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Political and Social Structures in Early Scandinavia: A Settlement-historical Pre-study of the Central Place

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Political and Social Structures in Early Scandinavia

A Settlement-historical Pre-study of the Central Place


This article is a preparatory study of the central place (CP) in prehistoric and early medieval Scandinavia. It discusses ways of tracing CPs, with the help of halls, special artefacts, ancient monuments, place-names, etc. Several important CPs are illustrated, for example, Gudme, Lejre, Gamla Uppsala, Borg and Högom. Special attention is paid to the contemporary nomenclature for the CP, for example, husaby, hall, sal, hov, vi, hög, åker, etc., and also for leaders, priests, etc. in society, for example, thul, vivil, lytir, gode, karl, rink, etc. In the last section, two case studies are presented, Gamla Uppsala and Skiringssal, to illustrate the potential of an inter-disciplinary, settlement-historical approach.

Keywords: Central place, settlement history, kingdom, sovereign, pagan cult, territories, districts, nomenclature.

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The Viking Age was obviously a turbulent period in Scandinavia in many ways. During these few centuries, the people of Scandinavia saw the emergence of the first towns, the first minting of coins, a new, "feudal", agrarian culture, a new kind of political kingdom, the conversion to a new religion, etc. We have here new phenomena of a certainly interrelated kind that fundamentally altered Scandinavian society. We can follow and reconstruct the new ("Continental") culture fairly well, thanks to written records on parchment and paper, but what about the old structures? In this case, the only practicable way to proceed is to use a markedly inter-disciplinary approach. One single source-category cannot be used for any reconstruction, but, if the source-categories are used
together, we can most certainly get a more accurate picture of the period.

In a project entitled *Central place, land and kingdom*, I am following this line of research. My first aim is to attempt to reconstruct the territorial and political structures in Scandinavia that preceded the emergences of kingdoms or the "state"-formation period that resulted in the countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The latter was probably a process in which "lands", chiefdoms, petty kingdoms, etc. were forced or voluntarily led into a higher order of social organization. The interesting object is hence to find the structures that preceded the phase of these inter-regional kingdoms. My second aim is to study the central places that were in use in these structures. We have most certainly had central places of different orders, representing different strata in society. Well-known central places, like Lejre, Gudme, Jelling, Birka, (Gamla) Uppsala, Sigtuna, Borre, Trondheim, etc., are intimately connected with the upper strata of society. But we have also had central places on lower levels, in "lands", administrative districts and settlement districts.

There are several ways of tracing these central or nodal places in the landscape, for example, from (i) special buildings (halls, churches, etc.), (ii) exclusive or specialized artefacts (gold, regalia, bracteates, weapons, craftmen's tools, imports, etc.), (iii) special ancient monuments (large mounds, boat burials, weapon graves, etc.) and (iv) special kinds of names (*Tuna, Husaby, Bo, Kaupang*, etc.). The last-mentioned case makes it necessary to pay special attention to a third aspect, namely the nomenclature, i.e. the contemporary words used for 'central place'. This naturally leads to the analysis of words used for 'leaders, chieftains, sovereigns, kings', etc., and for other prominent persons—like priests, warriors and so on—in a social context of this kind. All this leads to a fourth aim, namely to illustrate the formation of the new political "state" or kingdom in Scandinavia during the Viking Period and the early Middle Ages. This new kind of *rike* had its origin in personal bonds and alliances, as well as power over people, originally not over territories. Later on, however, the *rike* gradually became territorialized during the Middle Ages. The new approach is, thus, to discuss this process from a reversed angle, not retrospectively, but from the reconstructed society that precedes it.

This article is a—so far only preliminary—discussion of some of the aspects mentioned above, especially the problem of the *central place* in
early Scandinavia. A reconstruction of the “land” and the settlement districts, a discussion of the intrinsic administrative divisions and a new approach to the formation of the Scandinavian Viking-Age kingdoms are problems I will try to illuminate in future research. The first and larger part deals with the nomenclature related to the central place and the leadership in society; the second part consists of two case-studies, just to show the prospects of an inter-disciplinary, settlement-historical analysis for reconstructing political and religious structures in the cultural landscape.

Central, focal or nodal places

The problem of the central place has a long history, especially in geography, centred around the so-called central-place theory. When archaeologists, some time ago, started to take an interest in spatial theories, this concept gained ground also in the formation of archaeological theory (cf. Hodder & Orton 1976; CPAH). The debate and the definitions regarding the central place have in some instances become very intricate. For my purpose, it is sufficient to establish a simpler and more useful definition. What I am tracing are sites or small settlement structures that have had some function or significance exceeding the particular site or settlement, in other words, some kind of “power” over a wider area. These central, focal or nodal sites may have had one or more public functions, such as administrative, religious, judicial, mercantile, etc. functions. The general picture seems to be that, during earlier stages in society, there was a positive and perceptible correlation between religious activity at a site and the more profane manifestations of power (cf. SSSP).

Our knowledge of the central places in Scandinavia is growing gradually. The most important reasons for this are the recent, more or less intensive, archaeological excavations in Ribe, Sorte Muld on Bornholm, Gudme/Lundeborg, Lejre, Nørre Snede, Stentinget, Dejbjerg, Trondheim, Borre, Kaupang, Hamar, Sløinge, Birka, Sigtuna, Fornsigtuna, Gamla Uppsala, Högom, Adelsö, Vendel, Valsgärde, etc. (cf. H. Andersson 1972; RM 18; ØpcN; HoK; Christensen 1991; Clarke & Am-
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brosiani 1991; SRV; Jensen & Watt 1993; Callmer 1994; Sørensen 1994; Fabech & Ringtved 1995; Jørgensen 1995). New knowledge of this aspect has also emerged from recent historical, philological and toponymical research. This new knowledge of the central places has thrown light upon two probably vital aspects. The first is the establishment of the definition of the hall, a specialized building found in a central-place context, on kings' and chieftains' farms etc. (cf. Herschend 1993). The concept of the hall is nothing new in Scandinavia; it is well documented in the Old Scandinavian literature (cf. Fig. 1). The new feature is that we are suddenly starting to find these halls in archaeological excavations. As expected, these halls are found in typical central places and on kings' or chieftains' farms. The second new feature is the knowledge that, instead of being an exact site, a central place is very often to be understood as a central-place area or a central-place complex. From toponymical and archaeological evidence, central or nodal functions are often found spread out in a small, though consistent, settlement district. Furthermore, this has led to the assumption that the use of specialized terms like trading place, cult place, market place, assembly place, etc. is in many cases inadequate. It is more accurate to talk about central-place complexes. In my opinion, this latter aspect is probably something that is going to be underlined more and more in the future. A clumsy but maybe a more proper term for this would therefore be a multifunctional central place (complex) in talking about such nodes of power in early Scandinavian society.

Many of these central places seem to have been established as early as the Roman Iron Age (AD 0–400), according to recent excavations in southern and central Scandinavia, and they seem to have had a duration of several centuries. Many of these places were centres of power and economic life well into the high Middle Ages, such as Gudme and Gamla Uppsala. In some cases, there seems to have been a succession between neighbouring sites (Helgö–Birka–Sigtuna; Dankirke–Ribe), while in other cases one has to assume that neighbouring central places were functioning at the same time (Birka–Adelsö; Gudme–Lundeborg; Hög–Tuna in Hälsingland). Some important central places are obviously later, established in the middle of the first millennium or even later, in the Viking Age, such as Ribe, Jelling, Birka, Trondheim, etc.

For new and crucial information regarding central places, we have, first of all, to rely on archaeology. However, for a coherent understand-
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Fig. 1. An early attempt at reconstructing the interior of a Viking Age hall, with the posts for the high-seat and the long-fire in the centre (Guðmundsson 1894, p. 12).

...ing of the central places, we must use an inter-disciplinary, settlement-historical approach, working on archaeological excavations and finds, historical documents, literary evidence, place-names, contemporary terminology, retrospective map and cadastral analyses, topographical considerations, etc. In this connection, the nomenclature—the contemporary terms and proper names used for central places—is of vital importance. Some of these aspects will be discussed below.

