

**BETWEEN TOPONYMY, TOPOGRAPHY AND TEMPORALITY. TOWARDS A
PREDICATIVE MODEL FOR LOCALISING NORWEGIAN COURTYARD SITES**

**ENTRE TOPONÍMIA, TOPOGRAFIA E TEMPORALIDADE. SOBRE UM
MODELO ASSERTIVO PARA LOCALIZAR SÍTIOS COURTYARD DA
NORUEGA**

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Abstract: The courtyard sites, compounds mostly consisting of houses laid out around an open space and their functions are among the most debated features within Norwegian archaeology. In general, they occur from about 100 to 1000 A.D. Numerous hypotheses and theories have been proposed as to their functions, among others military, as they follow a relatively strict layout resembling barracks and camps, and legal functions as the number of houses sometimes correspond to the number of legal districts in a given area. This paper discusses the possibilities of localising courtyard sites in the landscape and determining functions by looking at factors such as toponyms (place names) and topography. Furthermore, differences in time and space will be discussed. Which changes in layout and between the different regions can be traced, and do these changes through time, and which common denominators are there across time and space?

Keywords: Courtyard sites, Norway, Iron Age, Viking Age, Toponymy, Spatiality, Landscape studies, Archaeology, Topography, Temporality.

Resumo: Os sítios *courtyard* são compostos principalmente por casas dispostas em torno de um espaço aberto e suas funções estão entre as características mais debatidas na arqueologia norueguesa. Em geral, foram erigidos por volta de 100 a 1000 d. C. Numerosas hipóteses e teorias foram propostas quanto às suas funções, entre as quais as militares, pois seguem um layout relativamente estrito que lembra quartéis e acampamentos, e funções legais, pois o número de casas às vezes corresponde a o número de distritos jurídicos em uma determinada área. Este artigo discute as possibilidades de localização de sítios *courtyard* na paisagem e determinando as suas funções pelo exame de fatores como toponímias (nomes de localidades) e topografia. Além disso, as diferenças de tempo e espaço serão discutidas. Quais mudanças no layout e entre as diferentes regiões podem ser rastreadas, bem como mudanças ao longo do tempo, e quais denominadores comuns existem no tempo e no espaço?

Palavras-chave: Sítios courtyard, Noruega, Idade do Ferro, Era Viking, toponímia, Espacialidade, Estudos de Paisagem, Arqueologia, Topografia, Temporalidade.

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Introduction

Courtyard sites are a much-debated feature type within Norwegian archaeology, distributed in time and space from Vest-Agder in the southernmost parts of Norway up to Troms in the north (figure 2), and from A.D. 100–1000. As suggested by the name, they mostly consist of house foundations laid out in a circular to oval shape around an open space, or a courtyard (figure 1), the interpretations as to their functions span from villages, military compounds and thing-sites to adoptions of Roman theatres and ritual sites (Armstrong 2010, 2000; Iversen 2015a:105).

The question is whether it is possible to find any common denominators between the sites in terms of placements, and that may contribute to localising further sites, but also in terms of determining functions.

This article is an attempt to find localization factors in the form of common features among toponyms as well as placement in the physical landscapes. In other words, to discuss the basis for a *unified predicative model*, as it were. A partial research question is whether it is possible to deduce something about function and localities from toponyms alone, be it among other things centrality, or whether they can be linked to maritime aspects such as the *Leidang*, the coastal system of proto-conscription and mobilisation, and the partition of the country into *skipreider* (ship districts), or proximity to sailing and trade routes. Any differences in time and space, i.e. dating, floor plans and geographical locations will also be discussed to glean possible geographical differences.



Figure 1 Artistic rendering of the courtyard site at Vollmoen, Steigen. After a painting by A. Reinert. See Storli 2010: 129.



Figure 2 Map of known and assumed courtyard sites. Map made in ArcMap 10.7 by Are Skarstein Kolberg. Map data from Kartverket.

State of the Art

Courtyard sites were for a period of time thought and interpreted to be gravemounds (Storli 2010:129), although Nicolay Nicolaysen quite early on suggested thing sites (Iversen 2015a:105). The courtyard sites in Rogaland have since been interpreted as villages by Jan Petersen, but they are, as Frode Iversen (2015:105) points out, often located in barren farmland, as well as differing from more certain village sites subsequently detected.

Later on, they were connected to military activity. German archaeologist Ernst Sprockhoff (1945:57-61) studied courtyard sites in Rogaland county, while on duty as an

officer for Wehrmacht in Norway during the second world war. He was among the first professional archaeologist to suggest a connection with the *Leidang*, although he did not rule out the Thing functions, arguing they were multi-purpose sites. Today the latter is the most common interpretation among current scholars (Iversen 2015a:105,117), although with an emphasis on legal things.

Courtyard sites have been connected to the division of the country into county-things and legal districts, but also into the aforementioned *skipreider* (Iversen 2015a:109, 2017a) which often corresponds to legal districts. Each house, or booth, in at the courtyard sites would have represented different legal districts or skipreider. In the counties of Nordland og Troms, closely equivalent to the medieval province of Hålogaland, Iversen(2015a:109;2017a:83,88,97) sees no clear connection to legal districts and skipreider, to the extent to which they may be reconstructed and localised. although it cannot be ruled out. Likewise, Iversen also does not rule out a connection to the levying of taxes and military functions, among others the hosting of weapon things (Iversen 2015a:109).

Inger Storli (2006, 2010), Franz Arne Stylegar and Oliver Grimm, likewise see a connection between courtyard sites and legal districts, although Stylegar and Grimm do not rule out additional functions such as religious, economic (taxation and trade) and military, the latter including barracks and encampments at which soldiers were mustered (Stylegar 1999; Stylegar and Grimm 2004; Grimm 2004, 2010). Trond Løken (2001:11f) suggests a connection to the Danish war spoil offering of Illerup, hypothesizing a Norwegian origin for the army slain at Illerup, and that the soldiers were indeed mustered at a courtyard site in Southwestern Norway, whilst others relate Illerup to a well organised society in Norway, in which courtyard sites constituted parts of a finely meshed network of military organisation (Carnap-Bornheim og Ilkjær 1996:296–298).

Stylegar and Grimm(2004) furthermore discuss Walter Christaller's central place theory and link the courtyard sites to a center-periphery relation, while Storli makes a claim that the sites were established at neutral grounds where people could meet as equal to discuss

matters, rather than manor farms and other sites of power, and this may subsequently be seen in relation to things.

There are also some uncertain courtyard sites, some of which are not examined or dated, of which the one at Øysund (database id 76995) has been interpreted as boathouses in the cultural heritage database pertaining to the Norwegian Directorate of Cultural Heritage, a plausible interpretation in lee of more evidence, as the houses were located by the sea, and as they would have had open end gables.

Localisation Determinants

Scholars like Iversen regard the extent of legal districts and skipreider as determinants for localisation (Iversen 2015a:109, 2017). Against this background, Iversen (2017a:99) argues that in the historic province equivalent to Trøndelag, one should be able to localise courtyard sites by looking at sites practically situated in regards to travels to Frostating, the major thing site in Trøndelag, and that courtyard sites should be found in counties encompassing several legal districts and skipreider, such as Nordmøre and Gauldalen.

Some believe that the presence of churches may indicate Things, but also reflect upon the relocation of cosmological functions in the transition to Christianity as well as royal consolidation of power (Iversen 2019: 196; 2017: 101; Ødegaard 2018: 91). It then becomes a matter of continuity versus break in terms of distance in time, but also in space. The question is, perhaps, whether the construction of churches has taken over some of the functions that the courtyard sites may have had in the past, and that any distance in space is due to different presuppositions for the centrality of the landscape. In the following summary, distance to medieval churches is considered. Proximity to menhirs, burial mounds and large concentrations of cooking pits may also indicate things (Ødegaard 2018: 91).

In the discussion, toponyms are looked at, and whether there are common features that can be used to detect courtyard sites, including toponyms that refer to thing sites, centrality and maritime functions. Examples are farms with the name *Skei*, places with the prefix *-knarr* (ship type) and things, including *Knarrlage* located in a protected and narrow

sound close to the shipping lane, suitable for mooring, which can theoretically be seen in connection with *leidang* and *skipreider*. One problem, however, is that most toponyms cannot be traced further back in time than around 500 A.D., with the exception of some toponyms with the postfix *-land*, which in some places could possibly be traced back to 200-300 A.D. (Helleland 2005; Særheim 2011). However, old toponyms may indicate a continuity of function in some places, including places with the toponym *Skei*, which, based on archeology, seems to have held central roles over longer periods of time.

Landscape and topography in themselves are important factors, in this article the focus will be on landscape rooms and traffic arteries, both land and sea routes. The height above, and the distance to, the sea will also be considered. Furthermore, it will be discussed whether greater variations can be detected through different periods, as well as in different regions, and to which extent these differences constitute different sites or if they can be said to be variations on the same theme.

Analysis: Examination of Courtyard Sites

There are 32 courtyard sites in Norway, distributed from Vest-Agder to Troms. However, several sites are highly uncertain, unexamined or undated, while some have been lost. Therefore, the most uncertain sites will not be included in the discussion. The more secure sites are treated countywide, divided by county and alphabetical order, evaluated on the basis of variables such as topography, toponym and dating.

Hordaland County

In Hordaland, a possible courtyard site has been identified that shares similarities with the two priorly detected in Sogn and Fjordane county. The construction methods here are different from the other sites in Norway, among other things they do not have open gables. As will be discussed later, the sites in Sogn and Fjordane may be local variations of a type of farm, whereas the one in Hordaland is more clearly defined as a courtyard site

Sausjord, Voss

Table 1: basic data for Sausjord

Id in Askeladden	138007
Floor plan	Round til oval
Number of foundations	13
Measurement of foundations	5-12 x 6 m
Dates	240 – 640 A.D.(after Olsen 2013)
Distance to closest medieval church	3 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	195 m
Distance to the sea	26 km
Certain/uncertain	Somewhat uncertain

This courtyard site was discovered by topsoil stripping in 2011 (Olsen 2013: 90). The uncovered post-holes at the site indicate three-tiered houses of about 10-12 meters in length and 6 meters in width, while one stands out with only one room and a length of about 5 meters (Olsen 2013: 92).

