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## 24 Avaldsnes, Kormt and Rogaland. A Toponymy and Landscape Survey

This chapter presents analyses of place names in western Norway, especially ancient place names linked in some way to an early sailing route along the Norwegian coast. Although the region is home to some of the oldest place names (for islands and fjords and related settlements and features) known in Scandinavia, medieval sources for the names are lacking; the oldest recorded forms are from the 16th and 17th centuries. On the island of Kormt (Kǫrmt) and the adjacent mainland, we find ancient settlement names primarily in *-heim* (however, no names in *-vín*), and prehistoric settlement names in *-stad* (< *-staðir*) and *-land*. Regarding the island names it is notable that the etymons of many of these names are descriptive, signalling hints for orientation or warnings for the people sailing along the coast. Also notable are the absence of place names in the analysed corpus that would indicate cult or sacrality and the lack of obvious central-place elements common elsewhere in Scandinavia where there was prehistoric settlement. The reason for this, we conclude, is that this was a society not based in agriculture, but facing westwards, towards the sea.

South-western Norway and its place names is to toponymists what Polynesia was for early anthropologists. The western coast of Norway is home to some very ancient place names, with the potential for opening up an onomastic gateway to prehistoric Scandinavia. The origins of some names, particularly those of islands along the coast, are so ancient that they are nearly impossible to etymologise; some scholars classify some of them as relics from a period of the language that precedes the Proto-Germanic. Furthermore, many of the settlement names represent some of the oldest in Scandinavia, probably an effect of the special topography, which ‘locks’ the settlements (Skre, Ch. 29:782–4). However, there is a striking irony to this: although the names here are some of the oldest known in Scandinavia, the recorded forms for these names are some of the youngest in Scandinavia. Thus, while the names might date as far back as the Bronze Age (more than 2,500 years old), the earliest records of most of these names are to be found in documents and cartularies from c. 1600 (only 400 years old). Yet another complicating factor is the fact that the majority of names have forms from 1520 and later, during which period the Norwegian language underwent major changes phonetically and under pressure from the Danish (administrative) language. Seldom do we find a medieval form of the name; unfortunately, this part of Norway lacks a *Røde Bok* (*Biskop Eysteinn's Jordebok*), an *Aslak Bolts Jordebok*, or a *Björgynjar Kálfskinn*. Toponymic analyses are therefore nothing if not problematic.

Most names of settlements known with some degree of certainty to be of medieval origin are found in *Norske Regnskaber og Jordebøger fra det 16de Aarhundrede* (NRJ), which are registers of farms and farmers. The name forms here would have deviated considerably from their medieval forms. To give some examples: *Fikstveit* in Skjold has the form *Vfixpueit* in a document from 1449, but *Fixtwet*, *Fycketvett* in NRJ;

*Kvinnesland* in Tysvær is written *i Huinislände* in a document from 1322, but has the forms *Kwnesland* and *Quigzland* in NRJ; and *Skjervheim* in Vats is written *a Skerfheimi* in 1313, *a Skærfhæimi* in 1317, but *Skerwin* and *Skerrem* in NRJ and *Skarffuenn* in 1563. The young name forms make the task of reconstructing a medieval form of the names – *Ófeigspveit*, *Hvínisland*, or *Skjervheimr* – practically impossible.<sup>1</sup>

In some cases there is sufficient evidence to show that the name must be ancient, whether through comparison with homonymous place names elsewhere in Norway, or in those instances where medieval documents do exist and preserve the medieval name forms. A settlement on the small island of *Ogn* has the earliest name forms *Offnen*, *Offne* (1534). These are of little help in themselves, but by extrapolating that the name of this settlement was the old name for the entire island, taken together with the fact that the same name occurs elsewhere in Norway, it becomes clear that the old name of this island must have been Old Norse (ON) *Ógn*. A small settlement in Skjold, *Yrke* (*Ørke* NRJ), is situated at the bottom of an elongated inlet, projecting to the west from the larger bay Vindafjorden. The name of the inlet is today *Yrkesfjorden* while the old name is found in the settlement name *Yrke* < ON *\*Yrkir*, which has cognates in several Norwegian river names in *\*Ork* (NSL 503, 346).

These island names hence belong to a very ancient strata of place names in this part of Scandinavia, names on islands and fjords which in several cases have a connection to the famous inshore sailing route, the ‘Norway’.

## 24.1 The name of the land

To begin with, let us take the name *Norway*. All discussion of this name is centred on the idea that it refers to an inshore sailing route along the country’s western coast (Fig. 24.1; NSL 335–6; Skre 2014:37; Ch. 29). The oldest attestation of the name is in *Liber Vitae* (Durham) from c. 840, which enumerates a “Reginaldus sacerdos de Nor-tuagia” (*Liber Vitae*, 56). In the famous account by *Ohthere* (Ottar) of how he sailed from his home in Hålogaland in northern Norway to *Haithabu* in the south, found as an appendix to King Alfred’s Orosius translation *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII* from c. 890, (Othere’s voyages, *passim*), the form is *Norðweg*. In Frankish annals we find forms such as *Nort(h)wegia* and *Norwegia* (Myrvoll 2011:114). The first occurrence of the name on Scandinavian ground is on the famous runestone in Jelling from c. 963 (Gelting 2010), where it takes the form **nuruiaik** (to be understood as *Norveg*). These forms allow us to posit two early forms of the name: *Norðrvegr* (> *Norvegr*) and *Norvegr*. In the first case the qualifier is the adverb *norðr*, giving the

<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, only the year for the name forms is given. References for each of the citations are to be found in NG 10.

name the meaning ‘the route to the north’, ‘the northern route’, whereas in the latter case it is the noun *nór*, ‘narrow sound’. There is no obvious explanation for a word *nór* or a name *\*Nór* as the first element in *Norway*; one possibility discussed below (with *Norheim*), is that the sound between Kormt and the mainland could have been named *\*Nór*, ‘the narrow sound’, and which could occur as the first element in the name *Norheim*. If there is any validity to this hypothesis, we have to consider the possibility of a *pars pro toto* name, whereby this particular stretch of the inshore sailing route, the sound between Kormt and the mainland, has given its name to the entirety of the sailing route.

## 24.2 The name of the province and district

Kormt is situated in the province of *Rogaland* and the old district of *Rygjafylki*. Presumably these two units comprise the same territory, although it is not entirely certain. One problem is that the *fylki* was a rather obscure and not uniform institution in medieval Norway; for example, the *fylki* in Trøndelag differs from the *fylki* in western Norway (Bull 1930; Indrebø 1937). Probably, the older of the two names is *Rogaland*, reflecting a prehistoric province (*land*), whereas *Rygjafylki* probably is a later administrative and legal district linked to the *leiðangr* institution. *Rogaland* seems to have been the name for the region around the large Boknafjorden, and the island of Kormt would have occupied a focal position in this *land* and *fylke*. From this it follows that these two names are linked.