Some social and political aspects of the pre-Viking, Viking and early medieval periods

In the political system that can be discerned in Viking-Age Scandinavia, power seems to have been exercised through the itineration of a political leader (king, chieftain, deputy, etc.) between different centres of power,
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where political, legal and maybe religious matters were dealt with. This has been called an ambulatory or itinerant kingship (Lönnroth 1940, p. 44). At the feasts and banquets (OWN. veizlor), the leader met his people, bonds of friendship were tied, oaths of allegiance were taken with handsome gifts and customary—at times, surely smart—proposals of marriage were made and settled. However, one has also to consider the more religious elements, in which the leader had some kind of function in cultic rituals, probably as some kind of high priest. This itinerant exercise of power in the prehistoric and early medieval Scandinavian societies had as a consequence that the king never had any permanent control over the whole realm at the same time. The autonomy of the different provinces and settlement districts was remarkably strong—especially in the more peripheral areas—during the whole of the Middle Ages, up to the reign of Gustav Vasa in the first half of the 16th century.

As an example of a narration describing such a banquet (veizla), I may mention the episode in Egils saga Skallagrímssonar (ed. Jónsson 1886–88, pp. 31 f.), when the Norwegian King Haraldr went to Halogaland in the north on a tax-collection journey (p. 103, my translation).

All the central places and halls probably did not have the chance of being paid by visits by some royal or even king-like person. A great many were not visited by any prehistoric king at all. In some cases, we know, from historical records, that the king actually did send a deputy, who during his itinerant visits to royal seats fulfilled the king’s obligations. One example was the so-called are or konungsare, who in early medieval times regularly visited the royal farms in Normland and there exercised the king’s authority (Brink 1994, p. 145). Probably one may also assume the existence of centres of power that belonged to a more private sphere, for example, early “manors” within a private estate. One of the central tasks in future research will be to try to find centres of a private character and those of a more regal or “official” kind.

Beyond the ordinary functions performed at an “official” central place, such as trade and marketing and legal and cultic practices, most certainly also other, more specialized skills were practised, such as highly qualified forging, highly skilled handicrafts, specialized cult-performances conducted by a special priesthood, an attendance of particular warriors and housecarls, etc. Several of these activities and specialists can be traced in archaeological investigations, but the place-names are more illuminating in this respect. Thanks to these, we may see where
This summer King Haraldr went to Halogaland and was received with grand banquets (veizlur), both when visiting his own farms and those of lords and rich farmers. Also Thórólfur conducted a banquet for the king and invested herein large expenses. It was agreed when the king was going to pay his visit. Thórólfur invited many men and had the best servants there were. The King had almost three hundred men, when he came to the banquet, but Thórólfur had five hundred men already. Thórólfur had furnished a big corn barn that was there and had benches made. Here the guests sat and drank, because a big house, where all the men could be, was not available. All around the walls of the house shields were mounted. The King was seated in the high seat and when all were seated, both above and below, he looked around and became red. He said nothing and the men could see he was angry. The banquet was splendid and the treatment the best.

the smith, most probably the smith par préférence, lived, and we can demonstrate the existence of a particular pagan priesthood and also prehistoric military units and warriors (see below). All these are in principle always found only in a central-place context.

Fig. 2 is a simplified model showing some of the names that can be found in a central-place-complex context. The model has a palpable, eastern-central Swedish colour. The nodal site—with a large mound (“thing mound”), where the church was erected—has a name ending in -tuna. Four theophoric place-names occur, indicating a probable division into two different chronological layers, an older one represented by the goddess †Njärđ’s stav ‘staff’ and the god Ull’s åker ‘arable land’, and a presumably younger name-pair, the goddess Fröja’s berg ‘hillock’ and the god Frö’s lund ‘grove’. The occurrence of such name-pairs, with female and male pagan divinities found in the names of places close by
each other, cannot, in my opinion, be explained away. This kind of theo-
phoric name-pair probably had some significance for the pagan fertility
cult and very often occurs in a central-place context. Also a place-name
indicating a military escort or unorganized warriors is indicated by Kar-
laby, containing karl ‘carl’. The name Smedby, in this context, is prob-
able to be understood as denoting the farm of the smith who had some
special attachment to and function in the central place. There is also an
occurrence of a rather elusive place-name Gillberga, sometimes found in
central-place complexes in eastern-central Sweden.

If we look at these historical observations—of an itinerant king and
the different, cultic, legal and political activities carried on in the central
place—in the light of recent archaeological results, we shall see that to-
day halls are found in excavations of central places. Especially Frands
Herschend (1993) has recently pointed to these halls as being vital ob-
jects of future research. The hall is eloquently mentioned in contempo-
rary written sources, both in Beowulf and in the Edda poems. Well
known is the last chapter in the Hálkonar saga Hákonarsonar, preserved
in the Codex Frisianus and the Flateyjarbók; we are then in the middle
of the 13th century. Flateyjarbók (3, pp. 232 f.): hann let gera trehallina
i konungsgardi i Nidarosi (he made the wooden hall at the royal estate in Nidaros), hann let gera veizluhall aa Steig (he made a banqueting-hall in Steig), hann let gera bu aa Hofi i Breidinn ok veizluhall ..., hann let gera veizluhall i Husabæ i Skaun a Heidmork ok adra a Ringisakri (he made a farm and a banqueting-hall at Hof in Breidinn..., he made a banqueting-hall in Husaby in Skaun in Heidmork and another one in Ringisaker). Furthermore, it is mentioned in the Codex Frissianus (p. 583) that Hakon konvnr keypti Ló i Vppdali ok let gera bu a ok veizluhall (king Hakon bought Ló in Opdalr and made there a farm and a banqueting-hall).

This kind of banqueting-hall was by no means in use only during the 13th century; it is eloquently mentioned in even older sagas. Both salr and holl are mentioned in the poetic Edda on several occasions, denoting such banqueting-halls. Especially informative is the heightening in Rígsþula: the house of the thrall, the banqueting-hall (holl) of the peasant and the banqueting-hall (salr) of the nobleman (cf. H. Stigum in KL 14, col. 676). The best-known episode mentioning these banqueting-halls is probably Snorri’s account of Uppsala in the Ynglingasaga in his Heimskringla (ed. Jónsson 1911, pp. 26 f.; my translation):

Ingjaldr, sonr Önundar konungs, var konungr at Upsólum. Upsala-konunggar varu æztir konunga í Svíþjóð, þá er þar váru margir heraðskonunger, [...]. [---] Ingjaldr konungr lét búi veizlu mikla at Upsólum ok ætlæði at erfa Önund konung, fður sinn; hann lét búi sal einn, engum mun minna eða óveglígra, en Upsalr var, er hann kallaði við-konungasal; þar váru í gór vii. hásæti. [---] Þar var vi. konungum skipat í inn nýja sal [...]. Óllu líði því, er til var komit, var skipat í inn nýja sal. Ingjaldr konungr hafði skipat hirð sinni ok Óllu líði sínu í Upsal.

Ingjald, the son of king Anund, was king in Uppsala. The kings in Uppsala were the most prominent in Sweden, when there were many heraðs-kings, [...]. [---] King Ingjald made a great banquet in Uppsala to celebrate his father, king Anund’s funeral feast; he made a hall (salr) as big and magni-

What must be understood to be banqueting-halls of this kind have been found in recent archaeological excavations at several early central places in Scandinavia (cf. Fig. 3). The best-known sites are as follows:
Fig. 3. A comparison between the totally or partly excavated halls in (from left to right) Gamla Uppsala (Uppland), Högom (Medelpad), Borg (Lofoten), Lejre (Zealand) and Gudme (Fyn), all clearly important centres during prehistoric time. Note that these halls belong to different periods, from the Roman Iron Age to the Viking Age. (A compilation from AMGU p. 121; Ramqvist 1987, p. 121; Herschend 1993, p. 192; Christensen 1991, p. 174; Sørensen 1994, p. 30.)
(i) **Gudme** on Fyn, Denmark. In 1993, there was an opportunity to investigate the central area of the already known, prehistoric settlement, just to the east of Gudme hamlet, a site that has yielded many rich and interesting finds. The excavators found several post-holes and other structures belonging to a large building. This one differed from other houses in the vicinity as being unusually grand, 47 x 10 m, with ceiling beams 80 cm in dimension, with a rare construction of the wall with perpendicularly standing planks at every 1.25 m and equipped with a double doorway, 2.5 m wide (Kromann et al. 1991; Sørensen 1993, 1994; Fabech & Ringtvedt 1995, pp. 15 ff.). This impressive hall-building—called by both laymen and learned the “king’s hall”—has been dated to AD 200–300, i.e. the Roman Iron Age (cf. Fig. 4).