The site would have been centrally located for access via the roads between the valleys, by which also the Sognefjord and Hardangerfjord can be reached. The site may thus have constituted a natural focal point for the inland areas (Hatling and Olsen 2012: 81).

Both Voss and Sausjord appear to be natural names, as related to lake and river respectively, but the farm name *Herheim* may indicate a legal district or be derived from Old Norse (O.N.) for army (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997), although the courtyard site seemingly predates the toponym, with a small overlap at the end of its life. Sausjord lay in what was Horda county.

There is a slight degree of uncertainty pertaining to layout, as the houses are interpretations made from the distribution of post-holes. Dating from the fireplaces provides a good indicator that any houses would have existed at the same time and thus constituted an oval to circular shape (Hatling and Olsen 2012; Olsen 2013: 94–96).

Nordland County

Several of the courtyard sites in Norway are located in Nordland, of which 5 are in Lofotoen and Vesterålen. It has been argued that the sites in Northern Norway differ from those in the south (Johansen and Søbstad 1978: 12), but the question is whether this dichotomy is justified or whether there are variations on the same theme. The facilities on the island of Løkta in the municipality of Dønna, respectively Botnmoen (id 16494) and Hov (id 63852), are so uncertain and little researched that they are not included here. The same applies to the one at Alfheim in Bodø (id 28594) which was removed when Bodø airport was constructed and which is listed as a mooring site in Askeladden. The site at Øysund (id 76995) is registered as boathouse in Askeladden, but Birgitta Berglund (1995: 311) casts some doubt on this interpretation. It is therefore not unlikely that there has been a courtyard site here, but this has been poorly researched and remains undated.

Bø, Steigen

Table 2: basic data for Bø

Id in Askeladden	37756
Floor plan	Round to oval
Number of foundations	12
Measurement of foundations	5–8 x 2–3 m
Dates	Up until c. 500–600 A.D.
Distance to closest medieval church	2,3 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No

Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	26 m
Distance to the sea	370 m
Certain/uncertain	Certain

Bø is one of two courtyard sites in Steigen that can be attributed to two different phases at the site. The first is up to 500–600 A.D., while the second is from about 550–1000 A.D.. It was Bø that was used in the first phase to about 600 A.D. (Iversen 2015a: 103). Vollmoen apparently takes over the function that Bø previously had. The layouts of the two sites appear to have been relatively identical and with larger mounds close by. At Bø, at least 12 house foundations with stone-free ramparts have been registered (Johansen and Søbstad 1978: 34), but some foundations likely were lost when county road 7520 was laid out right across the facility, splitting it into two parts.

According to Iversen (2015: 114), the houses may have represented the number of legal districts in Salten and Austvågøy, but again there is uncertainty about the number of house foundations as the county road passes through the facility.

There is no toponymous information on the site that can shed light on the facility: Bø simply means place of residence or farm (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). However, there is rich archaeological material from the younger Roman Iron Age here, indicating wealth and centrality (Simonsen 1970; Slomann 1959), and again this indicates Steigen's important location by the coast and its proximity to the shipping lane.

Bøstad, Vestvågøy

Table 3: basic data for Bøstad

Id in Askeladden	45077
Floor plan	Possibly oval
Number of foundations	At least 4

Measurement of foundations	Ca. 7 x 11 m
Dates	Till c. 600
Distance to closest medieval church	700 m
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	Yes
Height above sea level	5 m
Distance to the sea	140 m, but would have had direct access via the two inlets
Certain/uncertain	Uncertain

Bøstad was in use until about 600 A.D. (Iversen 2015a: 103). There are currently four house foundations registered at the site, but according to Olav Sverre Johansen and Tom Søbstad (1978: 44.45) there may have been more. This is supported by LiDAR (Figure 3) and image enhancing software (Figure 4). However, it cannot be ruled out that the additional foundations are mere natural formations. Non-intrusive methods such as geophysics can give better indications.

Today there is a road going through the site. Just to the south, the Bøstad River has meandered into what is marked as weathering masses on NGU's soil map (NGU) and excavated a small river valley. However, it makes sense that the site has been placed on top of a ridge by the river, considering its proximity to communication and in terms of visibility in the landscape. On the other hand, if the site consisted of only four to five houses in a row, it cannot be ruled out that it could be boathouses for smaller vessels that would have been able to sail up the river. Today the site is situated about four meters below the brink, but it would have been closer to the river in 600 A.D. due to changes in sea level and land elevation.

It must be pointed out that the geometry in Askeladden differs from the sites' location by more than 10 meters. Depending on the total distribution, the plant is from about

15 meters in width to about 31 meters in diameter, this is based on possible traces on LiDAR which indicate an oval shape with about 10-12 house foundations based on interpretations.

The toponym *Bøstad* is derived from O.N. *Bustad*, i.e. a farm or a dwelling (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). The site is facing the inlet *Innerpollen* which gave connection to the sea when *Bøstad* was in use. There are several maritime toponyms down towards *Innerpollen*, including *Eidosen*, *Båtneset* and *Nausthaugen*. In addition, boathouses and moorings are registered innermost by *Innerpollen*. The postfix *-pollen* comes from O.N. for narrow fjord or inlet, that is, the toponym indicates a connection to the sea (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). The site is centrally located and protected in a landscape where the maritime has been important in terms of sailing (Fredriksen 2015: 66–70), but there are also traces of old roads on land (id 159728). There are several burial fields here. Reference is also made to the hall at *Borg* (id. 159838) which has partially overlapped with the plant's last hundred years, based on current dates.

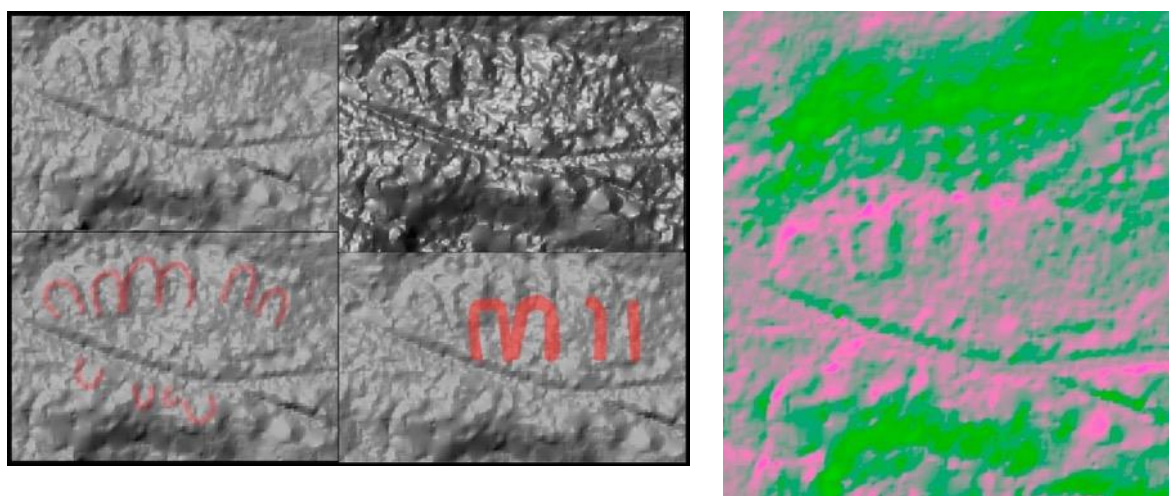


Figure 3 (left) LiDAR-scans from *Askeladden*. Top left.: without geometry. Top right.: LiDAR with additional shadows. Several possible structures may be spotted. Bottom left.: my own suggestions for additional foundations over-layed in Photoshop. Bottom right.: from *Askeladden*. Be advised as to deviating geometry. Figure 4 (right) LiDAR scan from *Høydedata.no* processed in image enhancing application *iDStretch* to pronounce possible additional structures.

Gimsøy, Vestvågøy

Table 4: basic data for Gimsøy

Id in Askeladden	8736
Floor plan	Round to horseshoe-shaped
Number of foundations	6
Measurement of foundations	7 x 5-7 m
Dates	C. A.D. 200-600 A.D. (after Storli 2006)
Distance to closest medieval church	1,7 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	Yes
Height above sea level	10 m
Distance to the sea	1,6 km
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The site today consists of 6 preserved house foundations that appear to have been laid out in a circular to horseshoe shaped floorplan, although there were allegedly 7 visible foundations at the site when it was first recorded (Simonsen 1970: 72). Also, at some point a road was laid through the site, which may have resulted in some foundations being removed, thus leaving the layout a subject to some degree of uncertainty. Gimsøy is located by a marsh which, according to Askeladden, was a shallow, sailable, inlet from the sea when the site was still in use.

The site is located by a hollow road (id 159728) which in turn may appear to be related to the shoreline and the ancient sites adjacent to it. About 850 meters to the west lies a marked elevation named *Vethaugan*, from O.N. for beacon or signaling fire, which may be due to the fact that there was a beacon there (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997), although a connection to the courtyard site cannot be ascertained as the toponym is probably later than the Courtyard site, with a possible overlap in time. But the island of Gimsøy at large must have had a central

location with regard to the shipping lane, but also with regard to land transport. Caroline Fredriksen (2019: 103) points out in her article from Viking 2019 that Gimsøy may have been a possible central place in the Iron Age.