The background to the names is an ancient ethnonym: *rygir*, first mentioned by classical authors in the beginning of the first millennium. This tribal name is a derivation with a common *-ja/-ia*-suffix to a stem *\*rug-* (where we have to reckon with a secondary development of the name inflected as an *i*-stem). In the name *Rogaland*, the first element, the genitive plural *Roga-*, is most certainly analogically introduced from the *a*-stems. The normal genitive plural we instead find in the district name *Rygja-fylki*. The stem *\*rug-* has been identified with ON *rugr* ‘rye’ (< PGmc *\*ruzi-*) and the name *rygir* translated as ‘rye farmers’ or ‘rye eaters’ (Andersson 2003:452–3). This etymology creates a number of problems. First, there is the question of an occurrence of rye in western Norway at this early time. Second, there is the problem of explaining the homonyms occurring across northern Europe, such as the Norwegian *rygir*, the German island name *Rügen*, and the classical authors placing a tribe *Rugi* in northern Europe, and so on. Is it one and the same tribe/people, or several tribes/people with the same name occurring in different regions in Europe? The onomastic Thorsten Andersson is of the opinion that we are dealing with a single people (“Es ist unwahrscheinlich, daß es zwei gleichbenante Stämme, urgerm. *\*Ru3jōz* Pl., gegeben hat. Es handelt sich vielmehr offensichtlich um ein und denselben Stamm, der sowohl an der s. Ostseeküste als auch im sw. Norwegen bezeugt ist.” Andersson

2003:453; see also Steinhauser 1939; Pohl 2003 pp. 456–8; Sitzmann and Grünzweig 2008:232–3; Udolph 2003). Generally, the classic question of how to understand, identify, and geographically locate Latin *gens* ‘people/tribes’ in Europe in the first millennium, however interesting, is too complicated for satisfactory discussion here.<sup>2</sup>

### 24.3 Ancient island names

Along this route we encounter ancient names such as *Kormt* (< *Kǫrmt*), which has been understood to be a derivation of the word ON *karmr* ‘battlework, safeguard, defence, shield, guard, protection’ (Fritzner 1972–3, art. *karmr*), alluding to the fact that this elongated island functioned as a protection, a shield for the inshore sea route (the ‘Norway’) from the open sea to the west (Hovda 1961:296; 1966:15; Strid 2004:78). *Bokn* is the characteristic island along this inshore route to the south (Figs. 24.1–2). The name probably goes back to a PGmc *\*baukna-* ‘sign, signal’, its name likely a reflection of the island’s function from ancient times as a navigational mark, especially if approached from the south, while crossing the large bay Boknafjorden from the Stavanger area (Brink 2017; cf. Elmevik 2012:89–92). The intention would have been to traverse the narrow sound between the islands Vestre and Austre Bokn, where the striking, 293 m high *Boknafjellet* (cf. the farm *Boknaberg*, ON *Bóknarberg*, at the foot of this mountain), the highest mountain in outer Ryfylke (Hovda 1961:248), rises on the easternmost part of Vestre Bokn; a man-made navigational beacon (ON *varði m./varða f.*) erected on the 188 m high *Vardefjellet* on Austre Bokn must also be taken into account.

North of Bokn, along this inshore route, we find the island of *Fosen* (ON *Fólgsn*; Fig. 24.1). The name has several identical counterparts on islands in Norway (NSL 156). *Fólgsn* is a derivation of the word ON *fela* f. ‘hideout’ and the verb *fela* (< *\*felhan*) ‘to hide’, which had the *Ablaut*-series *fel – fal – fálu – folginn* in Old Norse (Fritzner 1972–3, art. *fela*; de Vries 1962:116). The background to the name is probably that this island lies ‘protected and hidden’ along the inshore route, behind and above Bokn and inside of *Kormt* (*Kǫrmt*), or denoting a protected harbour (Særheim 2007:69). Between

<sup>2</sup> For a general discussion on tribes and *gentes*, many of them toponymically potentially linked to Scandinavia – at least according to an older generation of scholars – such as the Vandals to Vendsyssel, Denmark, the Burgunds to Bornholm (< Burgundarholm), the Kimbrer to Himmerland, Denmark, etc., or claiming Scandinavia to be their ancestral homeland, such as the Goths according to Jordanes in his *Getica*, see Kossinna 1895; Bremer 1900; Birt 1917; Neckel 1929; Güntert 1934; Norden 1934; Trier 1947; Schwarz 1956; Wenskus 1961; Hachmann 1970; Hofmann 1982; Rübekeil 1992, 1996; Beck 1999; Gillett 2002; Goetz et al. 2003; Geary 2003; Goffart 2006; Sitzmann and Grünzweig 2008; Garipzanov et al. 2008.



Fig. 24.1: The sailing route *Norðrvegr/Norvegr* and place names mentioned in the text.  
Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCG.



**Fig. 24.2:** Photo of the island of Bokn, with Boknafjell mountain in the center (facing north). Photo from Wikimedia Commons.

the island of Fosen and the small island of Ogn lies the island of *Høvring*. This name is a derivation of the word *\*hovr-* ‘hillock, elevation, hump’ with an *-ing*-suffix, and is cognate to ON *hyfri* ‘the upper part, the arc, of a horse harness’ with an older, general meaning of ‘elevation, hump’. There are several Norwegian place names derived from this latter word (NSL 233), whereas in Sweden the word *\*hovre* occurs in a few North-Swedish place names, such as *Hovra* i Hälsingland (Brink 1984b:103, 106). Another possible explanation finds a connection with the local dialect word *høvring* for the brown crab *Cancer pegurus*.<sup>3</sup> Although this word is not known in Old Norse, an ancient origin for it cannot be ruled out. The above-mentioned island *Ognøya* (Fig. 24.1), ON *Ógn*, is a name we again find in several Norwegian island and river names (NSL 342). The name has the etymon ON *ógn* ‘horror, fright, scare’. This name probably alludes to some danger of sailing too close to the island posed by underwater hazards, such as an undercurrent or a reef or cay.

Not situated along the inshore sailing route, but rather outside and to the west of Kormt, is the island *Utsira* (Fig. 24.1). The old name is *Sira*. The modifier *Ut-* ‘outer’ must be understood in light of the occurrence of several homonymous river and island names in western Norway. The meaning of the name *Sira* remains uncertain; several suggestions have been proposed (NSL 393).

North of Kormt, we continue to find ancient island names. After leaving Kormt, travellers faced a hazardous stretch exposed to the open sea in the west, before rejoining an inshore route in Bømlafjorden, protected to the west by the island Bømlo and then Moster. The name *Bømlo* (ON *Bymbil*) has been proposed to contain a word meaning ‘turgescient, swollen’, whereas *Moster* (ON *Mostr*) has a completely obscure

<sup>3</sup> I thank one of the anonymous reviewers for this idea, which I find both interesting (the word ought to be old, albeit not found in Old Norse lexica) and contextually possible.

background (NSL 114, 317). The problem of identifying the etymology for these names is in itself indicative of their very ancient provenance. The same goes for the next island to the north, *Stord* (ON *Storð*; Fig. 24.1), an island name with an obscure and much discussed etymology (NSL 429). Ancient island names – *Huglo* (ON *Hugl*), *Sotra* (ON *Sotr/Sótr*) (Fig. 24.1), and the like – continue to occur travelling northward along the western coast of Norway.