(ii) **Lejre** on Zealand, Denmark. From 1986 onwards, a large building was excavated at Lejre, the seat of the Viking-Age kings of Zealand (Christensen 1991; Schmidt 1991; KFL). An impressive hall has been found here, a guild-hall worthy of a Viking-Age king (Fig. 5). This building measures c. 48 x 11 m and has been intensively discussed and analysed (KLF).

(iii) **Gamla Uppsala** in Uppland, central Sweden. During the last few years, parts of a magnificent banqueting-hall have been excavated here. The house was as much as 60 m long and was built upon a man-made plateau of clay. It is dated to the Vendel Period (AD 600–800). An even older building has been found underneath this Vendel Period house (Gräslund 1993; AMGU, *passim*; Nordal 1996). The situation, right on the medieval royal estate, is, of course, extremely noteworthy (cf. below).
(iv) Borg on Vestvågøy, Lofoten, in northern Norway (Stamsø Munch 1991; Herschend 1993, pp. 190 ff.). Recently, a building measuring 85 x 15 m has been excavated here, with finds of the famous, presumably cultic, thin gold plates (guldgubbar) and imports of probably Carolingian glass. Under the Viking-Age house, an even older building dating from the Migration Period (AD 400–600) has been found, though slightly smaller (55 x 8 m). The lay-out of the Viking-Age house and the special character of the artefacts found make it plausible to talk of a veritable chieftain’s hall; this is, by the way, the largest building ever known from the Late Iron Age in Scandinavia. Indeed, it is stimulating to relate this building to the afore-mentioned paragraph from Egils saga of the journey of king Haraldr in Halogaland and the grand banquets held in the banqueting-halls on royal estates, chieftains’ farms, etc.

(v) Högom in Medelpad (Ramqvist 1987, p. 119 ff., 1995, p. 37) is also probably to be interpreted as a chieftain’s hall, though from the Late Roman Iron Age. One of the large mounds at Högom covers the traces of a building, c. 40 m long and 7–5 m wide, that differs from any other known Iron-Age house in Norrland. Per H. Ramqvist, who has analysed and presented the Högom material, first interpreted this building as a kind of “communal house”, a gathering place for the nobility of the settlement district or a “grave-house”, i.e. a house in which the deceased was placed, which was then burnt down and over which a mound
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was erected (Ramqvist 1987, p. 122). However, today Ramqvist (1995, p. 37) distinctly interprets the building as a kind of banqueting-hall, where “the meetings were gathered in connection with political, religious or jurisdictional meetings”. After an intensive analysis of the excavation results, Ramqvist is inclined to detect a high-seat in the house, an elevated base in the middle of the building. From the layout of the house and the finds of artefacts, he also detects a division of the house into a high-seat, a banqueting-hall room, hence a kind of assembly hall, and a part where women resided.

In these cases, we are confronted by a very special kind of building. All the afore-mentioned halls were most certainly never actually lived in; instead, they are to be interpreted as special kings’ or chieftains’ halls, maybe also in some cases as the private halls of rich men. It must be added that buildings of this kind are also found in other places in Scandinavia. An interesting question is then, what were these special halls called in the contemporary Scandinavian languages?

For exclusively religious buildings, this question has been, and still is, very much under debate; cf., for example, the discussion of the so-called “Pagan Temple” in (Gamla) Uppsala. In the light of what was mentioned above regarding the hall in Gamla Uppsala, the following digression may be of relevance.

When Adam of Bremen talks of the pagan temple in Uppsala, he normally uses the Latin term templum. However, on one occasion, when writing about the three pagan gods in the temple, he uses the Latin term triclinium: ita ut potentissimus eorum Thor in medio solium habeat triclinio (The mightiest of them, Thor, has his throne in the middle of the hall) (Adam, ed. Schmeidler 1917, p. 258). This triclinium ‘dining-room’ etc. looks at first sight not to be semantically congruent with ‘temple’. If, however, Adam had heard of an imposing and widely famous hall in Uppsala, the pieces in the jig-saw puzzle would seem to fit. A probable interpretation is thus that Adam had before him a description of the above-mentioned hall in Uppsala with its elevated location on the royal estate. Most probably cultic rituals were conducted here, as well as banquets and grand feasts. In this light, it seems plausible that Adam should have used the Lat. triclinium, probably then for denoting a banqueting-hall.¹

For a start, one may observe that the concept of ‘temple’, i.e. a spe-
cial kind of god-house, cult-house, etc., was obviously not present in very ancient times in the Proto-Germanic language region, that is, at the time when stones, trees, mountains, staffs, etc. were worshipped. On the other hand, there were religious temples in the old Greek and Roman cultures. Old, sacral place-names in Scandinavia from this early period may be Gudbjerg (perhaps) ‘mountain of the gods’, Torslunda ‘the god Thor’s grove’, Odensjö ‘the god Odin’s lake’, Helganäs ‘the holy or sanctified peninsula’, Viborg (older Vibjerg) ‘the holy mountain’, Vibøge ‘the holy beech-grove’, the latter containing an adjective *vi (< *wiha ‘holy’) (cf. Kousgard Sørensen 1992, p. 229), and maybe also Albjerg, Alvbøge, etc., probably containing an adjective *alh- ‘protected; holy’ (Brink 1992, p. 116). In forming adequate terms for ‘temple’ in these languages and in translating the Bible, very often words for ‘dwelling, house’ were used, with God implicitly or explicitly added (cf. Gothic gudhûs), or a word for ‘holy place’, derived from adjectives meaning ‘holy’ etc. Very often the translator simply borrowed the Lat. templum (Buck 1949, p. 1465). This lack of words for a special cult-building is worth noticing. On the other hand, there are words that have secondarily been assumed to denote special cultic houses, such as hov and maybe also vi, *al, sal, harg, etc.

In searching for this kind of central place and centre of power, where political, cultic, mercantile and juridical activities took place, it is of importance to find out the contemporary nomenclature for these nodal places (cf. Meulengraht-Sørensen, in the press). Below is a discussion of the prehistoric and medieval terms for nodal places that seem to be of interest in this connection.

Contemporary terms for central places in prehistoric and medieval Scandinavia

husaby

At least in Sweden, the term husaby is intimately connected with a central place. This is the name of the early-medieval, royal estate in eastern Sweden. Today there is an extensive literature on the husabyar (cf. Brink 1990, p. 58, for refs.), and the major framework of the ancient
Fig. 6. The distribution of the Scandinavian husabyar, the bo in Västergötland and the kungsgården in Norrland (Brink 1990, p. 59).
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husaby institution is presumably established. This kind of central place is today detectable by the place-name Husby etc., with a distribution that reaches far beyond the central parts of eastern Sweden (cf. Fig. 6). Also the Norwegian and Danish husabyar have been assumed to have denoted royal estates or farms; Johannes Steenstrup (SKVJ 1, p. 21) writes for Denmark: “Husebyerne were hence looked upon as centres within the King’s or the Bishop’s administration”, while Kåre Hoel (1985, p. 120) has written for Norway: “They [husabyar] were a kind of king’s farms, established places within a veitzlu system. Here the King came after old custom with a large escort and took veitzlur [hospitality]” (cf. Steinnes 1955).