Gimsøy may, despite its few visible house foundations, have been a common thing for Hålogaland, provided there were up to several minor things (Iversen 2015: 115), but there is much uncertainty associated with this interpretation.

The site is located at a place called *Raet*, a natural toponym meaning *moraine ridge*. With regard to Gimsøy, the toponym may come from O.N. for young sow, *gymbr*, so the name can say something about the activity on the site in general, but nothing about centrality and possible function that in turn may be linked to the courtyard site or the surrounding area.

Leknes, Vestvågøy

Table 5: basic data for Leknes

Id in Askeladden	47534
Floor plan	Round to horseshoe shaped
Number of foundations	4
Measurement of foundations	7,5 - 10 x 3,5 - 4 m
Dates	A.D. 400-600/700 A.D. (after Storli 2010)
Distance to closest medieval church	1,6 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	5 m
Distance to the sea	220 m via Haldsvågen
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The site was in use at about the same time as the one at Bøstad. Today there are only 4 visible house foundations, but it probably consisted of far more. It is believed that three foundations were lost when leveling the land for a football pitch, and that another four were removed in connection with road work (Simonsen 1970: 73). Lund, who examined the plant in 1952, believed that there may have been 14 house foundations in total, while Povl Simonsen (1970: 73) sets the number at 11. When the site was examined, stones were found inside the ramparts of the foundations (Johansen and Søbstad 1978: 41), and thus it differs somewhat from other northern Norwegian courtyard sites.

Given the location, the site at Leknes would have been accessible by sailing vessels as well as being centrally located in connection with the shipping lane, attested by the presence of boathouse and moorings (Fredriksen 2019: 103). At Leknes is found, among other things, the large boathouse at Kuholmshaugen (id. 47548-1, figure 5) which measures 520m² (13m x 40 m).



Figure 5 The large boathouse at Leknes. Photo: Are Skarstein Kolberg 2019.

Iversen (2015: 114) writes that Leknes may have been a county thing, and that there were 16 legal districts here in the Middle Ages. There is thus a possible deviation between the number of foundations and legal districts, unless Leknes and Bøstad, interpreted by Iversen as a possible minor, or half-county things, were connected. However, there is uncertainty associated with Bøstad, including with regard to the total number of foundations. In addition,

the site at Gimsøy must also be taken into account as this would have been in use during the same period.

The place where the site is located is called *Myrbakk*. There is nothing about this toponym that says something about centrality or function, it is a pure natural toponym, denoting a marshy area, but the toponym *Leknes* is more interesting. The vocabulary in the name can derive from O.N. *-leik*, as in social activities and games, and may indicate focal points or places of assembly (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997), which may support the hypothesis of courtyard sites being theaters and ritual sites (Armstrong 2010, 2000), but again the toponyms may deviate in time and space from the very courtyard sites, the latter seemingly predating the former in several cases. At *Leknes*, the general centrality of the site, as attested by archaeology, suggests a central role, and the toponym may say something about central place continuity.

Mo, Brønnøy

Table 6: basic data for Mo

Id in Askeladden	109138
Floor plan	Oval to oblong
Number of foundations	6
Measurement of foundations	11–20 x 8–11 m
Dates	790 – 1030 (after Beverfjord and Binns 1994)
Distance to closest medieval church	2 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	Yes
Height above sea level	10
Distance to the sea	660

Certain/uncertain

Certain

The site consists of six distinct house foundations, but the part to the west has been removed in connection with work on county road 17. There may have been 12–15 house foundations here in total. There are some burial mounds in connection with the plant. Mo has been within the division of what constituted the province of Hålogaland. Mo would have been very central to, and easily accessible from, the shipping lane in what may have constituted the legal district of Nordsømme (Iversen 2015: a111).

Etymologically, *Mo* simply denotes a sand depositon, or *mo*, that is, a flat area offset by river or coast. This corresponds well to the fact that the river *Oselva* has its run here. *Mo*, however, is close to the farm *Tilrem*, which dates from *Tiolgarheimr*, an important trading place in Snorri Sturluson’s *Heimskringla*, but the prefix in this toponym, *Tiolgar*, is probably derived from an old river name (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997), thus no direct toponymic indications of centrality may be traced. A larger hollow road network that runs right by the site has also been found here (id 109158-1).

Tjøtta, Alstadhaug

Table 7: basic data for Tjøtta

Id in Askeladden	38345
Floor plan	Round to horseshoe shaped
Number of foundations	7 certain
Measurement of foundations	12 × 9 m
Dates	A.D. 500–1000 A.D. (after Wik 1983)
Distance to closest medieval church	600 m
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes

Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	15 m
Distance to the sea	600 m
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The facility at Tjøtta consists of seven positive house foundations in addition to 6–9 possible ones. Today's height above the sea is 15 meters, but it would have been 5-10 meters when it was in use (Berglund 1995: 53), at that time there may have been a navigable bay all the way up to the facility, giving it direct sea access.

One of the things most strongly associated with the island of Tjøtta is Chief Hårek of Tjøtta, who probably lived from the second half of the 10th century to the first half of the 11th century A.D. Hårek and the farm of Tjøtta are both mentioned in *Heimskringla* (Snorri 2003). Although information from *Heimskringla* can be put to a certain degree of doubt, there is much archaeological evidence that the farm Tjøtta and the surrounding area have been important since the early Iron Age. It is also assumed that information in the sagas that goes on named persons and places has a fairly high level of reliable content, in addition, the degree of reliability in written sources such as sagas will increase as the distance in time between events and recording decreases. Original content may be preserved, mostly unchanged, for up to about 200 years, roughly corresponding to the time between Hårek and Snorri (Kolberg 2019 a). At Tjøtta farm itself there are several burial fields and menhirs. There are larger burial fields and moorings nearby.

The very courtyard site is located at a location that is charted as *Leikenga*. It is assumed that O.N. *-leik* derives from places of gatherings and centrality (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997; Særheim 2014: 52), while the name Tjøtta itself probably comes from O.N. for “thick thigh” and refers to the landscape form (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). Here, the site seemingly corresponds in time to the toponym. In other words, there is a certain toponymic support for a central function at the site.

Vassås, Bindal

Table 8: basic data for Vassås

Id in Askeladden	249780
Floor plan	Approximately round
Number of foundations	10-12
Measurement of foundations	Ca 11 x 9 m
Dates	Undated
Distance to closest medieval church	400-500 m
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	40 m
Distance to the sea	120 m
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The site was discovered on LiDAR in May 2019 and has not yet been thoroughly investigated in-field. However, it is well preserved, one can clearly see that it forms a circle with burial mounds on each side. There are apparently 10-12 house foundations with a possible mound in the middle. It is approximately 53 m in diameter, which corresponds to Vollmoen and Værem. It has not yet been dated but can be thought to coincide with the latter two.

The name *Vassås* indicates, according to the Norwegian Place Name lexicon (Norsk stadnamnleksikon), that it may have been a low lying wet area. It is conveniently located for access to the sea, well protected inside the inlet of *Hestvika* which would have been accessible via the lower lying isthmus of Bindalseidet, that, as suggested by the postfix *-eidet* (from O.N.),

may have been a portage. The *eid*-toponym is also found further to the north from Vassås. In other words, the site has been relatively central and well protected with regard to coastal traffic. Otherwise there are several moorings in the area, and the toponym *-naust* (boathouse) is also quite widespread, indicative of maritime traditions and the importance of the shipping lane.

Also, on the landside, the site must have held a central position, located next to a road which, in all likelihood, partly coincides with older roads if one is to judge from the location of gravemounds along the road, as well as Vassås medieval church (id 85780). The latter is located 400-500 meters south-west of the Courtyard site.

According to Aslak Bolt's *Jordebok*, in many respects the Norwegian equivalent to the Norman Domesday book, (AB 137,138), Bindalen in the 16th century was part of the county of *Ytre Namdal* but is not denoted as a separate skipreide. Iversen (2017: 87–89) points out that this may be due to changes through time, and that Bindalen in older times may have been part of Hålogaland. With regard to the various foundations, or houses as it were, it is somewhat unclear as to what areas they may have represented, as there are several other courtyard sites in Hålogaland. If the theory of thing-sites holds, it can be assumed that the site at Bindalen is based on the areas that was later added to Brønnøysund, which around 1500 was a separate parish (AB 146), but again there are chronological deviations.

Vollmoen, Steigen

Table 9: basic data for Vollmoen

Id in Askeladden	7945
Floor plan	Oval to horseshoe
Number of foundations	16–17
Measurement of foundations	C. 11 x 9 m
Dates	550–900 (after Iversen 2015a)
Distance to closest medieval church	1,2 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No

Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	31 m
Distance to the sea	815 m
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The site is well preserved with 16–17 house foundations, which according to Iversen (2015: 107) reflect 16 different legal districts for which Vollmoen was a county thing, given the number of foundations visible today reflect the actual number of houses in the facility when it was in use. There are also several burial mounds adjacent to the facility. Approximately 800 meters from the site to the west, down by the fjord, a boat mooring site (id 37753) has been found with two boathouses of approximately 13–20 meters and widths of 8–13 meters, but the dates here are uncertain. Like the facility at Åse, the ramparts at Vollmoen are free of stone, which may refer to the local building custom Sjøvold (1971: 26,27).

The nearest medieval church site is Steigen church (id 85561), located 1.2 km south of the site. Most of the larger grave mounds are located near the church with the exception of one (id 8840). The courtyard site at Vollmoen, therefore, does not appear to have held a very central location in the landscape, which supports the hypothesis that courtyard sites were built on neutral grounds, i.e. not in connection with large farms (Iversen 2015a: 105). It is likely, however, that there are several unregistered farms from the same period on the area on which the plant is located, as it forms an easily accessible bay. Here, too, Steigen's strategic location along the coast and the site's relative proximity to water must be taken into account.