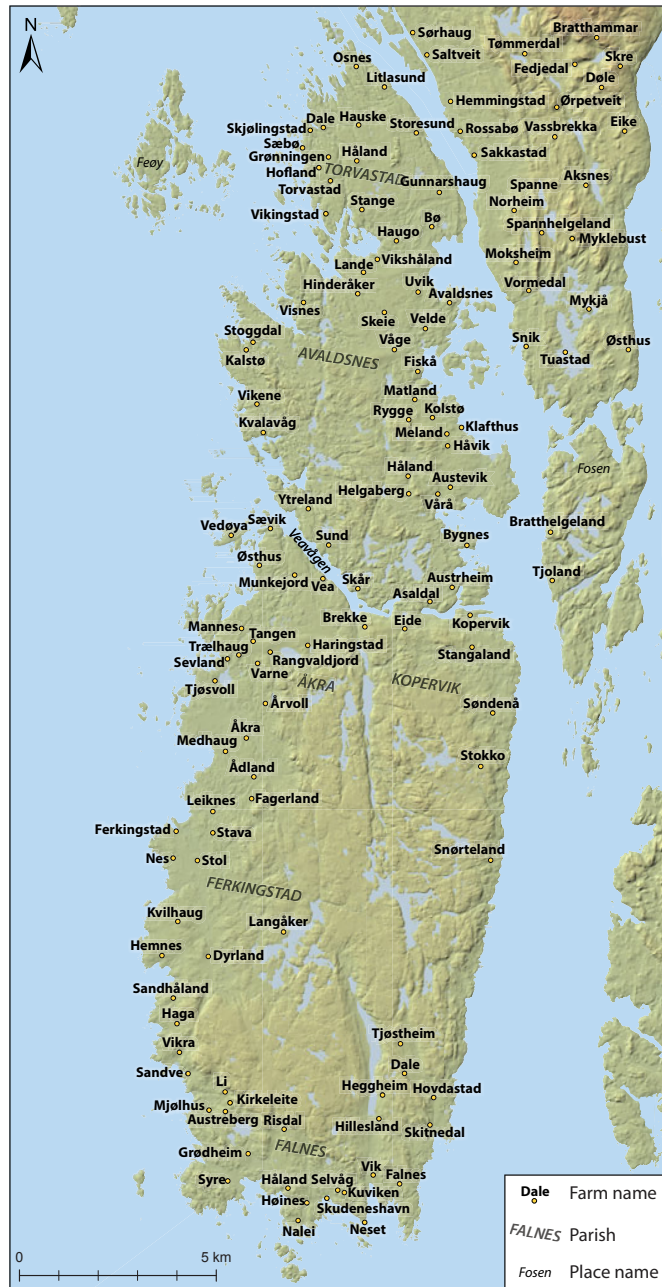
One explanation for the preponderance of ancient island and fjord names is the fact that these names belong to what the eminent Norwegian onomastician Magnus Olsen (1926) once referred to as ‘names of the route’ (*Veiens navn*), in contrast to ‘names of the local district’ (*Bygdens navn*) and ‘names of the farm’ (*Gardens navn*). Names in these three groups show notable differences regarding chronology: names of the route tend to be ancient, names of the district can be as old as the settlements, and names of the farm (applied to arable land, meadows etc.) tend to be relatively young. On display here is the phenomenon of *name chronology*, which is dependent upon the number of name users; the more people acquainted with and using a name, the higher the probability that the name will survive and be resistant to change. And for one of the most well-known and frequently used sailing routes in Scandinavia, we therefore must reckon with the possibility of a high degree of name continuity, which in turn explains the ancient names along this sea route.

Notably, many of the etymons of these island names are descriptive, serving as hints or warnings for people sailing along the coast: this island offers protection from the open sea (*Kørm*); that island, resembling in shape a buoy beacon, can be used as a navigation mark (*Bókn*); that island looks like a hump (*Høvring*); don’t sail too close to that island, for there are dangerous underwater obstacles nearby (*Ógn*), and so on.

## 24.4 Settlement names in and around Kormt

This section presents a survey of the place names and the landscape on Kormt. To determine whether Kormt is unique in any respect, comparisons are drawn between the toponymic milieus Kormt and the island of Bokn and the adjacent mainland parishes/settlement districts of Førre, Skåre (large parts of which today are incorporated into the city of Haugesund), Skjold, Tysvær, and Vats (Fig. 24.1). To that end, toponymic material for Kormt will be presented first, followed more briefly with the corresponding material for the mainland (names mentioned in the following may be found in the map Fig. 24.3).

For a spatial-geographical landscape approach, the survey grouped together names with the same head or denominator (second element), such as *-stad*, *-heim*, *-land*, *-tveit*, and *-åker*. This typology was chosen based on the premise that it is possible to date these elements roughly, within broad timeframes: early Iron Age (c. AD



**Fig. 24.3:** Place names referred to in the text.

Illustration: I. T. Bøckman, MCH.

1–600), late Iron Age (c. AD 600–1100), early medieval (c. AD 1100–1300), and similar (Brink 1983; 1984a). The modifier or qualifier (the first element in the compound) can identify who owned a tract of land or a farm or had established a farm (*Qgvaldsnes* ‘Agvald’s peninsula’), describe the type of topography, geology, or biology at the site (*Brattland* ‘the steep land’, *Birketveit* ‘the tveit with birches’), or describe the form or shape of the denominator (*Langåker* ‘the long arable land’). This method provides a general overview of a district’s settlement history.

The *-heim* names are normally dated to the Iron Age (often early Iron Age). In the material discussed here, there are 4 *Austrheim* among the 16 *-heim* names, and 8 *Håland* among the 62 *-land* names. These cases likely represent a well-known phenomenon in toponymy: the proliferation of a certain place name within a region or district. Similar examples are seen in western Sweden, where there are several *Askim* (< *Ask-hem*) within a fairly small area (Brink 1991).

The *stad-* (< *staðir*) names are normally dated to the Iron Age, many with some certainty more precisely to the late Iron Age. The first element, the qualifier, in the *stad*-names is frequently a man’s name, none of them Christian – an indication of their prehistoric origin. There are several place names in the area normally ending in *-stø*, in other parts of Norway and Sweden in *-stad*, which can be traced back to *-staðyrō* (hence not *-staðir* but derived from the same stem, *stað-*, to the verb *stā*, ON *standa* ‘to stand’). This word ON *stōð* f. denoted a landing place for boats.

The *land*-names are quite complicated for dating and regarding their denotations. As settlement names they tend to denote a type of arable, cultivated, or otherwise utilised land. Of the approximately 2000 total Norwegian *-land* names, a large majority are found in western Norway; this is reflected in our material, which includes 16 *heim*-names, 16 *stad*-names, and 62 *land*-names. Norwegian toponymists assign these names a broadly Iron Age date (NSL 279–82; Særheim 1999).

Avaldsnes must have been a central place already in the Iron Age (Zachrisson, Ch. 25). It is the largest settlement on Kormt, according to Halvard Bjørkvik’s (1999:28–9) assessment of (later) documentary evidence. The name occurs frequently in the Old Norse saga literature, normally in the form *Qgvaldsnes á Kormt* (Mundal, Ch. 3). In 1299 it has the spelling *de Agwallznes* and in 1308 *de Avaldsnes* (NG). The name evidently denotes the headland (ON *nes*) where the church is standing, and the first element has usually been understood as the man’s name *Qgvaldr* (gen. *Agvalds-*) (Olsen 1926:210; NSL 81). This man’s name is not unknown in medieval Scandinavia, with the second element *-valdr* denoting a ‘powerful, mighty leader’, but it is uncertain whether the first element here is *Á-* (< *\*ana-*), a strengthening prefix, in *Ávaldr* (hence, ‘very mighty, powerful’), or *Ág-* (< *\*aga-*) beside *Qg-* (meaning ‘frightful, horrifying’) (e.g., Janzén 1947:62, 113 and 160 n. 242). It is impossible to determine with any precision the age of a place name such as *Avaldsnes*. It could be as young as the earliest known recording, or as old as the Iron Age. It is possible that the name is so old that the first element is not actually a man’s name, but rather a title *\*ávaldr* ‘the mighty, powerful leader, king’, which would be the background to the man’s name

(cf. Veia 2004:113). In this scenario, the title and name could be understood in light of the name *Eiríkr*, a Proto-Nordic *\*Aina-rikiar* ‘the one in sole control of the power, the high king’. This is an intriguing hypothesis for the old royal seat of Avaldsnes, but unfortunately impossible to prove.