These royal estates of the husaby type probably had an important function in taxcollection in the settlement districts. The tax-objects were stored here, presumably in special storehouses. The practice of permanently taxing the peasants is, however, probably a rather recent phenomenon (Lindkvist 1988, pp. 15 ff.); an older kind of “taxation” is the tribute, testified in Icelandic sagas.

An original function for the husabyar was probably the so-called gästning, i.e. the practice of the King, within the itinerant kingship system, from time to time residing on a royal estate, obviously together with his escort, a hird, for purpose of consuming what had been collected and produced on the farm or in the hamlet. On these occasions, the King also had to face his people for different reasons (cf. Ferm 1992, p. 63; Björkvik 1992, p. 7). It was in this respect that the husabyar, in the same way as other kinds of royal estates, formed a certain kind of regal complex, the so-called Uppsala öd (Schück 1914), that was at the disposal of the King of the Swear.

To the same category of royal estates as the husabyar belonged also the bo in the province of Västergötland, as well as the kungsgårder in Norrland. At least the latter were strategically located in the most important, prehistoric, settlement districts along the Norrland coast-line. For some reason, these royal farms in Norrland were never called husabyar, but kungsgårder, demonstrated by the naming custom, Kungsgården.

A rough estimate of the number of these royal estates that the early medieval Swedish king had at his disposal, comprehending the husabyar, the bo in Västergötland and the Uppsala öd farms mentioned in the medieval Hälsinge Law Book (Fig. 5), yields a number exceeding 70 (Lönnroth 1940, p. 43).
Hall

A common term for a house with special functions was, of course, hall, OWN. holl f., translated by Fritzsche (2, p. 182) as ‘a big house = Lat. palatium’. The word has its equivalents in other Germanic languages, such as OE. heall, OSax., OHG. halla, with similar meanings, ‘manor’, etc. The word goes back to a Proto-Germ. *hallō- (< *halnō : Proto-Germ. *helan ‘hide’) and has a cognate in the Lat. cella.

Of special interest is, of course, the Old-English poem Beowulf, dating from the 8th century. Here it is noteworthy that the OE. word heall is commonly used for a king’s or a chieftain’s hall or banqueting hall, i.e. where the nobleman had his high-seat. As an example, the following stanzas may be quoted (Beowulf, ed. Heyne; transl. Clark Hall):

(484 ff.)

\[\text{Ponne wās þeós medo-heal} \\
\text{on morgen-tid,} \\
\text{drīht-sele dreór-fāh,} \\
\text{þonne dāg līxte,} \\
\text{eal benc-þelu} \\
\text{blōde bestyμed,} \\
\text{heall heoru-dreōre:}\]

Then at morning-time, 
when day shone forth, 
was this mead-hall, 
this chamber for retainers, 
stained with gore—
all the bench-boards deluged, 
with blood and gore of swords.

(643 ff.)

\[\text{þā wās eft swā ær} \\
\text{inne on healle} \\
\text{þrȳð-word sprecen,} \\
\text{þeόd on sælum} \\
\text{sige-folca swēg}\]

Then again, as of old, 
brave words were spoken 
in the hall, 
the people were in gladness, 
there was the clamour of a
conquering warrior;

(663 ff.)

\[\text{þā him Hrōðgār gewāt} \\
\text{mid his hāleða gedryht,} \\
\text{eodur Scyldinga} \\
\text{ūt of healle;}\]

Then Hrothgar, 
protector of the Scyldings, 
departed from the hall 
with his band of warriors.

(1008 ff.)

\[\text{þā wās sæl ond mēl,} \\
\text{þēt tō healle gang} \\
\text{Healfdenes sunu;} \\
\text{wolde self cyning} \\
\text{symbol þicgan.}\]

Then it was due time 
that Healfdene’s son 
should go into the hall; 
the king himself 
would take part in the banquet.
Never have I heard
that people bore themselves
better round their treasure-giver,
in a greater company.
The men of great renown there
seated themselves upon the benches,
rejoiced in feasting,
courteously drank
many a cup of mead;
Hrothgar and Hrothulf,
the mighty kinsmen,
were in the high hall

men offered them terms,
that they must give up
to them entirely
another hall,
a chamber and a seat of honour,
that they might share equal

The building was magnificent,
the chief a mighty ruler
in the lofty hall;

From this, it is obvious that, in Beowulf, hall is used for a king’s or a
chieftain’s banqueting hall. Banquets, mead-feasts and guilds are men-
tioned as having taken place in the hall. But the great political impor-
tance of the hall is also mentioned; one can read about “hall and
high-seat” (healle on heah-setl), of the hall trickling with blood after
fights, of words of power spoken in the hall and of the king who stood
high in his magnificent hall. The use is obvious, and it is worth noting
that the word sal, OE. sele, is used synonymically; cf. above in the talk
about the mighty chieftains Hrodgar and Hrodulf, who stood in the high
hall or sal (on sele þam heán).

Regarding the OSwed. word hall, Elof Hellquist (SEO, p. 328) puts
forward the striking opinion that the word is actually to be understood as
an early loan from the Icelandic or Middle Low German. In the Old-Ice-
landic literature, the word hól is used for Woden’s home, i.e. Valhall,
Ægir’s home (in Lokasenna) and for the dwellings of the giants. How-
ever, even more significant is, of course, its use in the more profane literature. Here one may note that a king’s or a chieftain’s house could be called a hall but that a farm in common could also have this epithet (Lex. Poet., p. 312). Interesting is also the use of hall in kennings in poetry: for a cave, the sea, the fire, but also “hallir Pétars”, i.e. the home of the Pope in Rome (Lex. Poet., loc. cit.). The word also occurs once in Egils saga Skallagrímssonar actually for a king’s hall (ed. F. Jónsson 1886–88, p. 222; my translation):

Eiríkr konunger geck til borða at vanda sínnum, ok var þá fjolmenni mikit með honum, ok er Arinbjörn varð þess varr, þá gekk hann með alla sueit sínna aluáþaða í konungsgarði, þá er konungr sat ífer borðum. Arinbjörn krafði sér inngaungu í hollina.

King Eiríkr sat to table at his usual time, surrounded by a plentiful escort. As soon as Arinbjörn was aware of this, he went, followed by all his men, fully armed, to the King’s farm, while the King’s men sat at the table. Arinbjörn asked to be admitted to the hall.

Hall could also denote a special building for higher social functions during late medieval times, as is stated in a Norwegian letter dating from 1395, in connection with hallin í biskupsgarði í Hamri ‘the hall at the Bishop’s farm at Hamre’ (DN 4, no. 641).

With great curiosity, one approaches the toponymical material for an investigation of the word hall. However, here one seems to be caught in a cul de sac. It looks as if the word was not used in name-giving in Scandinavia. Place-names with an element hall found in Scandinavia may be given other etymologies, such as hall ‘rock, stone’ or hall ‘slope’. In Sweden, it is obvious that the word was not used in older name-giving. Hence, Hellquist’s statement, that the word was not present in the older language, seems plausible. The word hall was not used in old place-names in Norway either (Falk 1909, p. 123). Even more remarkable is the fact that the word OE. heall is not found in older place-names in England either, which was to be anticipated. English place-names in -hall seem to be found only in the later stages of the language (post-Conquest). However, as a first element, the word is assumed in names like Halstead etc. (Mawer 1924, p. 35; Smith 1956, pp. 225 f.).

The word hall is hence problematic. It seems plausible to accept the view presented by Valtýr Guðmundsson (1889, pp. 194 f.) and Hjalmar Falk (1909, p. 123), that hall, OWN. hóll, denoted a king’s or a chief-
tain’s banqueting hall only from the second half of the 11th century onwards. This word is understood to have replaced older words such as hirðstofa or veizlustofa, which, however do not seem to be old either. Falk’s idea is that the old word for a baqueting hall, a grand hall, was not stofa—this word is totally absent in the Edda poems and in old place-names—but sal, OWN. salr. Falk puts up the rather peculiar hypothesis that stofa was used for these halls only during a short period, between the time of the Edda poetry and the latter part of the 11th century (cf. Vreim in NK 17, p. 354; Fritzner 4, p. 176).

