the comforts of indoor life, by a women's warm chamber, and by wearing padded mittens. *Haraldskvæði*, at least the first 12 stanzas (Fidjestøl 1993:13), were composed soon after the battle in *Hafrsfjord*; that is, at a time after he had won control of a realm, which he continued to expand. However, according to *Ynglinga Saga*, sea kings did not normally own land. Notably, though, the stanza names Haraldr's propensities 'from youth'; that is, from the time before he conquered land. Thus, from stanza 6–12 in *Haraldskvæði* it appears that Haraldr became a land king after a period as a sea king. If the change of name from *Lúfa* to *hárfagri* happened during his lifetime, that change might also be connected to him acquiring land.

On the basis of the available evidence, sea kings can hardly be distinguished from other leaders of Viking-ship fleets. The passage from *Ynglinga Saga* indicates that to Snorri's mind, pre-Viking Age sea kings from western and southern Scandinavia could range over the Baltic Sea; thus they could operate far from their homelands, as Vikings later did in Ireland and the British Isles. While on an extended raid they would probably depend on military force and plunder in order to maintain supplies. When operating on a more permanent basis in distant waters, they probably would have had bases on land, maybe of a more permanent nature than the longphuirts which ship-borne Viking armies in Ireland established when they first began winter-

⁸ Haraldr being called 'yngling' in *Haraldskvæði* (stanza 4) and in *Arinbjarnarkviða* (stanza 3) might indicate that he belonged to the prominent *Ynglinga* lineage, but this is not definite.

⁹ *Úti vill jól drekka, / ef skal einn ráða, / fylkir enn framlyndi, / ok Freys leik heyja; / ungr leiddisk eldvelli / ok inni at sitja, / varma dyngju / eða vottu dúns fulla* (Snorri 1966:51).

ing there from around AD 840 onwards (Sheehan 2008), but to more or less the same purpose – as a secure base to keep supplies, people, ships, and the like. Longphuirts were established at easily defendable spots.

Avaldsnes appears to be such a sea-kings' base. Avaldsnes and the other coastal manors in the Hordaland–Rogaland zone (Fig. 29.5) were probably supply stations for food, drink, and equipment for the fleet. The substantial 3rd–10th-century remains of production activities as well as food storage and processing in the south-eastern outskirts of the farmyard (Østmo, Ch. 9) may be related to supplying ship crews. Possibly, additional forces were deployed at Avaldsnes or on farms at the estate to defend the site or to be mustered as needed.

Based on Bjørkvik's assessment, the Avaldsnes estate would supply several tens of men that were exempt from agrarian production (Skre, Ch. 28:771). Based on Iversen's (2008:322) assessment of their land rent, the estates connected to the three early royal manors in Hordaland – Fitjar, Alrekstad, and Seim – would sustain a total of between a third and half of the Avaldsnes estate.¹⁰

For such a substantial community to be directed against seaborne warfare over the course of several generations, if not centuries (see below), development of extensive martial skills and traditions would be expected. In this environment, for a king to maintain control depended on persistent innovation and familiarity with developments regarding weapons, ships, battle techniques, logistics, and so on. The entrepreneurial attitude identified in Avaldsnes residents of early SP III and late SP IV (Skre, Ch. 28:775–7) supports the impression that a competitive martial culture was developed in the coastal-manor zones.

In these island communities, the presence of a sea-king base would influence most aspects of everyday life. In two skaldic verses, the inhabitants of the islands are given a distinct name, Hólmrygir ('island Rygir'), which distinguished them from the Rygir who lived on the mainland of Rogaland. The term occurs in Haraldskvæði stanza 14 (Haralds saga ins hárfagra ch. 32; Snorri 2011:116):

He would not have Hólmrygir
or Hqrðar women,
any from Heiðmork
or Hqlgi's kindred,
when the king of high birth
chose a Danish bride¹¹

¹⁰ E.g., about 55 men (30, 15, and 10 respectively) in the early 14th century, while Avaldsnes sustained about 120–180. These calculations are based on the same premises as those used by Bjørkvik.

¹¹ Hafnaði Holmrýggjum / ok Hqrða meyjum, / hverri enni heinversku / ok Hqlga ættar / konungur enn kynstóri, / es tók konu danska (Snorri 1966:54).

According to Snorri the stanza mentions some of the wives estranged from Haraldr upon his marriage to Ragnhildr, daughter of King Eiríkr of Jylland. Two of these wives were from the Hólmrygir and the Hǫrðar, possibly because Haraldr had bases there or was on friendly terms with sea kings who did.