In the large medieval Avaldsnes parish we have few typologically identifiable prehistoric names, and only three *land*-names: *Londo*, *Matland*, and *Meland*. The first element in *Matland* is probably the word *mat* ‘food’ (ON *matr*), which in place names often alludes to fertile land that can ‘bring food to the table’. The qualifier in *Meland* is ON *meðal* ‘between’. Most names in the parish denote some topographical feature, such as *Kvalavåg* (Hualauage 1322) ‘whale bay’, *Vikene* ‘the bays’, *Stoggdal* (< *Stokkdalr*) ‘log valley’, *Visnes* (uncertain qualifier), *Våge* ‘bay’, *Uvik*, *Fiskå* (< *\*Fisk(i) á*) ‘fish river’, *Rygge* ‘ridge’, *Håvik* ‘shark bay’, *Austevik* ‘the eastern bay’, and *Bygnes* (< *Bjúgnes*) a *nes* in some way described with the adj. *bjúgr* ‘bended, curved’. *Kalstø* denotes a landing, but the first element is uncertain and the earliest form (from 1661) provides no further information. There is another name of the same kind, *Kolstø*. Since this name has as the earliest forms *Kolstad* (NRJ) and *Kolstadt* (1563), it could be argued that this name is not an old *staðyr*, but rather *staðir*; if so, the second element probably could be understood as linguistically influenced by the similar *Kalstø*. If this hypothesis is correct, the first name could be the man’s name *Kolr*. However, the recentness of the known forms of the name means that this suggestion must remain speculative. The name *Hinderåker* is interesting, because the qualifier in the name for an arable land could contain an old river name *\*Hind*; an alternative interpretation is *\*Hindr(i)akr* ‘the farthest field’. *Velde* or *Vedle* is also related to agriculture, as the dative sg. *Velli* of the word *vøllr* ‘field’.

Occurring in the southern part of Avaldsnes parish are a few interesting names: *Vårå* (Vorde NRJ, Vordødenn NRJ, Vardenn 1563, Vaarde 1602), *Helgaberg* (Hegleberig 1661), and *Håland* (i Helgohalande 1301?, Haaland 1610). The name *Vårå*, as the older forms show, is an older ON *Varða*, containing a word *varð(a)* f. ‘beacon’ (cf. the verb *varða* ‘guard, watch’). This ‘beacon’ evidently stood on the hill *Helgabergsvarden* or *Helgabergsnuten*, a notable landmark in the landscape, with the farms *Håland* and *Helgaberg* on either side (Fig. 24.4). This hill’s older name must have been *Helgaberg* ‘the holy mountain’; this site, with the hill *Helgaberg* and the adjacent *Håland* (< *Helgaland*), could represent a feature in the landscape with some cultic-religious significance. In general, these kind of landmarks would have been seen as holding a supernatural significance, and the geographic feature would be associated with some myth.

On the island of *Fosen* (the name discussed above), part of Avaldsnes parish, there are two *land*-names: *Tjoland* (Thjønsländt 1563, Tiøttlännd 1567, Kiølland 1602) and *Bratthelgaland* (Helgelandt 1563). While the young forms of *Tjoland* provide no certain indication for interpreting the qualifier in this name, *Bratthelgaland* is *Helgaland* with the modifying *bratt* ‘steep’ added to distinguish it from the *Helgaland* in the vicinity.



**Fig. 24.4:** A raised stone in a grave mound at Vårå. Helgabergsnuten hill in the background. Photo: unknown, possibly Nils H. Tunstad or Jan Petersen. Scan and edit: Åge Pedersen, AM.

The perhaps most intriguing settlement name in the parish is *Skeie*, located in the central part of the island, to the west of Avaldsnes. It is written *i Skæidi* in 1285, *Skeidh* in 1427, and *af Skeidh* in 1463. The name doubtless contains the word ON *skeið* n. This word occurs with many meanings. One possibility is ‘racecourse for horses’, hence a gathering place for communal activities, such as games, horse racing, the settling of affairs, and the like. Very often names containing *skeið* occupy central locations in their districts and are often found at levelled fields (NSL 399). Hence, regarding potential sites on Kormt for Iron Age communal gatherings, perhaps even cultic activities, *Skeie* would be a prime contender: it is centrally located on a wide expanse of open land near to Avaldsnes, in an area host to numerous ancient, monumental burial mounds (Fig. 24.5).

The parish of Torvastad straddles the northern part of Kormt and a section of the adjacent mainland to the east. On the Kormt side occur three *stad*-names in close proximity in the west: *Torvastad* (Torfostaðum 1301, a Tofuastadum 1346), with either the man’s name *Torfi* in the first element or the word ON *torf* ‘peat’, alluding to peatery in the area (NSL 458), although the latter suggestion is undermined by the absence of bogs at Torvastad from whence to extract peat; *Vikingstad* (Vickingstadt 1563), probably containing the man’s name *Vikingr*; and *Skjølningstad* (Skiøllingstadt 1563), in



**Fig. 24.5:** Reheia/Blodheia. Photo: unknown.  
Owner: Karmøy Municipality.

which the qualifier is difficult to etymologise due to the recentness of the forms. There are also three *land*-names: *Håland* to the north; *Viks-Håland* to the south, with the modifier *Vik* added to distinguish it from *Håland* (both assumed to contain the adj. ON *há* 'high (up)', although this is not an obvious interpretation of the names, considering the topography); and *Hofland* or *Haugland* (Hoffland NRJ, Houland NG 10:407), evidently an older name for the vicarage (the late and diverging name offer no help in interpreting the name; instead, the local pronunciation of the name alludes to the possibility of the first element actually being *Hov*-; cf. Særheim 2007:108–9).<sup>4</sup>

Other place names in Torvastad are: *Stongo* 'pole, rod, staff', with uncertain reference, perhaps alluding to Stonganeset (Særheim 2007:220); *Sæbø* 'the farm by the sea'; *Dale* 'valley'; *Storesund* and *Litlasund* on the east coast of the island, referring of course to the narrow sound; and the trio of *Bø*, *Øvrabø*, and *Nordbø*, which would have initially comprised a single *Bø* unit. Frequently *Bø* in Norway are found in central locations in their districts, often near the parish church, and in many cases are thought to represent a primary settlement in that district (e.g., Olsen 1926:55–7; NSL 113–14). As mentioned, there are numerous important burial mounds in this parish, especially on the eastern side of Kormt, as reflected in the names *Haugo*, *Øvre*, and *Nedre*, as well as *Gunnarshaug* (Gwnershough NRJ, Gundershoug 1563), obviously containing the man's name ON *Gunnarr* or *Gunndjarfr*. The farm name *Storhaug* is obviously a secondary name referring to *Gunnarshaug*. *Osnes* on the northern tip of Kormt is probably an older *Ósnes*, containing the word ON *óss* m. 'opening, gap', in place names often referring to an outfall, that is, the mouth of a river. The name hence denotes an interruption to the inshore sailing route, where it gives way to the open sea. Finally, we have the intriguing name *Hauske* (Hyskøde NRJ, Høuskenn 1563). The older forms are of

<sup>4</sup> This possibility is emphasised by one of the anonymous reviewers, for which I am grateful.

no help. NSL (p. 200) records several occurrences of the name *Hauskje*, all of them in Ryfylke, and interprets the names as *\*Haug(a)skeið*, containing the above mentioned *skeið* and (probably) plural of *haugr* ‘burial mound’. Whether this interpretation is likewise relevant for the *Hauske* in Torvastad remains uncertain.