The name *Vollmoen* is composed of O.N. *voll* (rampart or higher lying area) and *mo*, in this case possibly denoting a flat, grassy meadow (Naob 2017). However, according to Stefan Brink, toponyms containing *-voll* can indicate central functions (Ødegaard 2018: 91). The name may therefore say something about the possible central role of the courtyard site, but not more specifically about its function. In terms of concurrence between toponyms and sites, there may

have been a simultaneity at Vollmoen, as the site dates to c. 550 A.D., corresponding well to what is known about the dates of O.N. toponyms.

Table 10: basic data for Åse

	Id in Askeladden	47651
	Floor plan	Round
	Number of foundations	14
Åse, Andøy	Measurement of foundations	10 x 4 m
	Dates	200-550
	Distance to closest medieval church	No sites in the near proximity
	Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
	Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
	Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	Yes
	Height above sea level	4 m
	Distance to the sea	450 m
	Certain/uncertain	Certain



Figure 6 The site at Vollmoen. Air photography from <http://www.Norgebilder.no>.

The site was investigated archaeologically by Thorleif Sjøvold (1971: 6–8) in the years 1947–1950, later, according to Askeladden, new coal samples were extracted for dating in addition to those Sjøvold arranged to take out. The dates indicate that the site was in use from about 200–550 (Sjøvold 1971: 24.25; Iversen 2015a: 113). Sjøvold points out that the ramparts in the house foundations, like the ones at Vollmoen, are devoid of stones.

The site is located next to a junction of roads dating to the younger Iron Age (c. A.D. 550–1050 A.D.), including ID 250155-0 and 250145-1. In view of the location of burial fields, settlements and boathouses, it is natural that there has been a road all the way along the water's edge on Andøya, of which one road has ventured up to the site at Åse (Jacobsen 2003: 71.72,96–100). In connection with the shoreline and the roads are found Iron Age boathouses, seen to constitute links between sea and land. The courtyard site would have been centrally located with a view to the inshore traffic along the coast up through the Hadsselfjord and on through the Risøysundet, but also considering the settlement pattern along the coastal edge of Andøya.

Iversen (2015: 113,114) believes that Åse may have been a county thing for 14 legal districts, and that the site at Bjarkøy took over when Åse was phased out, but that they may still have overlapped for some time before 500. Åse has 14 house foundations, while Bjarkøy has 16. This small increase may, according to Iversen (2015: 113), be due to the addition of two new legal districts. But again, there is uncertainty as to the total number of foundations. For example, several of the foundations at Bjarkøy are only assumed to have been there based on an overall assessment of how the floor plan probably looked, as a larger area, and possibly also foundations, has been destroyed due to recent farming activity (Sjøvold 1971: 8; Johansen and Søbstad 1978: 13–18).

With regard to the toponym *Åse*, there are no explanations other than it being a natural name (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). The very location of the courtyard site itself is today called *Filloksnes* or *Finnklokneset*, which may denote a small inlet or pond (Naob 2017), corresponding well to the lay of the land, but it may have Sami origins, the original meaning not known.

Møre og Romsdal County

Hustad, Fræna

Table 11: basic data for Hustad

Id in Askeladden	16770
Floor plan	Irregular/oblong
Number of foundations	7-8
Measurement of foundations	Ca. 6-7 x 3-6 m
Dates	Undatet
Distance to closest medieval church	2 km

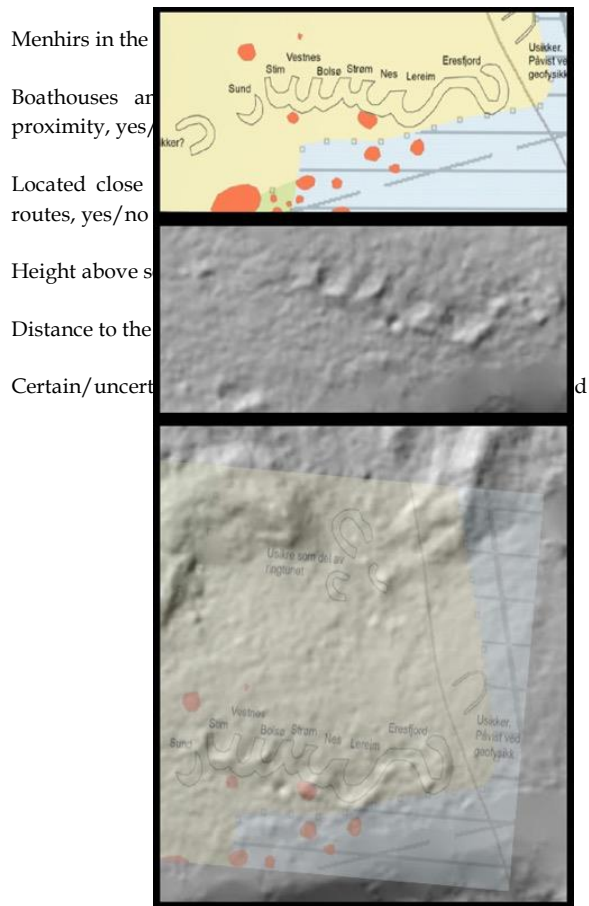


Figure 7 The site at Hustad. Backgroundphoto from Høydedata.no, drawing from Iversen(2017a).

The courtyard site is now lost but was supposedly part of a larger burial field. According to the information on Askeladden it was no longer possible to see monuments here during a survey in 1976. This site lacks documentation, and it was never dated (Iversen 2017a: 96).

Hustad is centrally located in regard to the shipping lane. Although Hustadvika is very weather-exposed, thus posing to a problem where sailing is concerned, the site would still have held a central role with regard to access from the surrounding islands, accessible via different coves that are more protected than Hustadvika, which is an open stretch of sea. Fræna also has a mainland connection. The toponym *eid* is also found in close proximity, suggestive of portages to the east of the site, where ships could be dragged across stretches of land between various lakes, allowing for a more protected route between the fjords on each side.

The toponym *Hustad* may be derived from the plural form of *hus* (O.N. for house), i.e. there were several houses there, while Oluf Rygh believed that the name could mean homestead or farm (Rygh 1999 [1897]; Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). If the name Hustad means several houses, it is an interesting coincidence, but attempts at detecting courtyard sites at the other places by the name Hustad has proved unsuccessful.

That there was a possible courtyard site here was suggested by Kari Støren Binns and Ingvild Onsøien Strøm (Iversen 2017a: 96), but again, there is a lack of information. Apparently, there were several possible house foundations here in connection with a possible core which may have consisted of 7 foundations in a row, with a possible number 8 detected by georadar (Iversen 2017a: 97). The 8 foundations at the core may reflect the eight skipreider mentioned in king Magnus Lagabøte's will from 1277 (DN), but there may have been as many as 13 foundations in total, laid out in an irregular floorplan (Iversen 2017a: 98).

In LiDAR scans it is possible to detect structures or shapes reminiscent of house foundations, but they are most likely to be natural formations. The formations do resemble the drawing of the site reproduced by Iversen in figure 7 (2017: 98). If you put the drawing as a layer over the LiDAR scan, you can see that the shapes coincide, and it is very likely that these formations were the ones that Strøm and Binns identified and deemed to be house foundations. Hustad must therefore be regarded as highly uncertain, most likely disproved as a courtyard site.

Rogaland County

In Rogaland there are several central courtyard sites with a particularly strong concentration around the district of Jæren. The two most well-known, and also the most extensive, are *Dysjane* at Tinghaug and *Varhaug*. These sites were investigated at an early stage before courtyard sites were fully appreciated as a separate category. As mentioned initially, the sites in Rogaland were previously interpreted as villages, which will be further discussed in the review of the individual sites. The alleged site at Skjelbrei in Sandnes (id 226100) was removed before any archaeological investigations were carried out (Iversen 2017b: 724). According to Askeladden, the site was registered by Helliesen in 1901 who identified two house foundations. Today's location in Askeladden is only approximate as it was not charted. Skjelbrei will therefore not be discussed here. Nor will the proposed site at Ritland in Suldal be discussed as it lacks documentation and charting, and like Skjelbrei, it has never been archaeologically examined (Iversen 2017b: 724).

Dysjane at Tinghaug

Table 12: basic data for Dysjane

Id in Askeladden	54113
Floor plan	Oval to horseshoe shaped
Number of foundations	16
Measurement of foundations	12-20 x 6-10 m
Dates	A.D.200-600 A.D. (after Iversen 2015a)
Distance to closest medieval church	5 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	100 m

Distance to the sea	10 km
Certain/uncertain	Certain

Dysjane is the only courtyard site to be found at a known thing-site, although the connection is uncertain. Today, the facility is highly visible with a floor plan consisting of 16 larger house foundations laid around an open space. There are several burial mounds in and around the site, including one in the middle. Placing Dysjane in a marine context is difficult as it is located about 10 km from the coast, at an altitude of about 100 meters above sea level. Although it cannot be altogether ruled out as Tinghaug, it would have been a central vantage point and a natural gathering site in a landscape in which the coast and the shipping lane were important factors.

The toponym *Dysjane* may be attributed to rocks piled up in mounds, which has been interpreted as an indicator that the area has been rich in burials (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). However, it is more likely that these are cleared rubble due to a generally rocky subsoil, characteristic of the entire region. The toponym *Dysjane* is also found at several other locations in the region, lending further support to the rocky subsoil theory.

Håvodl/Sælland, Time

Table 13: basic data for Håvodl

Id in Askeladden	33899
Floor plan	Uncertain
Number of foundations	5 Certain
Measurement of foundations	Uncertain
Dates	A.D. 450–630 A.D. (after Iversen 2017b)
Distance to closest medieval church	6 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No

Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	100 m
Distance to the sea	15 km
Certain/uncertain	Uncertain

The site is no longer visible as it has been removed but was last examined in 1989. Then, only 5 house foundations were registered (Iversen 2017b: 724).