The other occurrence of Hólmrygir is in a poem dedicated to Haraldr's son King Hákon inn góði; Hákonarmál stanza 3, probably composed by Eyvindr skáldaspillir after the battle at Fitjar in 961 where Hákon was fatally wounded. The stanza describes Hákon's preparations for battle (Hákonar saga góða ch. 30; Snorri 2011:110):

[Hákon] called on Háleygir
as on Hólmrygir,
the jarls' sole slayer
advanced to battle.
Free-handed, he had a fine
following of [Northmen],
the scourge of island-Danes;
he stood in brass helmet¹²

Although both skalds may have chosen to mention these groups to achieve alliteration, it seems noteworthy that a subgroup of the Rygir is mentioned in connection with both Haraldr and his son Hákon, while the Rygir go unmentioned here, and actually in the entire skaldic corpus. The kings' bases at the two coastal manors Avaldsnes and Utstein maybe the reason they are mentioned. The two skalds may have distinguished between Rygir and Hólmrygir because the distinction mattered to kings – the latter resided on the royal estates there. Thanks to the suggested long-standing martial tradition in the sea-king environment on the isles, the Hólmrygir would have had specialised skills; this may have been why they were called on when battle was imminent.

Schreiner (1929:31–2), Holmsen (1949:172, 178), and Krag (2000:50–2) hold that before Haraldr's time, the sea route was hazardous due to the depredations of pirates residing in Avaldsnes and the other manors along the coast, and that Haraldr, supported by earls further north, conquered the manors to secure the sailing route. However, Haraldr's original name, the skald's description of his propensities since youth, and the mention by two skalds of Hólmrygir in connection with him and his son all suggest that before he became a land king, Haraldr rose to power in a sea-king milieu in the Hordaland and Rogaland coastal-manor zone. His lineage appears to have contained some degree of nobility; however, his personality and skills seem to have been the main reasons for his position as sea king. The twenty-five 9th–10th

¹² Hét á Háleygi / sems á Holmrygi / jarla einbani, / fór til orrostu, / gótt hafði enn gjöfli / gengi Norðmanna / oegir Eydana, / stóð und árhjalmi (Snorri 1966:88). Here the edition's translation of *Norðmanna* to Norwegians has been substituted with Northmen; see note 7.

century churlish sea-king names (Sigfússon 1934:140–1) indicate that at the time, such a career was the norm in that environment rather than the exception.

Thus, it seems that the coastal manors had been the bases for sea-kings that dominated the coastal sea route for many generations before Haraldr. Rather than being mere pirates on the *Norðvegr*, they may have provided safety for those residing in the inland manors. To be sure, the latter's need for secure sailing did not occur in the late 9th century; traffic along the coast had a substantial volume, albeit with fluctuations, since the Roman Period. For instance, Eldorhagen (2001:21–48) finds that of the 440 oval brooches, including the 7th–8th-century typological predecessors of the Viking Age types, found in Trøndelag and Hålogaland, 69 date to the 7th–8th centuries, and 220 to the 9th. The vast majority of brooches, possibly all of them, had been transported by ships along the coast from production sites further south (Skre 2017).

Notably, when Haraldr extended his realm beyond Rogaland and Hordaland, he established a firm base in the other sea-king zone in the Midlands: in Møre and Romsdal. According to Snorri (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 12; 2011:53, 61) he made Røgnvaldr, who was based in Møre, earl of Nordmøre and Romsdal; later Røgnvaldr became earl of Sunnmøre as well. Snorri (*Haralds saga ins hárfagra* ch. 24; 2011:71) maintains that Røgnvaldr was Haraldr's dearest friend. Haraldr stayed with Røgnvaldr on several occasions, and his earldom appears to have been crucial for Haraldr's control of the realm.

The two sea-king zones in the Midlands appear to have been essential in Haraldr's efforts to take control of the realm that eventually became the kingdom of *Norðvegr* (Norway). Haraldr appears to have been based in the southern sea-king zone in Rogaland and Hordaland, and had his closest ally in the northern zone in Møre and Romsdal. Moreover, that the country was named after the sailing route suggests that control of that route was the core of Haraldr's kingship; control of the hinterland was predicated upon control of the sea route. Haraldr's success as a sea king enabled him to become a land king.

29.5 Sea kings in Qgvaldr's time

From the above discussion, it appears that before Avaldsnes and the four other coastal manors in the Rogaland–Hordaland zone became royal possessions, they were held by petty sea kings. The building up of royal authority in western Scandinavia may have been initiated before Haraldr's time, and may have been imposed in various regions and institutional spheres at different times. Iversen (Ch. 26) finds that the abandonment of courtyard sites in Rogaland, probably in the 8th century, may have been caused by a rise there of royal power that took control of jurisdiction. Accordingly, a more well-developed royal authority in Rogaland may be the reason why overseas raiding ceased at an earlier time in Rogaland than in other inland-manor zones

in the Midlands. While 9th-century ornaments from the British Isles and Ireland are abundant in all zones, Rogaland shows a near-total lack of such in the 10th. In all other zones Insular objects are abundant in graves from that century (Wamers 1985:karte 3). Possibly, military capacity in Haraldr's and his descendants' time was mobilised for controlling the realm rather than venturing overseas. Thus, the reason for Haraldr's success in including other regions in the Midlands in his realm may be that he had a firm political and military basis in a well-established royal authority in Rogaland.

Few sea-king names are known from the time before Haraldr, and those that may date to this period are not connected to places. As mentioned, Sigfússon identified an earlier group of names that had a quite different character than the slightly mocking 9th–10th-century names; the former were proper male names. By choosing for their kennings sea-king names that were obsolete and rare at the time, such as Gylfi, Hagbarðr, Hundingr, and Vandill, skalds were evoking the legendary past (Sigfússon 1934:139). Sigfússon (1934:141) calls them compound names, stately and full-sounding.