In the eastern, mainland part of Torvastad parish, there is the name *Spanne*, of uncertain background, along with two *heim*-names, *Moksheim* (Møgsenn 1567, Mogsimbs 1602) and *Norheim* (Noremb 1602). Although the latter two have very late forms, they most probably should be understood as old *heim*-names. According to NG (10:410) the first element is a river name *\*Moksá*. There is, or at least has been, a small rivulet issuing from the small lake Moksheimsvatnet and running through this settlement. The name of this rivulet could be linked to ON *mykr* ‘muck, dirt’ (cf. NSL 315).

The settlement name *Norheim* is of special interest. Although only young forms of the name survive, there is reason to investigate the possibility of an ON form *Nórheimr*. The first element here is definitely the word ON *nór* n. ‘narrow sound’, although there are doubts regarding the frequency and antiquity of this word in Norway (Strid 1981:62). Evidently the word *nor* does occur – now and then – in Norwegian place names (e.g., NSL *passim*); what is notable is that the word is absent from the Icelandic language and is not mentioned in Fritzner’s lexicon of the Old Norse language (1972–3). At issue with this name is of course its relation to the name *Norway*, given its location along the inshore sailing route, identified with the name ‘Norway’, and its proximity to Avaldsnes royal estate. The most obvious explanation is that *Norheim* is situated at the narrowest point of the sound between Kormt and the mainland – a natural interpretation of the first element *Nór*-. A more speculative approach would be to posit a direct link from *Norheim* to the name *Norway*, or even to ask whether the *Nór*- in *Norheim* is a reflection of an old name for the sound between Kormt and the mainland, *\*Nór*, which in turn is the background for the name *Norway*, denoting the entirety of the western sailing route (hence a *pars pro toto* name). There is no way to test any of these theories, however, and whether the other 3 (or 4) *Norheim* in Rogaland (Særheim 2007:170) can be explained in the same way remains uncertain.

Kopervik parish, which in the Middle Ages belonged to Avaldsnes parish, has one *heim*-name and two *land*-names: *Austrheim* (Østrem NRJ) ‘the eastern *heimr*’, *Stangaland* (Stangeland NRJ), and *Ytreland* (Ythrelandt 1563). What *stong* f. in *Stangaland* refers to is uncertain (NSL 423), as the word has many meanings. Because *Stangaland* gave its name to one of the *skipreide* (naval *leiðangr* district), the *stong* here could be the same as in the compound *merkisstong*, meaning a staff bearing an official or even provocative (insulting) connotation, in this case perhaps to identify the place where the *leiðangr* men assembled. The fact that there are several *Stangaland* in Rogaland, however, weakens this explanation. *Ytra*- ‘outer’ in *Ytraland* refers to the location of the farm. *Nordstokko*, *Midtstokko*, and *Sønnstokko* evidently refer to an older farm *Stokko* (< *Stokkar*) that was subsequently divided. The same holds for *Indre Eide*, *Ytra Eide*, and *Midt-Eide*; *Eide* referring to the *eid*, the narrow isthmus between the inlets Kopervik and Veavågen. Finally we have *Brekke*, *Skår*, and *Sund*, three names with

a topographical background: *brekk* ‘slope, hillside’, *skår* ‘nock, score, incision’, and *sund* ‘sound’.

To the west of Kopervik is Åkra parish. The parish name goes back to a farm name *Åkra* (a Akrom 1301, Akra s. 1392) ‘the (or most certainly *the*) arable land’. In this parish we find one *stad*-name, *Haringstad* (Harrinngstad 1567), and three *land*-names, *Sevland* (Seweland NRJ), *Ådland* (Alland, Oland NRJ), and *Fagerland* (Ffagreland NRJ). One would expect *Haringstad* to contain a man’s name, but there is no obvious candidate. A name *\*Haringr*, which would linguistically fit, is, to my knowledge, unknown. Oluf Rygh (NG 10:379) has proposed, somewhat unconvincingly, a man’s name *Haring* ‘a man from Hardanger’. Alternatively, it could be the older name, *\*Haringr*, on the small lake Heiavatnet, or a name on the terrain north of Haringstad; in both cases, derivations to the word *har* ‘stone, stony terrain’ are to be found in Swedish dialects, but it is uncertain whether they are also to be found in Norwegian dialects (for example, the word is lacking in Torp 1963, but proposed for a name *Haram* in NSL 196). *Sevland* is probably an older *Sævarland* to ON *sær* ‘sea’; *Ådland*, NG (10:382) believes, is an older *Árland* to *á* ‘river’; and the adj. *fager* ‘beautiful, useful’ occurs in *Fagerland*. The island name *Vedøya* in the north is perhaps an older *Veiði-øy* to ON *veiðr* ‘catch, capture’, often found in coastal place names denoting sites used for fishing or seal hunting (Fig. 24.6). Relatively self-explanatory names include: *Sævik* ‘the bay by the sea’; *Østhus* (Yzstahuus 1392) ‘the outermost house’; *Munkajord* ‘land (farm) owned by a monastery’; *Vea* (< *Viðar*) to *viðr* ‘forest, wood’; and *Varne* (Vardøenn 1563, Warnne 1569) to *varð(a)* f. ‘beacon’. *Medhaug* (< *Miðhaugr*) in the south obviously refers to some burial mound with an ‘in the middle’ position. *Leiknes* presumably has as the first element the word *leikr* m. ‘play, game’; for what reason is unknown.

The neighbours *Tjøsvoll* (Tywsewal NRJ, Thiøssuoldt 1563) and *Årvoll* (Aruold 1567) certainly refer to a common *\*Vøllr*. *Årvoll* refers to its location near a river (*á*), whereas *Tjøs-* is unclear. In one interpretation, given the central location of these two settlements near the Tjøsvollvatnet just north of the parish church, is that it represents an old assembly place on this *vøllr* ‘levelled field’ (cf. the many *Tingvoll*, *Tingvalla*, *Pingvellir*, etc. to *vøllr*). If such were the case, the name *Åkra* also becomes interesting – parish names and names of the district’s most central settlements containing the element *åker*, at least for Sweden, have been interpreted as cultic fields, perhaps associated with fertility (Vikstrand 2013). A combination of *Åkrar* and *Vøllr* is certainly an indication, at least in eastern Sweden, of the centrality of communal activities and a potential cult. Whether this interpretation can be transferred to Kormt is uncertain.

The names of another pair of neighbouring settlements in Åkra – *Trælhaug* (Threlltuedt 1602, Thrællhoug NG) and *Mannes* (Manness NRJ, Mandenes 1563) – appear to refer to forced bondage or slavery; an interpretation to which NG (10:380) already is hinting. *Trælhaug* (probably < *Þrælahaugr*) apparently includes as the first element the word *thræll* ‘slave (cognate with English thrall)’, and as the second element the word *haugr* ‘a burial mound (if not a natural mound or hillock)’. Thus, it is a mound or



**Fig. 24.6:** Vedøya (facing north).  
Photo: S. Brink.

hill in some way is linked to not one *thræll* but a collective *thrælar* in plural. We actually have a couple of names in *Thræl*- here in Ryfylke (cf. Iversen 1997). In *Mannes*, the second element denotes a peninsula (a *nes*), while the first element could be the word *man* n., which occurs as a synonym for a *thræll*, sometimes for an individual in a household, sometimes for the collective (Fritzner 1972–3). This interpretation of *Mannes* (< *Mananes*) is of course reinforced by its neighbour, *Thrællhaug*. Beyond the likelihood that the two names are related to slavery, however, semantic explanations remain a matter of speculation.