Two problems arise. Firstly, the word hall occurs in old Edda poems. In Falk’s opinion, the use of the word hall was revived during the 11th century, though with an aristocratic meaning borrowed under the influence of OE. heall ‘the king’s hall’. Was the word hall then out of the language for a period of 100–200 years? Secondly, we have the problem with the Old Irish word all ‘big room’ which was obviously borrowed from the Old Scandinavian hall, holl (Craige 1894, p. 156).

If, thus, the word hall, holl was used in prehistoric Scandinavia, one wonders why this special word was never used in name-giving and, perhaps even more remarkable, is never found in genuine dialects. The reason for this seems unclear. One possibility that must be considered is Falk’s idea that during prehistoric times the word hall belonged only to the poetical language. If this was the case, it seems plausible to assume that the word was de facto an early loan from, say, Continental Germanic or Old English, a word incorporated in the Scandinavian literary language. In other words, one has to assume that the word hall is not an old Scandinavian word. This would explain the absence of the word in old place-names and in genuine dialects.

On the other hand, this throws some light on the place-name Skíringssalr, discussed more extensively below, and the name-form used in the famous description by Ottar in King Alfred’s appendix to Orosius’ history, namely Sciringes heal. Earlier opinions were that this form had as its latter element OE. healh, dat. healh ‘corner, hiding-place; bay, gulf’ (Bosworth & Toller, pp. 520 f.; Holthausen 1963, p. 151). Sigurd Fries (1980, p. 95) assumes this heal rather to be a transformation of the Scandinavian salr m. and gives credit to P. A. Munch’s opinion (1850, pp. 359 f.), that Sciringes heal may be understood as an attempt to find a form as close as possible to the Old Scandinavian Skíringssalr. It may seem plausible to interpret this heal as an An-
glo-Saxon etymological reconstruction, in which, against the background of what was known about the place and its importance, the second element was understood as OE. heall ‘banqueting-hall’. Against this, one must observe, as Christine Fell (1983, p. 64) has recently underlined, that the OE. word requires a masculine inflection and therefore the common OE. word healh ‘corner, bend’ suits it well, as has been stated before. Any way, the form Sciringes heal seems not to be of Scandinavian origin, and hence it may be put aside in this discussion.

I have been fairly exhaustive in discussing this word hall, since the term had such a central position in the old literature. The conclusion is that one must raise doubts regarding the authenticity of the word in Scandinavia. Perhaps it is an early loan from the West Germanic language. The old Scandinavian word for a banqueting hall was instead salr.

**sal**

It may seem strange to discuss the word sal in such a connection as this, since leading toponymic experts during nearly all of this century have advocated the meaning ‘shieling, seter’ (Sahlgren 1953, pp. 26 ff.) or ‘meadow-barn’ (Hellberg 1967, pp. 181 ff.) for sal. Recently, however, I have analysed the word and the toponymic element and have reached the conclusion that this general explanation must be wrong (Brink, MS 1; cf. Kousgård Sørensen 1989, pp. 12 f.; Strid 1993, p. 101; Gräslund 1993; Brink 1993). There are unequivocal examples in which salr in the Germanic languages denoted magnificent halls for banquets and gatherings. For a start, one can observe that in Old English law sele occurs as a name for ‘a king’s house’, in Langobardian law sala denotes a ‘Viehof’ (Schmidt-Wiegand 1989, pp. 359 f.), and in OHG. sal was translated by the Lat. templum.

Of the utmost interest in this connection is the Beowulf poem (8th century). Here sal or OE. sele means ‘hall’, i.e. a long-house with one room. To represent the use of sele, the following verses may serve as examples (Beowulf, ed. Heyne, lines 1015 ff.; transl. Clark Hall):

- fægere gehægon
courteously drank

- medo-ful manig
many a cup of mead;

- māgas þåra
Hrothgar and Hrothulf,
In connection with the return of Beowulf to Hroðgar (1640 ff.):

{oð þæt semninga}  
{tō sele cōmōn}  
{frome fyrd-hwate}  
{feówer-týne}  
{Geáta gongan;}  
{gum-dryhten mid}  
{mōdíg on gemonge}  
{meodo-wongas trād.}  
{Pā cōm in gān}  
{ealdor þegna,}  
{dæd-cēne mon}  
{dôme gewurðad,}  
{hāle hilde-deór,}  
{Hrōðgar grētan;}  

So at last there came,  
presently advancing to the hall,  
fourteen Geats,  
bold and warlike,  
and the lord of men  
among them,  
proud in the multitude,  
trod the meadows to the mead-hall.  

Then entered in  
the chief of the thanes,  
the man valiant in deeds,  
exalted with renown,  
the hero bold in battle,  
to greet Hroðgar.

_Sal_ or OE. _sele_ is hence used for the special hall of a king, the long-house where the king held his court and his banquets.

Turning to the archaic language of the poetic _Edda_, we find, for example, in _Vafðríðnismál_ _salr_ and _holl_ as synonyms, while in _Ríghótlaga_ we find the heightening: the house of the thrall, the hall of the farmer and the _salr_ of the nobleman. Obviously, cultic acts may also have been performed in a _salr_. In _OWN._, we furthermore find a composition _disar-salr_ normally translated as ‘the cult-hall of the _dis(ar)_’ (A. Kock in _ANF_ 1904).

In this connection, the evidence from the well-known Snoldelev runestone in Denmark appears in a new light. This speaks of the _þular a salhauku[m]_ (DR no. 248), i.e. the _thul_ in _Sallev_ (or more correct _Salhōghar_). What was a _thul_? It seems obvious that the word was a dignifying term and probably the _thul_ was a kind of leader, a prominent person, a kind of priest (cf. above), a law-man, a chieftain, etc. (cf. Noreen 1921, p. 19 ff.; Vogt 1927; Clarke 1936; de Vries AGR 1, pp. 402 ff.; Eliason 1963; Hauck 1970, p. 98; Meulengraht Sørensen 1991, p. 237). To Jan de Vries (1934, p. 57), the _thul_ was a poet, a scald or a reader, carrying with him all the treasure of mythical and magical knowledge needed to be able to make and understand _Edda_ poems. To him, the
gode had a profane function, while the *thul* was a “Kultredner”, a pagan priest who conducted the cult and pronounced the magical words. In the same way, Ludvig Wimmer (1874, p. 229) looked upon the *thul* as a kind of priestly speaker. To Axel Olrik (1909, pp. 8 ff.), on the other hand, the *thul* was a leader in a settlement district, a wise man who guided his people with knowledge and advice.

The word *thul* must be kept together with *OWN. þula* ‘string of words’, as well as with *OE. þyle* ‘orator, spokesman’ (Bosworth & Toller). It is widely believed that the etymology is known (*þul* : Proto-Germ. *þul*- ‘talk, mumble, sing’ etc.; cf. Fick-Torp, p. 188; Noreen 1921, pp. 22 ff.; Vogt 1927, pp. 26 f.; AEW, p. 626; Clarke 1936; Eliason 1963; Hauck 1970, p. 98). It is interesting to note that the *OE. þyle* occurs in *Beowulf*, in the passage where king Hroðgar’s “þyle” is mentioned, sitting by his king’s feet (*Beowulf*, lines 1166 ff. and 1457, ed. Heyne; transl. Clark Hall):

Swylce þær Unferð þyle  
åt fōtum sāt freān Scyldinga:  
gehwylc hiora his ferhōe treówde,  
þät hē hāfde mōd micel,  
þyle Hroðgâres:  
Hrothgar’s spokesman

there sat Unferth the spokesman  
at the Scylding chieftain’s feet;  
all of them trusted in his spirit,  
that he had much courage,

Thus, in the light of the stipulated etymology, the central function for a *thul* was to talk. Whether this was to recite a poem or an ode in his capacity as a scald, to quote a section of a law in a judicial dispute as a man of law or to function as a spokesman, the one who speaks for a king or a chieftain during a banquet, lawsuit, cultic feast, etc., hence a kind of equivalent to the so-called “talking chief” (*tulafale* in Samoa) known in Oceania, is uncertain; personally I like the latter idea. The second element *hög* in this place-name (*Salhöghuar*) may be seen in the light of what is discussed below (*hög*). The first element *sal* has denoted, I think, some kind of hall in the vicinity of this *hög* (mound).