The name is possibly derived from O.N. *há*, denoting a higher lying area or rampart. Another possible explanation is that the name is composed of *há* and *vadl/vadill*, O.N. for camp (Fritzner 1972). If this interpretation is correct, Håvodl is the only courtyard site with a toponym indicative of an encampment. Given the location in the landscape, the first interpretation is most plausible as the plant has been erected at a height above a valley that would have constituted a passage between landscape rooms. Several burial fields have been recorded in this passage, indicating a traffic route (Gansum et al. 1997), a larger stream also passes through the valley. The site may have been central in terms of traffic towards the higher lying parts of Jæren, where several farms from the Iron Age have been registered. In this case, Håvodl's central role is supported by Brink's previously mentioned interpretation of places with the name *-voll* as central sites.

Klauhauane, Hå

Table 14: basic data for Klauhauane

Id in Askeladden	61076
Floor plan	Round to oval
Number of foundations	19
Measurement of foundations	C. 9-16 x 6-8 m
Dates	A.D. 135-872 A.D.
Distance to closest medieval church	2 km

Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	Yes
Height above sea level	31 m
Distance to the sea	3,6 km
Certain/uncertain	Certain

Klauhauane has an approximate circular to somewhat oval floor plan with 19 house foundations (Iversen 2017b: 725). There is also a large burial mound adjoining the site. Dates suggest a lifespan from 135–872 AD, but there are doubts pertaining to the earliest dates. In addition, there may be several possible phases of use, with some foundations possibly being built above older ones (Iversen 2017b: 727,731,743).

In terms of centrality, the site is located by an older road, also passing several burial fields in the proximity of the courtyard site. Klauhauane could have had a central function for the district of *Hå*. At the farm *Kvia*, about 500 meters south-east of the site, leidangs-things (military gatherings and likely the levying of taxes) were supposed to have been held at various occasions (Nesvåg 2011: 68), but a possible connection to the courtyard site at Klauhauane is not known.

According to O. Møllerop, the toponym *Klauhauane* is derived from *klov*, meaning hoofs, due to the shape of the terrain likening cow feet (Grimm 2010: 134), while *Hå*, from O.N., denotes a higher-lying area (Fritzner 1972).



Figure 8 The site of Klauhauane. Photo: Are Skarstein Kolberg.

Kåda, Hjelmeland

Table 15: basic data for Kåda

Id in Askeladden	24136
Floor plan	Uncertain
Number of foundations	2-4 detected
Measurement of foundations	10 x 6 m
Dates	Undatet
Distance to closest medieval church	3,5 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	40 m
Distance to the sea	950 m
Certain/uncertain	Uncertain

The site does not appear as clear on LiDAR, nor has it been investigated archaeologically. Therefore, it remains undated (Iversen 2017b: 724). According to Askeladden, there are four house foundations around an open space, but only two of these are clearly visible. The location of these suggests a circular shape, but the layout is uncertain. The place is central with regard to the entrance to the Ryfylke region and the road ahead, for example in regard to the route to the thing at Gulating, lending some support to the thing-theory.

The site is adjacent to a burial field with pre-historic stone fences and Iron Age farms, much of which was removed in the 1980s according to Askeladden. Today, the foundations are seen as partially razed walls or stone piles. It may seem that several of the foundations at Kåda may be an additional farm which has been misinterpreted as a courtyard site. Rather, there may even have been several farms with shared fields or even a village. Etymologically, the name *Kåda* can be interpreted as a cottage or house, which in turn may indicate that it has been a farming site since pre-historic times. Also, similar names are found several places in rural Norway (Rygh 1999 [1897]). Hjelmeland is derived from the mountain formations close by, in other words a natural name (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). The toponyms, therefore, suggest nothing about the function of the place or about centrality.

Alternatively, these may be misinterpreted grave mounds, or cairns, the ramparts are reminiscent of previously registered mortuary houses, i.e. houses built into burial mounds or cairns, known from before at other locations in Rogaland (Magnussen 2013: 55). The courtyard site of Kåda is thus considered to be highly uncertain.

Leksaren, Hå

Table 16: basic data for Leksaren

Id in Askeladden	34529
Floor plan	Round
Number of foundations	15
Measurement of foundations	8–16 x 4–8 m
Dates	0–550 A.D. (after Iversen 2017b)

Distance to closest medieval church	1,5 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	40 m
Distance to the sea	2 km
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The site is highly visible with an oval to circular floor plan consisting of 15 larger house foundations. In connection with the site are also found several burial mounds and cairns, one of which is almost integrated into the courtyard site. There are several large burial fields in the immediate area.



Figure 9 The site at Varhaug. Photo: Luftwaffe/Feldwebel Huber.

Etymologically speaking, there may be several possible explanations for the names *Leksaren* and *Varhaug*. The prefix in *Leksaren* can be derived from N.O. *leik*, denoting game or contest, and may point to a gathering place (Fritzner 1972; Særheim 2014: 52). The prefix *Var* in the name *Varhaug* can refer to moorings, from O.N. *vor*. Another possible explanation is

that it points to a vantage point, then with regard to a guard post (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). Var may also be derived from *væte* or *våtta*, O.N. for beacon (Fritzner 1972), which does not immediately make sense as Leksaren and Varhaug are not at a particularly high point in the landscape of Jæren. One needs to venture quite a bit inland before there is any proper elevation. But a connection cannot be ruled out, as a beacon could have been erected on top of a mound or a cairn, or otherwise made to be visible.

If the name *Varhaug* can be attributed to the courtyard site, it may indicate a coastal connection, but it is more likely that Varhaug must be attributed to the site as a whole. It is also not likely that the foundations at Leksaren have been moorings or boathouses as they are too far inland. For larger vessels they would have been too small. Furthermore, the courtyard site probably predates the O.N. toponyms, although with some possible overlap. There is, however, a degree of centrality in the landscape around the site, to which the possible explanation of the name *Leksaren* is more likely connected. But a central place continuity cannot be ruled out.

Øygarden, Rennesøy

Table 17: basic data for Øygarden

Id in Askeladden	64548
Floor plan	Approximately round
Number of foundations	10
Measurement of foundations	C. 11 x 7 m
Dates	A.D. 100 - 200 A.D. to 750 (after Iversen 2017)
Distance to closest medieval church	2,1 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	Yes
Height above sea level	25 m

Distance to the sea	270 m
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The site is located on a plateau below Hegrabergfjellet which forms a natural vantage point on the island of Vestre Åmøy. The courtyard site overlooks the Mastrafjord. 1 km to the southwest is found the rock of Varaberget with a height of 70 meters, commanding a great view over the Sound of Lines. A grave mound is found at the top. The toponym *Varaberget*, which stems from *Vardaberg*, meaning a rock with a cairn on top, a toponym that is also found in the close proximity. Possibly, there was a cairn on top of Varaberget, marking a waypoint. There may also have been a beacon here. A lower rock with a similar name, and with a burial mound on top, is also located on the other side of Åmøy towards the Mastrafjord. Also, similar toponyms are found at other locations in the vicinity. The courtyard site therefore appears to have been centrally located in terms of access to Jæren. According to the Norwegian place name lexicon, the toponym Åmøy may stem from O.N. *Ama*, meaning *to scrub*, referring to the slippery rock surfaces the shore, polished by the sea, but the interpretation is uncertain (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). Also, the courtyard site partly predates the O.N. names.

The floorplan is an approximate circle, but it is not nearly as closed as corresponding circular sites. It has been argued that it is a kind of semicircle or horseshoe, and that it differs from other sites (Iversen 2015b: 222), but the site has an opening to the east and is adapted to the terrain in which it is located, thus the site can be interpreted as respecting the form of the plateau. Also, the placement of the burial mounds helps to close the plan in a sort of invisible circle.

Sogn og Fjordane County

There are two rather distinct courtyard sites in Sogn and Fjordane, Hjelle and Gjerland respectively. They differ from the norm in terms of house construction methods, as they both consist of three-tier timber post-constructed houses, as revealed during top-soil stripping. Nor do they have larger openings in the gable (Randers 1989; Olsen 2005: 339). In addition, there is a similar site at Sausjord in Voss in Hordaland county. The question then is

whether they are courtyard sites or local varieties of farms or even villages. The facility at Gjerland is somewhat inadequately documented and lacks dates, as well as geometry and id in Askeladden. Furthermore, it is as of today lost/removed. Gjerland, thus, will not be discussed here.

Hjelle, Stryn

Table 18: basic data for Hjelle

Id in Askeladden	95319-1
Floor plan	Uncertain
Number of foundations	3 certain, may have been as many as 15
Measurement of foundations	9-14 x 6 m
Dates	570-1020
Distance to closest medieval church	None in the near proximity
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	29 m
Distance to the sea	C. 23 km
Certain/uncertain	Uncertain

Post-holes corresponding to three houses were found in 2002 (Olsen 2005: 323,324), but according to Askeladden there may have been up to 15 houses in the courtyard site. The recovery of cultural layers and fireplaces inside the houses suggest they held some form of housing or accommodation function rather than outhouses or barns. The courtyard site was dated by samples from the fireplaces inside the houses, yielding a date ranging from about A.D. 570-1020 A.D., but the main phase appears to have been around A.D. 810-880 A.D. (Olsen 2005: 327). It is difficult to glean anything as to the layout of the site, but if there were up to 15

houses here, it may have had an oval shape, judging from the placement of the three probable houses.

It is plausible that this is a courtyard site as the houses appear to have been oriented in towards an open space. Based on the gradually narrowing shape of the houses as suggested by the placement of the post-holes, the openings probably faced the open space in the middle of the site as the houses were at their widest at this end (Olsen 2005: 323).