South of Åkra in Ferkingstad parish occur one *stad*-name (the parish name *Ferkingstad*), and two *land*-names, *Dyrland* (Dyrlannd 1567) and *Sand-Håland* (Haland NRJ). *Ferkingstad* is assumed to contain the man's name *Farpegn* (NG 10:384; NSL 143); *Dyrland* (< *Dyraland*?) could contain the word *dýr* n., in place names often referring to big game, such as deer, whereas *Sand-Håland* is again one of the *Håland* names, here with a qualifying *Sand* to distinguish it from the other homonyms. The farm name *Stava* (Staffue 1563) might refer to some staff of unknown usage or a mountainous feature. *Nes* and *Hebnes* both refer to peninsulas. The etymon for *Stol* (Staall 1567) is uncertain. *Langåker* 'the elongated arable land' is straightforwardly descriptive; *Kvilhaug* (Quilgaa 1567) could be a variation of *Hvilhaug* 'a mound suitable for taking a rest' (*Hvilhaug*, *Hvilstein*, etc. are not uncommon names); and *Haga* 'fenced-in field' is straightforward. Two more obscure names, *Vikra* and *Sandve*, occur in the south

of the parish. *Vikra* (pa Vikra NRJ) NG (10:386) is derived from *vikr* m. ‘bay, inlet’, in this name probably an *-r-* extension of *vik* ‘bay’; the settlement is situated at an inlet, today a protected harbour, but further context for the name is not evident. *Sandve* (Sandwen NRJ) is according to NG (10:386) an older *\*Sand-vin*, hence an old *vin*-name. This interpretation is reinforced by the occurrence of other *Sandve* in Rogaland, with medieval forms of the names intimating their provenance as *vin*-names.

Falnes is the southernmost parish on Kormt, formerly part of Skudenes herred (hundred). *Falnes* (Fallnes 1602) and *Skudenes* (a Skutonesi 1418) denote the two peninsulas extending to the south. The etymology of *Fal-* is obscure; perhaps it refers to the peninsula’s resembling in shape a *falr* m. ‘the tubular part of a spear’. The name *Skudenes* (< *Skútunes*) probably contains the word *skúta* f. ‘a protruding wall of a mountain/hill’ (NSL 408; cf. the mountain *Åreskutan* in northern Sweden). Maybe this ‘skuta’ is the hill *Varden*, alluding to a beacon on this peninsula, or identifies the peninsula’s pointy shape at the southernmost tip of Kormt.

Two areas of fertile land in this parish appear to have a long history of agricultural use. One area contains the settlements *Grødheim* (Grøthem 1567), *Syre* (Ssyrið 1417), and *Håland* (Haaland 1661). The first name is a *heim*-name containing *grjót* ‘gravel, stony land’. *Syre* is one of the largest farms on Kormt regarding the *landskyld*, and certainly an ancient settlement; as Torun Zachrisson writes (Ch. 25:706, Fig. 25.14), a remarkable find of a late Migration Period goldsmith’s hoard underlines *Syre*’s prehistoric background. The name, however, remains obscure; extensive discussion of the name in NG (10:386–7) proposes several possible etymologies, but none are convincing. Lastly, *Håland* here is another of the many homonyms on Kormt.

The second agricultural area in Falnes parish is situated around Lake Hilleslandsvatnet. Here occur two *heim*-names: *Heggheim* (Heggimb 1602), derived from *hegg* ‘bird-cherry tree’, and *Tjøstheim* (Thiøstimb 1602), with an obscure first element. There is also a *land*-name here, *Hillesland* (Hellisland NRJ), which could contain *hellir* ‘cave, overhanging cliff etc.’, probably referring to the nearby *Nauthelleren* (NG 10:388).

Several names in Falnes have a topographic background: *Austnaberg* ‘the hill in the east’; *Li* ‘slope’; *Risdal* (< *\*Hrísdalr*) ‘scrub’; *Nalei* (obscure); *Høynes* ‘the peninsula where hay is found’; *Selvåg* ‘seal, sea-calf bay’; *Kuviken* ‘cow bay’; *Neset* ‘the peninsula’; *Vik* ‘bay’; *Skitnedal* ‘shit(!)valley’; and *Dale* ‘valley’.

Finally, in the east lies *Hovdastad* (Hoffdestadt 1563), a *stad*-name containing the word *hovde* ‘hill, hillock’ (NSL 225), and in the north-east *Snørteland* (Snørthelann 1567). NG (10:389–90) discusses the first element of this name extensively and offers parallels, but a definitive etymology remains elusive.

Regarding the settlement names on the mainland and islands adjacent to Kormt, a more summative assessment of the overall picture is possible. First, the island of Bokn: several settlements here, not surprisingly, have old island names, such as *Ogn*, *Nautøya* ‘island where cattle (*naut*) are kept’, and the obscure *Are* (Aardt 1563), which could denote an island resembling an *arðr* ‘arder’. Many have a topographic back-

ground: *Aksdal* ‘valley’, in which the qualifier is obscure, perhaps a metathesis of *askr* ‘ash tree’, thus *Askdal* > *Aksdal*; *Våge* ‘bay’; and *Trosnevåg* with obscure qualifier. *Jøsen* (Jossenn 1567) has been discussed by many scholars (Særheim 1996:40; 2007:118–19). Oluf Rygh (1893:201) suggests the name could be derived from an older *Mjósund*, denoting a narrow sound. Magnus Olsen (NG 10:433) postulates an older island name *Jøsund* f.; this idea has been picked up by Eva Nyman (2000:363), who interprets the name as ‘ferment and foam’, presumably in reference to the sea pounding the island. Although the settlement *Jøsen* is not directly adjacent to the bay leading up to the settlement from the south, it is fully possible that *Jøsen* could be the older name for this bay, an old *und*-derivation.

*Kro* (a Krom 1392) < \**Króar* is perhaps a plural of the word ON *kró* f. ‘cattle corral’. *Øvrebø*, *Nedrebø*, and *Sæbø* all contain the head *bø* ‘farm, hamlet’, the latter in conjunction with *sæ* ‘sea’. There are three *stad*-names on Bokn: *Alvestad* (Alwesta NRJ), probably < *Olvisstaðir* to the man’s name *Olvir*; *Grønestad* (Grønesta NRJ, Grønnestedt 1563) with an obscure qualifier; and *Gunnarstad* (Gunderstedt 1563) to the man’s name *Gunnarr*. Finally, there are as many as eight *land*-names on Bokn: yet another *Håland*; *Vatnaland* (Vatnelandt 1563) to *vatn*, ‘water, lake’, alluding to Lake Vatnalandsvatnet; *Laupland* (Lopland NRJ) with an obscure qualifier; *Hognaland* (Hagnæland NRJ), perhaps with the man’s name *Hogni*, or alluding to the hill *Hognåsen* (Særheim 2007:104); *Sunnaland* (Swundeland NRJ) to *sund* ‘sound’ referring to the long Sunnalandssstraumen; *Torland* (Torrelannd 1567) containing perhaps a West-Norwegian dialect word *tor* f. referring to a stony shore (NSL 458) or the man’s name *Pórðr*, rather than Norw *tørr*, ON *purr* ‘dry’; *Dagsland* (Daxslandt 1563) possibly containing the man’s name *Dagr*; and *Aukland* (Haukland 1427), as with the many *Aukland* found in Norway (and also in the British Isles), to the verb *auka* ‘expand’ (NSL 77). Finally, we have a name of a farm situated on the land belonging to Vatnaland, *Trælhaug* (Trelhoug 1723), hence a homonym to *Trælhaug* in Åkra on Kormt.