Qgvaldr, after whom Avaldsnes (Qgvaldsnes, 'Qgvaldr's headland') was named, would be such a name. It was obsolete by the Viking Age, and thus originated at some point during the Iron Age, but cannot be dated with any further precision. The second element of the compound name, 'valdr', means 'king' or 'ruler', while the first element has a less secure meaning, writes Mundal (Ch. 3:46). It may be derived from 'og', meaning 'sword edge', or 'age', signifying respect, fear, or admonition. Brink (Ch. 24:673–4) interprets the names along the same lines, adding that it might originally have been a title rather than a name, somewhat in line with the Old Norse male name Eiríkr, Proto-Nordic **Aina-ríkiar*, meaning 'the one in sole control of the power'. This remains conjectural, Brink states, although the Qgvaldr name's association with rulership and military power should be evident.

The name Qgvaldr accords well with the archaeological features from two periods at the Avaldsnes headland. The 3rd–4th-century evidence connects the Avaldsnes residents to a Continental Germanic network of economic military alliances with the Roman Empire, as well as to a pan-Scandinavian way of organising reception and feasting space, influenced by Roman customs and building types (Skre, Chs. 27:758; 28:772–5). The 7th–8th-century palisade and the two late 8th-century ship graves demonstrate military presence and dominance of the sea route (Skre, Chs. 27:759–60; 28:776–7). In both periods innovations and long-distance contacts can be attested, setting the holders of the Avaldsnes manor in an entrepreneurial role. Although it cannot be substantiated, it is possible that Qgvaldr was one of these entrepreneurs in one of the two periods.

29.6 Epilogue

From these discussions it appears that in the early first millennium AD the sea route along the west-Scandinavian coast was dominated by sea kings based in manors with sufficient agrarian yield and good harbour facilities with close access to the sailing route. Surely, their positions were at times threatened and probably overturned; also, some may have been based at a single manor, others at several. Some sea kings may have dominated other sea kings, and perhaps claimed *veizle* ('rendering' or 'grant', Björkvik 1975) from them. Faint echoes of such kings and conflicts can be found in the Old Norse literature, both in 9th–10th-century skaldic verses, in the *konungasögur* and *íslendingasögur* of the 12th–14th centuries, and in the *fornaldarsögur* (Mundal, Ch. 3; Skre, Ch. 2:28).

Several aspects of the sea kings' history and their relation to inland kings will be discussed in the next Avaldsnes volume. Were they protectors of inland communities, or were they also at times acting as predators? Did the sea kings' use of Avaldsnes and other coastal manor resemble the way ambulatory Germanic kings made use of their manors in the same period? To be sure, sea kings existed elsewhere in northern Europe and beyond, and the transition from sea king to land king has several Scandinavian parallels in this period (Lönnroth 1977:7–16). Thus, comparisons will be rewarding. The reference in *Hákonarmál* (stanza 3) to *Eydana* ('Island-Danes') points to another Scandinavian region where maritime dominion would have been a prominent aristocratic concern. A third area is the coastal part of Svealand, formerly called Roden (from *roðer*, 'rower'), probably the origin of the term for Scandinavians (*Rus'*) used by peoples living east of the Baltic. In the coastal areas of the southern North Sea, Germanic seafaring and piracy existed throughout the entirety of the first millennium AD (Haywood 1999).

In western Scandinavia the age of sea kings ended in the 10th century, when Haraldr hárfagri expanded his realm from dominion over a section of the sea route to encompass most land in the western Scandinavian Peninsula. The transition to land king, however, did not invalidate the need to control the sea route. Indeed, the continued centrality of maritime dominion is reflected in the very name of the kingdom Haraldr established: *Norðvegr*. Through the 10th–12th centuries the events recorded in the *konungasögur* clearly demonstrate that kings still needed to control the sea route in order to maintain power.

Increasingly through the 11th–12th centuries, however, kings resided in towns rather than in the royal manors. The manors were either donated to ecclesiastical institutions or maintained as royal administrative centres for tax collection or similar functions. By the mid- to late 13th century, Avaldsnes was the only royal manor to continue to be used as such, even undergoing a period of expansion: King Hákon Hákonarson ordered the St Óláfr's Church to be built there, and a subsequent king initiated a masonry building and other undertakings (Bauer, Ch. 14). Avaldsnes' status as royal residence persisted for reasons quite different from those of Haraldr hárfagri and the

sea kings before him: rather than positioning themselves to control the sea route, which by that time was secure, Hákon, his son, and grandson were seeking a convenient place for themselves to stop on their travels and a place where their clerks could organise the trade to English and other ports where commodities retrieved as taxes and otherwise could be sold. Those needs faded as a period of Swedish and Danish suzerainty over Norway began in the late 14th century, and ultimately Avaldsnes became a rectory for the vicar of St Óláfr's Church (Bauer, Ch. 15), as it has remained until the present.

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