The site is located on a river plain at the bottom of Oppstrynsvatnet, an inland water which is connected to Nordfjord via the Stryne River. Two rapids make it difficult to sail here, but it cannot be ruled out that smaller vessels may have been carried overland, as Oppstrunsvatnet constitutes a well-protected port. There are several toponyms with the postfix *-eid* (*portage*, O.N.) along the river. Today the name *Kyrkjeieidet* is known, but on a map from 1790 by A. Krogh the toponym *Stovreejde*² is known. Also, based on data from NGU and the location of recorded Iron Age sites along the river, it is not impossible that it had a different run in the past due to meandering. The courtyard site is located in what would have been the county of Firdafylke, roughly in Nedstryn skipreide. The site may have been centrally located in regards the connection between the inland and the coastal areas via the fjord, but also in regard to the pre-historic settlement patterns in the surrounding fjords, also connected via possible portages, as suggested by locations bearing the *-eid* toponyms as well as the height above water at these locations, allowing for easy over-land transport of boats.

There are no toponyms here that say anything about function or meaning. *Hjelle* is a natural toponym and either means *a plateau* or *elm forest*, while *Stryn* is probably a river name (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997), which again is in correspondence to the lay of the land.

What can speak against *Hjelle* being a courtyard site is that the houses have no clearly defined gable openings, which differs from the construction method of most other courtyard sites. Furthermore, a larger layer of brewing/boiling stones has been found, indicating farm (Olsen 2005: 324,336–338), but according to Asle Bruen Olsen (2005: 337,338) the barren soil

² Krogh 1790, Nordre Bergenhus amt nr 5: Kart over Prostiet Nordfjord: Sogn og Fjordane. Available from Kartverket, the Norwegian Mapping Authority: <https://www.kartverket.no/Kart/Historiske-kart/>

around the site is not suitable for agriculture, speaking against farm function. Boat houses are ruled out as the houses would not have had wide enough openings in gables. The courtyard site at Hjelle is therefore uncertain.

Troms County

Bjarkøy, Harstad

Table 19: basic data for Bjarkøy

Id in Askeladden	68225-1
Floor plan	Oval
Number of foundations	16
Measurement of foundations	C. 10 x 4 m
Dates	A.D. 500–800 A.D.
Distance to closest medieval church	1 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	50 m
Distance to the sea	480 m
Certain/uncertain	Certain

Bjarkøy is mentioned in *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson and is traditionally connected to Thorir Hund, perhaps mostly known for supposedly having pierced Olaf Haraldsson (St. Olaf) with his spear in the battle of Stiklestad (1030 A.D.), who is said to have resided at the old chieftain's farm of *Øvergård* (Storli 2006). Bjarkøy has undoubtedly been an important place along the coast of Hålogaland. Along the shore there are several boat houses and moorings. There are also larger burial fields and traces of settlements that indicate wealth and power up to the Middle Ages, including high-status farms right by the courtyard site on what is today

called *Sandmælen* (Niemi 2016: 5). The cultural landscape at Bjarkøy is partly a larger protected area of national interest (id 141602-1), but the courtyard site itself has been removed. Fortunately, it was well documented by Harald Egenæs Lund at the Museum of Tromsø in the 1950s. The courtyard site consisted of 16 house foundations with stone-free ramparts around an oval opening (Johansen and Søbstad 1978: 17). The site is stated to have had a diameter of 34 meters. However, parts of it may have been destroyed by modern farm buildings erected partly on top of it (Johansen and Søbstad 1978: 13–17). The dates indicate that the site was in use from about A. D. 500–800 A.D., but it may also have been in use somewhat earlier (Iversen 2015a: 113).

Iversen (2015a: 106) believes that the tufts may represent the 16 circuits that existed between Vesterålen and Troms in the Middle Ages, but it seems that Lund may have had more tufts here.

Sandmælen is a natural toponym, denoting a riverbank/sand deposit, in other words it does not say anything about centrality or function except that sand banks can sometimes have been practical for landing boats, and that trade may have taken place at such places. However, the toponym *Bjarkøy* itself is interesting. It may derive from O.N. for *birch wood*, i.e. an island with birch forest, which in turn may be a natural name, but according to the Norwegian place name lexicon it is probably derived from O.N. *bjarkøyjarréttr*, or *the Bjarkøy law*, the name of an old law regulating trade and trading places, from *Björkö* in Sweden, where is found the well-known trading hub of *Birka*. The place name lexicon states that Bjarkøy must have been an important trading hub for, among other things, trade with the Sami population (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997), so the toponym *Bjarkøy* can indicate centrality and hub functions, which are probably also linked to the large and wealthy farms on the island. This is supported by the archeology of the area. The dating of the courtyard site concurs well to the probable age of the toponym.

Trøndelag County

In Trøndelag we find three courtyard sites, all of which were still in use in the Viking age, two of them until the early 11th century. There is also a recently discovered and as of yet

unconfirmed courtyard site in Ogdal (id. 249833), possibly dating to the 800s (Midthjell 2019: 56). This site will not be discussed as more research needs to be done.

Heggstad, Verdal

Table 20: basic data for Heggstad

Id in Askeladden	73589
Floor plan	Approximately round
Number of foundations	4-5
Measurement of foundations	Ca. 8 x 16 m
Dates	A.D. 605-990 til 1025 A.D.
Distance to closest medieval church	900 m
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	62,5 m
Distance to the sea	7 km
Certain/uncertain	Uncertain

Heggstad has a floorplan approximating a closed circle of 40 meters in diameter. There are currently 4 to 5 house foundations here (Iversen 2017a: 94). The site is surrounded by large burial mounds. Dating of the site suggests a timespan of A.D. 605-1025 A.D., with A.D. 990-1025 A.D. being the most probable range (Iversen 2017a: 94). The distance to the river *Verdalselva*, which has been navigable a long way up past Stiklestad by flat bottomed boats and ships (Kolberg 2011) is about 740 meters. According to Iversen, the house foundations may constitute the 5 skipreider in Verdølafylki, but with a possible deviation in the number of house foundations (Iversen 2017a: 95). Is it possible, then, that some house foundations and other features at the site may have been lost due to natural processes or agriculture?

There is a slope just east of the field towards the stream *Bjønndalsbekken*. Further afield, there is a brink overlooking a deep river valley. There have been many landslides in the area (Kolberg 2011), and rivers and streams have shaped the landscape, but the foundations seem to be situated well within the slope towards the brink. On a map drawn by E. Musum in 1922, the extent of the burial ground corresponds to that of today (Stenvik 1989).

Hegstad is centrally located next to Stiklestad, where there has been an important junction and central place in the Iron Age up to the Middle Ages, which also probably explains the location of Stiklestad church (Kolberg 2011). There are several important farms and large burial fields in the area. In this respect, the courtyard site at Heggstad is close to what would have been a vantage point for travel and transport further inland and up the fjord. Otherwise, nothing about the toponym *Heggstad* indicates function or role as it is a natural toponym denoting vegetation and forests.

The courtyard site at Heggstad is somewhat uncertain given the lack of foundations and floor plan, but also the sheer size and appearance of the ramparts. It cannot be ruled out that the houses, or foundations, were mortuary house, that is to say, a burial custom consisting of burying the dead in houses built into grave mounds, similar to that found in connection with the E39 project at Vinjeøra in Norway in 2019 (Hansen 2019). Further archaeological examinations are required.

Skei, Steinkjer

Table 21: basic data for Skei

Id in Askeladden	216807-1
Floor plan	Round
Number of foundations	8 Certain
Measurement of foundations	C. 10-14 x 8-10 m
Dates	A.D. 600-1000 A.D.
Distance to closest medieval church	4,9 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	Yes
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No



Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	125 m
Distance to the sea	5,7 km
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The Skei field, centrally located in Sparbu, is one of Norway's largest burial fields with about 100 burial mounds. Nearby there are several interesting archaeological locations such as Mære and Dalem from which rich burials are known. In addition, there are several menhirs and a courtyard site dating to the period around A.D. 600–1000 AD (Iversen 2017a: 91). Today there are visible traces of 8 house foundations in the courtyards site, but it is cut by the Tanem road at the middle and by the Dalem road in the northwest corner. LiDAR scans show how the site has formed an approximate circular floor plan with a diameter of about 52 meters. In other words, there are doubts as to how many house foundations there were originally, but today's eight fits according to Iversen (2017: 93) with the number of skipreider in the Sparbyggja county. Still, it cannot be ruled out that there have been more. In LiDAR scans you can get the impression of at least nine.

The toponym is derived from O.N. *skeið* which, as already pointed out, may mean a gathering place. The site and the toponym are seemingly contemporary, given the dating. The Skei field can thus be interpreted as having been an important, central, location in the middle of a rich landscape with several large farms (Grønnesby 2019: 266).



Figure 10 The courtyard site at Skei. Photo: Are Skarstein Kolberg.

Værem, Grong

Table 22: basic data for Værem

Id in Askeladden	46620
Floor plan	Round
Number of foundations	13
Measurement of foundations	C. 9–11 x 7–9 m
Dates	A.D. 540–885 A.D. (after Iversen. 2017a)
Distance to closest medieval church	3,5 km
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	70 m

Distance to the sea	30 km
Certain/uncertain	Certain

The courtyard site is located on a plateau above the river Namsen, about 900 meters from the farm *Værem*, and is laid out in a circle about 53 meters in diameter and with burial mounds adjacent to the compound. *Værem* has had different phases with older house foundations detected underneath younger ones (Iversen 2017a: 87), but the basic layout can be assumed to have been more or less identical throughout all phases. The site consists of 13 house foundations which, according to Iversen, correspond to the different rural districts in the Namdals county, as the skipreide-division never quite settled geographically in this region according to Iversen (2017a: 88.89).