There is little doubt, in my opinion, that this word *sal* ‘guildhall, cultic hall, representation hall for a king or a chieftain’ etc. is found in a couple of Scandinavian place-names, i.e. the Norwegian *†Skiringssalr*, two *†Oðinssalr* and maybe in *†Tesalir* (P. Hovda in KL 14, cols. 677 f.; Hoel 1985, pp. 127 ff.; Kousgård Sørensen 1989, p. 13), the Danish *Sallov* (< *Salhöghuar*) and four *Sal* (Kousgård Sørensen 1989, p. 13), as well
as in the Swedish (Gamla) Uppsala (Gräslund 1993; Brink 1993), Onsala, Odensala (both < Odinssalir) and maybe also some simplex Sal(a). It is striking that, when sal occurs as the second element in compounded place-names, they are regularly of the theophoric type, and the god concerned is always Odin, the pagan god of the kings and chieftains!

Without doubt, one scents here an exciting connection with regard to sal—thal—sovereign—Odin. How these interrelate, and whether they de facto do so, is, of course, uncertain. The indications that tie the thal and thus maybe the scald or the talking chief with the sovereign, the king and his hall, the sal, where sal seems to have been related to the god of sovereigns and poets, Odin, is in any case pervasive and ought to be analysed more closely.

The conclusion seems obvious that the word and place-name element sal had an older meaning, ‘a long-house with one room’, often connected with high social prestige, hence a ‘hall’. Both words, hall and sal, are often used in a prestigious social sphere, in connection with buildings where noblemen and kings celebrated feasts, had veizlur and maybe also held sacrificial feasts (blot). In the light of this result, it is, of course, only natural and exceptionally appropriate that in Scandinavia Jerusalem was named Jorsalum! That sal in place-names also had a semantic content of not so imposing buildings is not remarkable; a striking parallel in this connection is, of course, OWN. skáli, Sw. skåle.

bo, bosgård

The word bo n. is normally used during the Middle Ages with the widespread meaning of ‘farm, home’. In eastern Svealand, we have some occurrences of the place-name Bo, with a probable pendant in bosgård in central Götaland, which have both been given a special interpretation. These names have traditionally been connected with two phrases in the Law of Skåne (chap. 215), kunungs bo and archibiskops [bo], as well as a well-known passage in the Law of Östergötland (ÖgL, dråpsbalken 14): Nu uarþær dræpin kunungxs bryti i upsala bo. [...] Nu uarþær dræpin iarls bryti i ropzs bo. [...] Nu uarþær biskups bryti dræpin i stafs bo ok stols (Now the king’s tenant in Uppsala bo is killed ... Now the jarl’s tenant in Rodhs bo is killed ... Now the bishop’s tenant in [the
bishops] bo is killed). A common opinion has been that these paragraphs refer to a special kind of administrative farm, managed by a tenant (bryte) and owned by the king, the bishop and the jarl respectively (cf. Hjärne 1947; Ståhle 1946, pp. 177 f., 1954; Ståhl 1957; Hellberg 1979, pp. 147 f.; Gustavson 1987). However, Gösta Franzén (1937, pp. 106 f.) has assumed that the bosgården in Östergötland were a kind of ecclesiastical bailiff’s farms within an unknown administrative system, while Staffan Helmfrid (1962, p. 135 f.) has emphasized their independent status.

The bo institution in Västergötland, where bo is the designation of an administrative district, is also related to this complex. The names of these districts are obviously named after a royal estate (a bo), for example, Vadsbo after the king’s farm Vad etc. (Sahlgren 1925). Against the background of this bo division in Västergötland, several scholars have assumed that place-names in -bo, -bu, like Delsbo, OSw. Guthisbo, Hablingsbo, Selbu, Sparbu, etc., normally testify that a bo division was more widespread in earlier times. In my opinion, this is most probably not the case. In all the names compounded with -bo, -bu outside Västergötland, the second element has rather the semantic content of ‘settlement district’ (Sw. ‘bygd’), not ‘administrative district’ (Sw. ‘distrikt’).

Obviously, it seems plausible to follow the traditional interpretation and assume that these bo and bosgården were a kind of (royal) administrative estates or farms. Carl Ivar Ståhle (1946, p. 178) has, in addition, pointed out that Bo in some cases was the name of only a part of a royal estate, a king’s hamlet. One example he puts forward is Hammersta in Ösmo, Sörmland, most probably a royal farm, which in 1362 had the following description: såx öresslandh iordh i Hammarstum, j Ödzmo sokn, j them delenom som kallass boo (six öresland of arable land in Hammersta, in the parish of Ösmo, in that part known as Bo). Another example is Bo by Amnö. Ståhle’s interpretation is that Bo here denotes the farm of the king’s tenant or bryte, i.e. his part of the hamlet. Lars Hellberg (1975, p. 96) has argued that bo is to be understood as ‘a farm for a (higher) royal servant’.

Quite recently, Sigurd Rahmqvist (1994, pp. 109 f.), however, has raised strong arguments for the view that both bo and bosgården are in several cases to be looked upon as not particularly royal administrative centres but as a kind of “manor” within private estates. He has demon-
Stefan Brink

Stefan Brink stated that several of these Bo and Bosgård can be linked to noblemen in different degrees; this is the case with Bo in Österåker, Bo on Helgö, Bona on Munsö, etc. That sometimes the king, the bishop or the jarl were in possession of such an estate is nothing odd.

With Sigurd Rahmqvist’s qualification of this problem, it today seems plausible to assume that bo in Svealand and bosgård in Götaland formed a kind of centres of power, in so far as they were “manors” in an estate; maybe it is not out of the question that in some instances they may have been (perhaps contemporary) administrative farms within a regal organisation.

hov

There has been a lively discussion of the word and place-name element hov, especially its possible connection with the pagan cult. Etymologically, the word goes back to hov, hof ‘hillock, elevation’, still found in Norwegian dialects. In place-names, the word occurs normally in eastern Scandinavia as simplex Hov, in western parts often in compounds like Njarðarhof, Pórshof, Ullinshof, etc. In a thorough study, Olaf Olsen (1966) states that hof may have denoted ‘a rich-man’s house, a building of grandeur’, and that this special meaning must have made its way from the Continent into Scandinavia. In Olsen’s opinion, hof was then a house that was used among other things for cultic activities. His point is that the house may have had several other functions, both profane and religious. Per Vikstrand (1992) takes a somewhat new line and assumes that hov may have denoted a special gathering-place, with presumably religious activities, and that it may have been a house. He argues for the possibility that hov may have denoted a special, exclusive guild-hall and not, in line with Olsen, the main house on a farm. I believe that the distribution and the localisation of the hov settlements in the different settlement districts are strong arguments for the possibility that hov may have denoted special buildings for different activities of a social character, such as cult, feasts, etc. Especially the hov names in the province of Jämtland strongly support this interpretation, in my opinion.
Probably the safest knowledge of the pagan cult we have in Scandinavia is the place-names in \textit{vi}, \textit{vae}, \textit{vé}. This word goes back to a Proto-Germ. adjective *\textit{wīha-}, Gothic \textit{weihs} 'holy', which in substantive form is found in OWN. \textit{vé} 'cult-site, sanctuary', OSax. \textit{wīh} 'sanctuary, temple', OE. \textit{wīg}, \textit{wēoh} 'idol'; cf. OWN. \textit{véar} 'gods' and Gothic \textit{weīha} m. 'priest' (Anderson 1992b, pp. 77 ff.). In compositions with -\textit{vi}, the first element is normally a god’s name: \textit{Frövi, Frösvi, Torsvi, Odensvi}, etc. A place-name of special importance is \textit{Tyrved}, OSw. \textit{Tôravi} on Södertörn in Sörmland. This name means 'the \textit{Tór} inhabitants cult-site', a place-name that obviously allows us to assume that those who lived in Södertörn formed a cult community, which gathered here at Tyrved. Another closely related place-name, though somewhat more difficult to grasp, is \textit{Göteve} (< \textit{Götavi}) in central Västergötland. A crucial question is whether \textit{vi} also denoted a building? Bearing the Scandinavian climate in mind, it seems highly plausible to assume that a special building was erected on a \textit{vi}, although the word may have had an older connotation of a natural site of importance in the pagan cult.