In Skåre parish, where nearly all medieval farms have been incorporated into the modern city of Haugesund, there is one *heim*-name, another *Austrheim* (Østreimb 1602); three *stad*-names, *Skastad* (Staddestad NRJ, Skagestadt 1563), *Hemmingstad* (Hemingstadt 1563) < mn. *Hemingr*, and *Sakkastad* (Skakestada NRJ, Sochestad 1567); and perhaps a fourth *stad*-name in the obscure *Veste* (Vesta 1563). Of other settlement names deserving mention, the name *Vikse* (< *Viksa* or *Viksir* probably an *s*-derivation to *vik* ‘inlet’) in the north is an older name of a fjord, Viksefjorden, with a very narrow sound-like inlet (NSL 492). The preponderance of *haugr* names in this area calls for special explanation, which will be addressed in the discussion below.

In Tysvær parish, the parish name *Tysvær* (Teizfyrdi 1322, Tiæzfiardar sokn 1338) is an older name for a minor inlet, *Vågen* ‘the bay’, to the larger Førlandsfjorden. The first element in this bay name is obviously the man’s name ON *Teitr*, a common name (NSL 469). There is one *heim*-name, *Vatnheim* (Vatnimb 1606) to *vatn* n. ‘water, lake’, and ten *land*-names, of which all but one denote the land or local topography; the exception is *Kvinnesland* (i Huinislande 1322), having as the first element an old fjord

name *\*Hvinir* or *\*Hvínir*, which is probably the older name for the certainly secondary *Førlandsfjorden*. The name *Lundarvoll* (Lwnderwal NRJ), located centrally in the parish beside the church in Tysvær, could be compared with central Tjølling, where we find the names *Tjølling* (< *Þjóðalyng*), *Vollen* (< *vøllr*), and *Lunde* (a Lunde 1451) (Brink 2007a:63); *Lundarvoll* should probably be understood as the *voll* by *Lund* or a *lund* 'grove'. Situated at the western shore of the large Hervikfjorden, with an exceptionally good and protected harbour, is the settlement *Hervik* (i Heruikum 1322). The first element is probably the word *herr* 'cohort, troop, army' (NSL 211). Because Tysvær was a *skipreide* (a *leiðangr* district), it is tempting to link the name *Hervik* to the *leiðangr*; perhaps it was the assembly place for this *leiðangr* district. In the north of the parish is *Narreviken* (Knareuig 1602), probably containing *knørr* '(cargo) ship'.

In Førre parish, the parish name *Førre* (Førde NRJ) is an old *\*Firði*, dative sg. of *fjorðr* 'sound', alluding to its position at the bottom of Førresfjorden. Here there are two *heim*-names, *Nesheim* (Nessim 1563) and *Veim* (Veimb 1606); three *land*-names, two *Helgaland* and one *Nodland* (Notuland 1449); and two *stad*-names, *Stakkastad* (Stockestadt 1563) and *Tuastad* (Twuestad NRJ, Thiøffuestadt 1561). All of the *land*- and *stad*-names, except for *Helgeland*, have rather obscure qualifiers.

Other names of interest include *Myklabust* (Myklebostad NRJ) < ON *Miklibólstaðr* (Gammeltøft 2000; 2001); and *Vormedal* (no older name forms), situated along a short river issuing from Lake Vormedalsvatnet – the first element is an old name for this river, *\*Varma*, oblique form *\*Vormu-*, to the adj. *varmr* 'warm', with the second element *-dalr* 'valley'. The most intriguing case is the name *Veim*. This settlement is centrally located, just north of the parish church. A possible interpretation could be *\*Vé-heimr*, with the first element identified with the word *vé* n. 'pagan cult site' or perhaps the adj. *vé* 'holy'. The present church could have been erected on a pagan cult site, †*Vé*, hence the *heim* settlement, *Véheimr*, would be understood as the *heimr*-settlement near the †*Vé*. On the other hand, the homonym *Veim* in Aurland, Sogn, has been written *Viðheimr*, *i Viðheimi* 1334, and *i Vidheimi* c. 1360 (NG 12:111), demonstrating that the first element is probably the word *viðr* m. 'wood, forest'; NG (12:111) is of the opinion that this latter explanation holds for both *Veim* names.

*Skjold* parish is situated to the east of Førre. In the Middle Ages the vicarage was known as *a Skildi* (1393). Semantically, it is fairly obvious that the name contains the word *skjöldr* 'shield' (NSL 403). The name is likely the old name for Skjoldafjorden, which opens up in a broad inner bay at Skjold. The background to the fjord- and the parish-name is to be found in the shield-like shape of either this fjord's bay, or of the small, rounded island Nesøya, situated in the middle of the fjord.

This large parish has three *heim*-names: *Nesheim* (Neßemb 1602), situated on the top of a peninsula (nes); *Fjellheim* (Fiellimb 1606) to the word *ffell*, ON *ffall* n. 'mountain'; and yet another *Austerheim* (Østrem NRJ). There are two *stad*-names: *Hatlastad* (Hatlestad 1610), probably to the mn. *Atli* or perhaps *hassel* 'hazel'; and *Østeinstad* (Ystenstad NRJ) to the mn. *Øysteinn*. This parish has as many as 17 *land*-names, in which the qualifiers normally denote the topography for the site.

Finally, in Vats parish to the east, there are two *heim*-names: *Nesheim* (Nessim NRJ) and *Skjervheim* (a Skerfheimi 1313). The former name contains *nes* ‘peninsula’ as the qualifier, the latter probably Norw. dial. *skjerv* ‘rock’, Sw dial. *skärv* ‘cairn, heap of stones’ (Torp 1963:603), likely alluding to stony land. There are four *land*-names, of which *Frøland* (Frølannd 1567) is of special interest. In a Swedish context, a homophonous *Fröland* would merit investigation as to whether the first element could be the name of the goddess *Freyja*, if the older forms support such an etymology. In the present case, the older forms do not provide a hint in any direction. The absence of theophoric place names in the region works against interpretation as an older †*Freyjaland*; rather, it appears more likely to be a qualifier *frøy* (< \**fraiw-*) ‘exuberant’ (Torp 1963:138; cf. Elmevik 2003), alluding to fertile ground. This *Frøland* is to be seen in conjunction with several homonyms elsewhere in western Norway.