Oluf Rygh believed the toponym *Værem* came from an area in the river with quieter currents. This is supported by the toponym *Sem*, O.N. for *sea*, on the other side of the river (Rygh 1999 [1897]), also supported by the Norwegian place name lexicon (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). The toponyms may be contemporary with the courtyard site but may have been given its name in later times as the farm has expanded, making it the namesake for a larger area, provided today's farm is located close to the former. The connection between courtyard site and toponym, therefore, is uncertain.

The courtyard site would have been centrally located, considering Namsen's important function as a traffic artery. Namsen is currently navigable with smaller, flat-bottomed vessels. The water level in Namsen during the Iron Age probably has not changed much, but it may have been navigable all the way up to Grong during the period when the courtyard site was in use (Iversen 2017a: 87). About twenty boat graves have been registered along Namsen (Pettersen 1988). If Rygh's explanation of the toponym *Værem* is correct, the place may have been used for mooring boats as it would have been suitable.



Figure 11 The courtyard site at Værem. Photo: Are Skarstein Kolberg.

Vest-Agder County

In Vest-Agder there are two courtyard sites that may appear to have had coastal connections as well as central locations. These two sites, *Spangereid* and *Oddernes*, are nevertheless considered as uncertain. They will be treated separately in the following summary.

Spangereid, Lindesnes

Table 23: basic data for Spangereid

Id in Askeladden	3420
Floor plan	Uncertain
Number of foundations	4 certain
Measurement of foundations	Ca. 10 x 7 m
Dates	Undatet
Distance to closest medieval church	250 m
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	Yes

Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	Yes (marine, portage)
Height above sea level	5 m
Distance to the sea	200 m
Certain/uncertain	Uncertain

The area around the courtyard site has got strong marine connections. As the name suggests, there has been a portage here, which has also been proven archaeologically (id 51304). Otherwise there are many moorings and boathouses in the area. The place where the courtyard site is located has evidently been a central and strategically important point with regard to control of traffic further inland, especially considering the harsh weather conditions around Lindesnes and Lista, as the portage of Spangereid would have allowed for safer passage to the districts concerned. The place would have had a central location in Edgafylki County both with regard to the coastal areas and to the inland districts. This is supported by the fact that a hillfort is situated on a top overlooking the inlet towards the portage (id. 102152). Just north-west of the courtyard site there is a hill called *Vardebakken*, the pre-fix *varde* (from O.N. for *cairn*) indicating that it has marked a waypoint or route, but it may also have been a beacon there.

The courtyard site itself is part of a larger burial field (Presthusmoen) and has a probable date to the transition to the younger Roman Iron Age (Stylegar and Grimm 2004). However, there is uncertainty about the plant. Today, it consists of four visible house foundations, one of which has a road that goes through, while others are difficult to distinguish from the burial mounds adjacent to them as the area has been disturbed. In Askeladden there is no mention of a courtyard site, on the other hand the burial field is listed as having four boathouse foundations and some disturbed burial mounds as well as possible house foundations or grave mounds. In the past it was not uncommon for house foundations in connection with courtyard sites to be mistaken for grave mounds (Stylegar 1999: 147), the descriptions in Askeladden are nevertheless of a much more recent date and seem plausible. It is also not an obvious system in the placement and layout of the house foundations.

Therefore, there is a certain probability that the structures at Spangereid are not part of a courtyard site.

Oddernes, Kristiansand

Table 24: basic data for Oddernes

Id in Askeladden	23285
Floor plan	Uncertain
Number of foundations	5
Measurement of foundations	5–7 x 3–4,5 m
Dates	Uncertain, A.D. 60–70
Distance to closest medieval church	130 m
Menhirs in the proximity, yes/no	No
Boathouses and moorings in the proximity, yes/no	No
Located close to hollow roads/old routes, yes/no	No
Height above sea level	24 m
Distance to the sea	1 km
Certain/uncertain	Uncertain

Like the courtyard at Spangereid, this is an uncertain site. Oddernes was surveyed in 1971–72 in connection with the construction of a congregation house (Rolfsen 1976; Sørensen 2012: 4), resulting in the uncovering of wall ditches answering to five houses. These may have overlapped each other, but several parts of the ditches were gone. Furthermore, it could look as if the walls had gone all the way around, i.e. there was not an opening in the end gable similar to those otherwise found in connection with courtyard sites. The dates are uncertain. In the 1970s, coal samples were taken from the trenches as well as from a fireplace in one house, yielding a possible dating to around 60–70 A.D. (Rolfsen 1972: 71.72).

The site would have been centrally located in the landscape at the entrance from Skagerak and into the Tofdalsfjord. There are several burial mounds as well as a hillfort (id 33257) along the inlet to the fjord. The toponym *Oddernes* may be derived from the river name

Otra and the ending *-nes*, i.e. a promontory. In other words, Oddernes probably means a promontory protruding into the river (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). The toponym, then, indicates an association with a traffic artery, but first and foremost, *Oddernes* is a natural toponym. Also, the courtyard site predates the toponym if the yielded dates are correct.

The layout appears to have been a series of houses, possibly a more amorphous to oval shape if one takes adjacent postholes into consideration. In all, 14 long houses and several possible pit-houses were found (Sørensen 2012: 4), but any dating from these does not exist, and any connection to a possible courtyard site is unknown. Rolfsen (1976: 73,77,78) writes that the sites from the possible plant can be about farm buildings from a farm, and that the whole site can be about a larger farm complex. The site has now been removed. It is also impossible to see traces of a courtyard site in aerial photography from before 1972. The site at Oddernes is thus highly uncertain.

Discussion

Courtyard sites have often been linked to military functions and to the *leidang* system, but there is a chronological problem as the introduction of the *leidang* is often set to the 10th century A.D. It is still probable that a similar system can at least be traced back to the 9th century A.D. (Kolberg 2019 b), but even here there are discrepancies in time between when most of the courtyard sites were established and the introduction of the *leidang*. A link to an earlier system of mobilisation on which the *leidang* can be based is probable, however, as courtyard sites appear to have been built at central locations that have been practically accessible via roadways, either via the coast, rivers or ashore, making them natural focal points. Furthermore, a relatively strict pattern is followed in terms of design that may be reminiscent of Roman military camps and forts, which in turn may refer to well-organized military systems.

Of course, it is tempting to see the plants in the context of social organisation, the thoughts go to Harald Blåtann's ring fortresses and road systems in Denmark, but this is problematic given the distribution of the courtyard sites in time. However, elements of social organising can be traced in the courtyard sites, it is likely that they were part of some sort of

system. They were connected by advanced road systems, but then in a figurative sense in terms of coastal sailing routes and advanced boat technology, something that has been important to coastal Norway for a length of time. There are also traces of road systems on land. From the 13th century there are laws that dictate roads and their maintenance (Kolberg 2011), but it is not impossible that these are based on older regulations. The question then is not necessarily whether they were part of *a* system, but *which* system(s).

If there was a strong connection to the *Leidang* and the maritime, place names with references to ports and shipping should be able to function as location determiners (including post-fixes and toponyms pertaining to *-knarr* (a common ship type, although mainly a trading vessel), *-båtstø* (moorings), *-naust* (boathouse)), but this is far from always the case. Several attempts to detect courtyard sites from maritime toponyms alone have so far been unsuccessful, including the community of *Knarrlaget* in Trøndelag, the toponym indicating a district responsible for equipping ships of the type *knarr* (Sandnes and Stemshaug 1997). Many courtyard sites, as shown, do not have names that indicate marine connections, neither are they located in such places. *Dysjane* in Rogaland county are located at a central elevation in the landscape, at a good distance from the sea. On average, the facilities are located about 5 km from the sea both before and after 500 A.D. (Table 25). In general, names that indicate function are not widespread to the extent that there are clear common denominators. There is also a problem with regard to the distance in time between courtyard sites and toponyms, as the oldest sites predates the toponyms. Either way, places like *Knarrlaget* may very well be connected to the *Leidang*, but the latter is not necessarily connected to courtyard sites.

Toponymy alone, thus, is not sufficient. One must also look at factors such as topography and the cultural landscape. With regard to centrality, one must look at each area, as local and regional factors dictate what is central to any given place. In some places the coastal route will be the most important route of travel and transport, in other places rivers have been important. Traveling over land by roads may have been important in other areas. Junctions may have been just as central as at nodal points along the coast. To the extent that there are variations in space between the courtyard sites in regard to location, this is due to different criteria for what is central for different areas, rather than different functions and roles

in different regions. Toponymy and topography may indicate central functions for courtyard sites, for example in connection with the toponym *skei*.

Also, there is not necessarily a one-to-one relationship between toponym and courtyard sites as the latter have largely been named in retrospect based on the places they are located at, as the courtyard sites quite often predate toponyms, but that they may have a traditional toponym associated with them, again indicating some sort of function and use continuity at the site in general, or that they are located near large farms that may be dated back to the Iron Age or even beyond. Again, the toponym must be assessed against the topography and the presence of any monuments and sites such as grave mounds. It is also pointed out that place names can move, that is, they follow the settlement (Helleland 2005), or that they can be spread over larger areas. What was once a farm name is today the name of larger settlements and towns.

Although the courtyard sites can be said to be variations on the same theme, there are differences in time and space. It is also conceivable that in several places there have been simpler post supported structures without ramparts that are only possible to detect by topsoil stripping, as is the case with the possible courtyard sites in Sogn og Fjordane and Hordaland. Local variations in construction are also pointed out by Sjøvold in connection with some of the Northern Norwegian courtyard sites. In Rogaland and Jæren, rocks are used in the ramparts, while further north this is not common. As Table 25 shows, there are small differences in altitude and distance to the sea before and after 500 A.D. if looking at Norway at a whole. There is also an even distribution through time and space in terms of floor plans, i.e. any clear typological differences are not present. Location must also be understood from differences in topography.