The places bearing the name \textit{Vi} in the province of Gästrikland have a rather unique position in this respect. They attract special attention. As shown by Folke Hedblom (1958, p. 84; cf. Brink 1990, p. 355), a hamlet named \textit{Vi} occurs in a central situation in all of the seven old parishes in the province. In many cases, we also find the name \textit{Vall} borne by some hamlet in the vicinity. In this central position, the church has normally been erected. As Johan Nordlander (1905, p. 314) has demonstrated, all these places with the name \textit{Vi} were the king’s farms and hence they were royal estates. One very seldom finds such a clear and unequivocal structure, when working on prehistoric, multifunctional, central places, as in the cases of the \textit{vi} and \textit{vall} names in Gästrikland.

\textit{*al}

An element \textit{*al} has long been assumed in Scandinavia with the probable semantic content of 'temple'. Normally, place-names like \textit{Motala}, \textit{Fröijel}, \textit{Norrala}, etc. have been combined with the Gothic \textit{alhs} 'temple'. The reconstructed word \textit{*al} has thus been used as an example of a word...
that has denoted a pagan cult-building. I have analysed this problem in an extensive study (Brink MS 2; cf. Brink 1992). The result—still preliminary—is that this idea is perhaps somewhat hasty. The meaning found in the Gothic Bible is probably not representative of an alh-known from the Germanic language region. Instead, we ought to assume the meaning of ‘farm, settlement’, often with the semantic content ‘protected’; cf. OE. ealgian ‘to shelter’. If thus we had a word *al in Scandinavia, which is not at all obvious, its meaning was probably ‘a habitation of some kind’. The first element in some place-names, such as Götala, Fröja, †Gutnal, etc., seems to give a hint that this building was of a special kind, i.e. the *al of the götar, Fröja’s *al, the *al of the gutar, etc. Hence, I consider that this postulated word may have had the meaning of ‘prominent house, building of special importance for a settlement district’, etc., in other words, a kind of hall.

hög

It may seem odd to bring up this word in dealing with central places and probable halls. However, it is highly likely that hög was used as a kind of technical term for a central place during prehistoric times (cf. Olrik 1909; Lindqvist 1936, pp. 4 ff.). One can focus on place-names such as Hög in Hälsingland, Högom in Medelpad and †Hög in Högby parish, Handbörds härad, in Småland. Furthermore, one has to pay attention to the names of some central places in Inntrodelag in Norway, Alvislaug in Skogn, Haug in Verdal and Sorshaug on Underøy, all compounded with -haug, as well as the fact that in the provincial law of Hälsingland the three Uppsala öd farms in the province are called Sunnaste högher, Högher i Sundedhi and Högher a Nordhstigi (cf. Brink 1990, p. 273).

These places with names compounded with hög probably denoted a gathering site, a thing site, etc. situated by a large mound. In some cases, they may have become veritable central places and royal estates. In other words one may assume that buildings must have been erected on these sites beside the mound, where the king, the chieftain or their representatives dwelled and conducted their business. It thus seems likely that halls or special buildings were erected on these sites.
In discussing the question of prehistoric central places, a classical problem is the place-name element -tuna. Although the discussion on tuna has been long and extensive, no consensus regarding its meaning and function has been reached (cf. Holmberg 1967 for older refs.; Andersson 1968; Hellström 1971, pp. 87–98; Olsson 1976; Hyenstrand 1982; and for an updated account especially Hellberg 1984–85).

It seems obvious that at an early stage the word had the meaning of ‘fence’, but the distribution and the localization of the tuna places, as well as the special first elements found in several of these names, strongly favour an interpretation that goes beyond the simple ‘fence’ hypothesis. Names like Vallentuna and Sollentuna, i.e. ‘tuna for those who live in Valland’ and ‘tuna for those who live in Solland’, as well as theophoric names like Frööstuna, Ultuna and Torstuna, more or less force us to look for another explanation.

Perhaps the most important reason for understanding the tuna places as prehistoric central places is firstly their distribution in the landscape, especially when one take into consideration the early administrative districts, secondly the localization in the different settlement districts, where they nearly always have a very central position, and thirdly the toponymical situation, i.e. the general setting of place-names of which tuna is a part. Very often, one finds in the vicinity of a tuna name other place-names indicating a central-place complex, with names such as Smedby, Rinkaby, Frösvo, etc. Now and then, also the successor as the central place for a tuna is found, normally a husaby, although one has to be very careful in talking of a succession in these cases, as we have no secure knowledge of the age of the tuna names.

In a couple of very interesting cases, we can discern a prehistoric settlement district or an administrative district from a name-pair with -tuna and -åker. In Uppsala, we find Ultuna and Ulleråker, and in western Uppland Torstuna and Torsåker. Within the hundare division, Ulleråker and Torsåker have become the hundare names, which perhaps mirrors the fact that the gathering and thing sites in these districts were upon or beside arable land (åker) consecrated to the pagan gods Ull and Tor; these district names were both formed from the names of the gathering site, a very common pattern in district names (Andersson 1982). If Ulleråker and Torsåker were the thing sites for the districts,
then *Ultuna and *Torstuna may have been the administrative centres. (Some scholars have interpreted the latter names as reduced forms of *Ullarakirsttuna and *Torsakirsttuna.) If this hypothesis is correct, it has very important implications as "proofs" for the idea that there was a geographical split of central functions such as the thing, cult, marketing, the tenant's (bryte) farm, etc.

Today I am becoming more and more convinced that the tuna places reflect no homogeneous structure. As I see it today, some tuna places were most probably originally the prehistoric farms of a petty king, a chieftain or a rich man, while others may have had a function as a central place within an administrative-district structure. The crucial common trait may be that the word tuna (in the plural) denoted some kind of chieftain's farm or nodal site, in a settlement district or an administrative district, in prehistoric society.

**husa**

One scholar, Lars Hellberg (e.g. 1979), has stated that an element husa, a plural of hus 'house', had the meaning of 'administrative central place' in place-names. In Hellberg's opinion, these names have prehistoric origins and are the predecessors of the medieval husabyar. This hypothesis also gives a natural explanation of the linguistic origin of the latter; after a re-organisation of the central places concerned, the element -by 'hamlet community' was simply added to the older husa (Hellberg 1979, p. 143). Place-names of this kind are normally very corrupt today, for example, Vivelsjö (< Vivilshusar), Vivelsta (< Vivilshusar), Hossmo (< Husamo), Österås (< Østerhusar), etc. The interesting husa problem is still wrapped in obscurity and in need of qualification and thorough discussion by Hellberg.

**åker**

In the light of the discussion above regarding åker and tuna, it is only natural to also discuss the element åker (cf. Strid 1993, p. 103). It seems plausible to think that many of the places in -åker had some function as
a central place (cf. Ulleråker and Torsåker above). While many of these names are theophoric, a cultic, perhaps judicial background seems probable. The arable land (åker) in question has thus been consecrated to a pagan god. In some cases, we also know that the places were thing sites; the central place may have given its name to the thing district. In many instances, we find the simplex Åker; the best example of this kind, with probable central functions, seems to be Aker at Vang in Hamar, Hedmark, Norway (cf. ØpcN).