#### 24.4.1 Names with -haug

One observation, admittedly somewhat unsystematic and *en passant*, is the occurrence of an astonishing number of place names with the element *-haug* at the place where the sound between northern Kormt and the mainland (in principle within the boundaries of the city of Haugesund) is at its narrowest. Apparently, the word *haugr* in this area often denotes a man-made (burial) mound, as in many other areas in Scandinavia, fostering the impression that burial mounds were built along the shores of this narrow sound, perhaps as a display of power. Evidence from the excavated burial mounds suggests that all of them date to the Iron Age. The names I have found (some of which may be young and of no relevance) are: *Grønhaug*, *Storhaug*, *Haugo* (plur.), and *Gunnarshaug* in Torvastad; *Kjuklinghaug*, *Øygardenhaug*, *Rehaugane*, and *Flaghaugen* in Avaldsnes; and *Haugo* (plur.), *Grønhaug*, *Sørhaug*, *Niphaug*, *Svehaug*, *Orshaugane*, *Høgahaug*, and *Steinneshaug* in Skåre, today entirely incorporated into *Haugesund*, which takes its name from the first *Haugo* (NSL 199) – perhaps the first element in the name of the town alludes not only to *Haugo*, but to the many ‘haugar’ to be found here. As is well attested, burial mounds have been subjected to considerable destruction over the centuries, and those mounds (and their names) preserved today represent only a small share of what was once a monumental arrangement of large burial mounds along this sound. This observation, although warranting further substantiation, would reinforce the importance of the location here at Avaldsnes and northern Kormt generally, and should be considered in light of Torun Zachrisson’s enumeration and discussion (Ch. 25, *passim*) of several important archaeological finds in this area with a concentration of *haug*-names.

### 24.4.2 Place names and pagan cults

One notable aspect to the discussion of prehistoric place names in Rogaland is the question of whether they contain evidence of pre-Christian cultic activities, a phenomenon that occurs throughout Scandinavia to varying degrees. In Sweden there are plentiful examples of districts with theophoric names and place names indicating pagan cult and rituals. There is similar evidence, though to a lesser extent, in Denmark and in the Viken area in Norway. A recent development in this field of research is the understanding that different parts of Scandinavia were home to distinct regional cults. While there was a general, pan-Scandinavian mythology and religion, regional differences are revealed in place names as well as archaeological burial customs; for example, regional preferences for cults of certain gods or goddesses (Brink 2007b).

In this respect, south-western Norway markedly differs from other parts of Scandinavia with Iron Age settlement: by comparison, theophoric place names here are few. The few cases that do occur here are highly debatable, often due to lack of medieval forms of the names. This lack of sacrality in the place-name material is notable even for elements denoting pagan cult sites, such as *vé* or *hof*.

In the toponymic corpus assembled for this chapter, the following names are relevant to discussion of evidence for pagan cults:

*Bratt-Helgaland* (Helgelandt 1563) on Fosen in Avaldsnes parish

*Helgaberg* (Helgeberg 1723) and *Helga-Håland* (Helgohalande 1301?) in Avaldsnes, both at the foot of the striking hill, *Helgabergsnuten*

*Spann-Helgaland* (Helgeland NRJ) in Førre, between Spanne and Moksheim

*Helgaland* (Helgelannd 1567) in Førre

?*Veim* (Veimb 1606) in Førre

?*Hofland* (Prestegdn) (Hoffland NRJ) in Torvastad

?*Frøland* (Frølannd 1567) in Vats parish

This is the complete list; the only ‘obvious’ candidates are a few variations on *Helgaland*. However, the word *heilagr* as an element in place names in some cases can have a purely profane meaning (Calissendorff 1964, 1991); therefore, not even the *Helgaland* names can be taken as ‘proof’ of pagan cults.

Strikingly, among the approximately 300 analysed settlement names, there are no theophoric place names to be found. The only contender is *Frøland* in Vats; as noted above, the lack of other theophoric place names in the region advises against identifying the name of the goddess *Freyja*, especially as the older name form is entirely obscure, and that other interpretations (i. e. related to agriculture) are plausible.

As for names indicative of cult sites, *Veim* in Førre could be a contender. It is certainly possible that central Førre would offer a site for a \**Vé* (acknowledging the reservation noted above). Likewise, the old name for the vicarage in Torvastad appears to have been *Hofland* or *Hog-/Haug-land* (the young forms offer no help), possibly referring to a *hof*, but this cannot be claimed with any certainty.

Thus, the only clear example of pagan sacrality in the landscape is the *Helgabergsnuten*, which had the old name *Helgaberg* ‘the holy mountain’. With fair certainty, this name represents a homonym or cognate of the many *Helgaberg/Helgafell* to be found throughout Scandinavia and Iceland, frequently with some myth attached to the mountain or hill (Brink 2007a).

Why, then, does south-western Norway differ from the rest of Scandinavia regarding pagan sacrality in the toponymic material? It might be assumed that such names have been lost, due to a restructuring or death of old place names, but as has been shown to the contrary, the region possesses a toponymic corpus of very old place names and a notable stability in the landscape, owing to topographical factors. Thus, other arguments must be considered.

As one hypothesis, I would suggest that the naming practices of a particular region reflect its socio-economic foundations, which in sea-oriented south-western Norway are essentially different from those of agriculturally centred regions, such as Trøndelag or the Mjøsa region, or the area around Viken, or even Jæren in south-western Norway. Religion, cult practices, and rituals were probably expressed differently in agriculture-based societies than in sea-based ones such as in Ryfylke and Sogn; precisely how pagan religion in a sea-orientated society can be identified in a place-name corpus has yet to be fully understood. Such a hypothesis could explain why Ryfylke differs from for example the eastern parts of Norway, let alone from Denmark and Sweden.

### 24.4.3 Place names and central places

In interdisciplinary research of recent decades, place names have been used to identify central places in the prehistoric Scandinavian landscape (e.g., Fabech and Ringtved 1999). For Sweden, elements used in these analyses have been *tuna*, *husaby*, *vi*, *hov* and some others. For Denmark and the area around Viken in Norway, the same elements have been analysed, though found with less frequency. Distinction must be drawn between names for true central places within a district, and names, such as *Bø* or *\*Vin*, that denote old, centrally located settlements assumed to have been divided into new farms, which in antiquated terms might be called an *Urgård* or *Ættegård* (e.g., Olsen 1926; *pace* Pilø 1999; 2005). These centrally located settlements were not political or administrative central places, but in many cases could have functioned as communal gathering places for a settlement district. To the same category can be assigned place names denoting a cult site, such as *vé* or *hof*, which probably were the communal cult sites for a district. To this category the following names can be enumerated:

- Bø* (Bø, Øvrabø, Nordbø) in Torvastad
- Åkra* and *\*Vøllr* (Tjøsøvoll and Årvoll) in Åkra parish
- Bø* (Øvrebø, Nedrebø) in Austre Bokn

\**Landir* (Londo and Landanes) in Avaldsnes

*Veim* (Veimb 1606) in Førre

*Skeie* (< *Skeið*) near Avaldsnes, which, owing to its location on the island and situation on open ground and proximity to Avaldsnes, could have had some function as a communal gathering place for the district

*Lundarvoll* (Lwnderwal NRJ) in Tysvær, which as mentioned above could be compared with central Tjølling, where we find the names *Tjølling* (< *Þjóðalyng*), *Vollen* (< *vøllr*), and *Lunde* (a Lunde 1451) (Brink 2007a:63); the name *Lundarvoll* is probably to be understood as the *voll* by *Lund* or a *lund* 'grove'

In the place-name material discussed here, the picture regarding administrative central places is even more unclear and scant than in eastern Norway. No obvious central place name is to be found, and the obvious central place in the area, Avaldsnes, has an atypical name for a central place. Apart from Avaldsnes, which must be understood as a 'political' central place, it is possible that *Hervik* i Tysvær could have functioned as a 'central place' for Tysvær *skipreide*, as the site where the *leiðangr* ship anchored and its crew assembled.

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