The connection to church sites is problematic as there are often temporal deviations between courtyard sites and the introduction of Christianity. Another aspect is differences between pre-Christian and Christian cosmology. In Norse societies, the god-world is placed in the midst of the worldly world, while in Christianity the kingdom of God is elevated over man, and thus it may have led to the building of churches on central heights (Fabech 1999: 470), although there are many examples of the opposite, including that churches are often built

at important junctions, allowing them to control landscapes to a greater extent (Kolberg 2011: 60). Furthermore, there is an argument that churches may have been built over older shrines (Sollund and Brendalsmo 2013: 214), which in turn indicates possible continuity in the use of central and cultic sites, in other words, gathering places. Thus, the link is plausible, although Table 25 shows that there is often some distance between courtyard sites and churches, although it must be taken into consideration that many early churches in Norway were farm churches and that many remain unknown (Sollund and Brendalsmo 2013: 206).

The fact that several courtyard sites appear to have been in use for hundreds of years, some up to 500 A.D. , and that at some sites older house foundations are found under younger ones, confirms a continuity of the courtyard sites themselves, but cannot determine the continuity of use, that is, that they have had the same function all the time. It must also be pointed out that they may have been multifunctional sites. Furthermore, it is not impossible that there have been variations in functions through the phases, since the period ca. A.D. 500-1000 A.D. is a period of major social change. By the 9th century, Huseby farms were established, that is, central farms for the king's henchmen (Brink 2007: 59–63). Perhaps these may have taken over much of the function in terms of gatherings and centrality, including with regard to taxation, but county churches may also have taken over some functions, and again this may be linked to state consolidation and increased power on the hands of the kings (Iversen 2017a: 101) . However, there are discrepancies in space between Huseby farms and known early churches, there is generally a great distance between them. There is also a great distance between Huseby farms and the courtyard sites, but this can again be linked to a new organisation of power and landscape.

The village hypothesis can be written off, partly because some courtyard sites are found at locations unsuitable for agriculture, but several are also some distance away from other farms. Farm communities and complexes are what make out the basis for villages, often with fences separating farms from in-fields and pastures (Lillehammer 1999: 131–134; Mikkelsen 1999: 178). Most of the courtyard sites do not resemble these systems to a sufficient degree, with a possible exception for the site at *Kåda* in Rogaland. There are also no toponyms that indicate village function with, again, the possible exception of *Kåda* which may translate

to plural *houses*. The courtyard sites differ markedly from what we know about confirmed villages from the Iron Age.

With regard to neutral locations, there are several courtyard sites that contradict this hypothesis, including the sites at Tjøtta and Skei, which are located in the middle of central landscapes and in connection with large burial fields, while others are located by important traffic arteries. However, there are also some courtyard sites, including Vollmoen in Steigen, which are more removed from the surrounding settlement, thus the hypothesis of neutral placement cannot be completely written off. It is also not a given that large burial fields can be associated with individual farms or dynasties alone, as they may have been divided between several farms. The courtyard sites that are adjacent to burial fields may have been built on common ground but were still central in the landscape.

It has been put forward that the courtyard sites may have been thing sites, and that the number of houses may be related to the number of skipreider or legal districts in each county. Although this in some cases checks out, there are still some deviations and some uncertainty related to the number of house foundations, as the numbers in several cases do not add up. Sometimes, for this reason, the courtyard sites are interpreted to represent half-county things (Iversen 2015a: 113–115), which is tending towards ad-hoc interpretations. There is also a problem that many skipreider were not established before the Middle Ages, which casts some doubt (Iversen 2017a). In some counties, several courtyard sites are concentrated in relatively small areas, while for other counties the courtyard sites are lacking according to Iversen (2017a). Attempts were made to detect a possible courtyard site for *Skæynafylki*, part of Trøndelag, by searching the areas for the various skipreider of *Markabygda*, *Frol*, *Ytterøya*, *Mosvik*, *Ekne* and *Alstadhaug* by consulting LiDAR data. The most likely area was believed to Ytterøya, as it lies approximately midway between all the sailing routes, and as it is centrally located by the inlet to the Trondheims fjord and *Skæynafylki* from the north, via the portage of Namdalseid, with a number of marine toponyms suggesting boathouses, moorings and places of gatherings, as well as a portage. But as of yet, these studies have not yielded results.

The example of Hustad shows that it can be problematic to try to locate courtyard sites according to specific criteria, seeing as how it was to some extent given in advance that

there should be a courtyard site of a given size in Nordmøre county. It is likely that what is really natural formations have been interpreted as a courtyard site due to expectations and the psychological process of pattern recognition. Of course, there may be several reasons why it is difficult to detect new courtyard sites, one thing is which quality of LiDAR data is available for each site, another is that sites may have been damaged or lost, as demonstrated throughout the analysis. Also, some courtyard sites may only be detectable by the method of topsoil stripping.

Changes in sea level and post-glacial rebound, i.e. the gradual elevation of land masses weighed down by the receding ice cap, have in most cases not affected the location of the sites in regard to sailing routes and access to the sea, as the sea levels in parts of Rogaland, Steigen and Lofoten have not changed much since the Iron Age. This is indicated, among other things, by boathouses and mooring sites. Shorelines displacement curves suggest a difference of four meters in large parts of Rogaland about 2000 years ago (Johnsen 2017: 87), whereas for Trøndelag it may have been about 13–6 meters 2000 to 1000 years ago (Olsen and Sveian 1984: 32–34), but with a probable smaller difference in sea levels along the coast line (Romundset and Lakeman 2019: 51–65). As the known courtyard sites in Trøndelag lay inland, in the Trondheim Fjord and in Namdalen area, this would not have caused a very big difference as they were nevertheless a distance away from the sea and the coast. For large parts of Vest-Agder, as well as Nordland and Troms, including Lofoten, the difference may have been only a few meters from the current level (Midtbø et al. 2001; Midtun 2019: 61).

Some of the aforementioned irregular courtyard sites may in some cases be mortuary houses as they are adjacent to burial fields, and since some have house foundations that are reminiscent of burial mounds. Also, it is not impossible that some sites may in fact have been boat houses for smaller vessels, as both types of structures would have had openings at the end gables. The boathouses at Ferkingstad in Karmøy (id. 61137, figure 12) are constructed in a way that makes them reminiscent of a courtyard site. Although both the width and length here are longer than the usual measurements for courtyard sites, it is easy to see how boathouses for smaller vessels in some instances may be confused for, or misinterpreted as, courtyard sites, but possibly also the other way around. The courtyard site at Øysund, listed

in the Askeladen database as boathouse locality, demonstrates the uncertainty pertaining to interpreting sites. It is not impossible, thus, that some of the irregular courtyard sites were in fact boathouses for smaller vessels.



*Figure 12 Boathouses at Ferkingstad. In aerial photography and in LiDAR, at least two foundations are visible.
Photo: AM/UiS.*

Summary and Conclusion

In conclusion, variables such as toponymy and topography alone cannot be used as localisation determinants. For example, after examining sites by the toponym *Skei* by employing LiDAR data, it has so far failed to detect new courtyard sites. What is found often to be common among courtyard sites is that they are centrally located in the landscapes, but

Table 25: temporal and spatial variables pertaining to courtyard sites

Courtyard sites less than 500 meters from the sea	10	Average distance to the sea for courtyard sites after 500 A.D.	5,2
Courtyard sites over 500 meters from the sea	16	Courtyard sites abandoned around 500-600 A.D.	13
Courtyard sites with maritime toponyms	2	Courtyard sites established after 500 A.D.	4
Courtyard sites with toponyms indicating centrality	5	Courtyard sites in use until c.800 A.D.	3-4 (Ogdal er uavklart)
Courtyard sites with toponyms pertaining to (legal) things	1	Courtyard sites in use until c. 900 A.D.	1
Courtyard sites close to beacons, cairns or higher grounds with toponyms relating to the former	4	Courtyard sites in use until c. 1000 A.D.	5
Courtyard sites close to menhirs	4	Oval courtyard sites before 500 A.D.	3
Courtyard sites close to boathouses and moorings	12	Oval courtyard sites after 500 A.D.	3
Courtyard sites close to medieval churches (1 km or closer)	7	Circular/round courtyard sites before 500 A.D.	6
Courtyard sites less than, or at an elevation of 10 meters above the sea level	6	Circular/round courtyard sites after 500 A.D.	6
Sites higher than 10 meters above the sea level	18	Oval to circular/round courtyard sites before 500 A.D.	2
Average height above the sea level for courtyard sites before 500 A.D.	47,6 m	Irregular to uncertain layouts	15
Average height above the sea level for courtyard sites after 500 A.D.	51,64 m	Uncertain courtyard sites	13
Average distance to the sea for courtyard sites from before 500 A.D.	5,4 km	Likely disproved courtyard sites	1 (Hustad)
Courtyard sites less than 500 meters from the sea	10	Average distance to the sea for courtyard sites established after 500 A.D.	5,2

that each landscape has its own presuppositions for what is central in terms of topography, settlement patterns and traffic routes. Local topography will therefore play a role in terms of

localising courtyard sites, but also to some extent in terms of their layout. There are also some regional differences in layout, but on the whole, they are variations on the same theme. In terms of function, it is not possible to glean this from toponymy or topography other than assumed central and focal point functions. It is difficult to say whether this is related to things, mobilisation or social functions such as games, but it is pointed out that thing sites may also be linked to military functions and to the levying of taxes. There does not always seem to be any clear connection between skipreider and courtyard sites, which Iversen has also mentioned in connection with Hålogaland. Furthermore, it is problematic to connect some of the courtyard sites to legal districts and counties as there are deviations in the number of house foundations, but the thing-site hypotheses is highly plausible. It may be concluded with some certainty that the courtyard sites were multifunctional sites at which things were held and that they can, with a certain degree of probability, also be linked to military functions.

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