In the same way as in Gästrikland, where we found a clear structure with Vi and Vall as central places in the settlement districts, we have in the province of Halsingland a direct correspondence with place-names in åker (Brink 1990, p. 358). In very central locations in at least nine prehistoric settlement districts, we find a place-name in åker, normally a simplex Åkre. Very often, the church was erected on or in the vicinity of these locations, and hamlets with the names Vi or Hov are often to be found as neighbours. A plausible hypothesis is therefore that these places in åker denoted some prehistoric gathering site for the settlement districts concerned. Most probably, some cultic and judicial activities took place here. It may be assumed that some kind of building was erected beside these arable lands, in the same way as for hög and vi.

harg

As in the case of hov, a sacral meaning is only a secondary phenomenon for the element harg. An older meaning is ‘heap of stones, rock’ etc., and it is from this that the hypothesis of a secondary meaning ‘stone-altar for sacrificial offerings’ has emerged. It is true that there was an attempt to “profane” the element harg, so that it never had any sacral meaning (Rostvik 1967), but this attempt probably proved to be a failure, as names like Torshälla (Thorsharchum 1252) and Odensala (Othinsharg 1286) suggest. Even more illuminating is perhaps the use of the word in other Germanic languages. In OHG. harug corresponded to Lat. lucus nemus ‘cult sites’, delubrum,fanum ‘sacred groves’ and ara ‘altar’. Similarly, OE. hearh, hearg have the special meaning ‘idol’.

It may be questionable whether harg should be assigned to the category of central places. It is also uncertain whether some building was erected on a prehistoric harg. However, at least in some Edda poems, a
högr was obviously a building (Grímnismál 16, Vafþrúðnismál 38 and Völuspá 7; cf. Meulengraht Sørensen, in the press).

Several other words and elements may be discussed in a central place context, for example, stav, vall, vang (in Norway), hilla (in Denmark), etc., but those mentioned above are probably the most central.

Prehistoric warriors and pagan priests

In the previous section special attention was paid to the thul, mentioned on the Snoldelev runestone in Denmark, and to a probable close relative, the Anglo-Saxon pyle. By etymologizing this kind of term for kings, sovereigns, priests, warriors, etc., we gain new and fruitful information to be used in the reconstruction of prehistoric and medieval society. A pervading characteristic in all discussions of this kind is the problem of finding out what specific activity or qualification each of these attributes implies. It seems to be very difficult to separate one kind of special activity from another. This situation may be a consequence of lack of sources or very sparse source-material, but it may also be due to the fact that during these periods a specialization had not yet emerged to any great extent; one individual could represent many different functions and could perform many different acts or tasks. There are also some indications that in prehistoric Scandinavia several activities, such as cult and law, were intimately connected, which makes it difficult to separate the one from the other.

In a later stage of the project, I shall try to illustrate and discuss the nomenclature of this kind, for kings, chieftains, pagan priests, warriors, etc. For the moment, I shall content myself with pointing out some of the names, with the observation that they obviously imply that in many cases there seems to have been a separation of especially cultic activities.

Some of our prehistoric place-names in Scandinavia contain the word of what must be interpreted as a kind of pagan priest. In these cases, it seems obvious that we had at least some exclusive specialists in the cultic sphere. The names of some of these priestly figures are OSw. *vivil,
*lytir*, ODa. *thorsvæ*, *frøsvæ*, OWN. vésiri, besides the afore-men-
tioned ODa. *thul* (cf. Vogt 1927; de Vries AGR 1, pp. 397 ff.; Elmevik
1966, 1990; Hellberg 1976; Andersson 1992a, p. 249; Kousgård Sø-
rensen 1992, pp. 236 f.; Strid 1993, pp. 103 ff.).

The first example, OSw. *vivil*, is a priestly term, observed by Gunter
Müller (1968), Lars Hellberg (1979, p. 129) and others, and found in
both the Icelandic literature and in Scandinavian place-names. The word
is a derivation from the Proto-Germ. adjective *wīha-* ‘holy’. The word
*lytir* is very interesting. This element is found in a couple of cen-
tral-Swedish place-names (*Lytisberg*, *Lytislanda*), but also once in the
form of a pagan god’s name, *Lytir*, in a *þáttir* in the *Flateyjarbók*. The el-
ement has been observed by many scholars, for example, Dag Ström-
bäck (1928) and Lennart Elmevik (1966, 1990). The former argues that
*Lytir* was probably another name for *Freyr*, while the latter connects the
element with OSw. *luter*, *loter* ‘lot, fate, destiny’. A *lytir* priest was then
probably a kind of fortune-teller, a seer, hence conducting a well-known
practice in prehistoric Scandinavian society. A *lytir* was certainly con-
sulted before one went away on a long journey, before starting a plun-
dering expedition, to see if it was going to be profitable, etc.

On the other hand, we have some titles that reveal that a leader could
have both political and religious power. Such a title is *gode*, *gude*. This
is, of course, well known from Iceland, for an Icelandic chieftain (cf.
Foote & Wilson 1980, pp. 132 ff.), but we have the title also on a couple
of Danish runestones. Although the *gode* was a political leader, the term
itself shows that he must have had some connection with the divine
sphere. Obviously, this was a sacrificially confirmed leadership. Outside
Iceland, *gude* is thus only known from two Danish runestones. On the
famous Glavendrup stone on Fyn (DR), the dead man is described as
*kvþa uia* ‘the priest [*gude*] of the sanctuaries [*vi*]’, which certainly gives
the title *gude* a religious content. It is, however, uncertain whether *gode*,
*gode* originally had only religious connotations, so that the political
*gode* on Iceland was a later development.

This leads on to the nomenclature for political leaders. Here we prob-
ably can distinguish between sovereigns and military leaders; although
the earliest leaders of the Germanic peoples were leaders in war, they
did not necessarily have any real power during peacetime. First, one no-
tices that we have a lot of terms for individuals: *konungr*, *neskonungr*,
*drött*, *jarl*, *hersir*/*hærse*, *vise*, *styrip*, etc. The latter names obviously
denote leadership in connection with the *ledung*, the old, sea-warfare organisation. The other category is the terms for a group of people, normally an escort (*hirð, līð*) of warriors of different ranks and qualifications, such as *rīkars, thægnar, drengiar, karlar, svener*, etc. Many of these are very often found in place-names (*Rinkeby, Karlaby*, etc.) within a central-place complex, where the nodal site may have a name in, for example, *tūna* (cf. Aakjær 1927–28; Kuhn 1944; Elgqvist 1947, *passim*; Finberg 1964; Green 1965, *passim*; Lindow 1976; Christophersen 1982; Hellberg 1978, 1979, 1984, 1990, pp. 69 ff.; Strid 1987, 1993, p. 96; Jesch 1993, 1994; Duczko 1995).

All these terms have a semantic content that says something about the actual office. Hence, by etymologizing them and by understanding them semantically, one gains an important part of the jigsaw puzzle that is the reconstructed, Old Scandinavian society.

Settlement-historical analyses of central places and central-place complexes in Scandinavia: Two case studies

In my opinion, the most promising approach in the study of old central places and central-place complexes is an inter-disciplinary, settlement-historical analysis of settlement districts. This is the key to understanding the distribution and the process of centrality in the cultural landscape. In my project, I am analysing several Scandinavian settlement districts by this method. To give an example of the method, I here present two case-studies, first *Gamla Uppsala* in Sweden and then *Skiringssalr* in Norway. These two central places both belong to the highest strata of central places in prehistoric society; *nota bene*, the element -*sal* is probably not given both these places at random! My aim is to be able to detect and reconstruct central places—in different social layers—by the inter-disciplinary, settlement-historical method here presented. In this presentation, I hope to be able to make two points: (i) the exciting perspectives that this kind of broad, settlement-historical approach opens up, in which many different source materials intermingle, and (ii) the potential that this kind of research has for the reconstruction of the ancient Scandinavian history and society.
Gamla Uppsala

Buckets of ink have been wasted for a long time in describing and discussing the most famous central place in Sweden, Gamla Uppsala. Most of the books and articles produced, especially during earlier centuries, are, however, biased and problematic from the source-critical point of view. The concept of Gamla Uppsala and its importance during prehistoric and medieval times may undoubtedly be described as oscillating; for those acquainted with history, the controversy that erupted during the 17th century between the two professors in Uppsala, Schefferus and Verelius, on this subject will come to mind (cf. Lindqvist 1936, pp. 99 ff.). A somewhat more recent authority, Jörn Sahlgren (1953), concluded only a couple of decades ago that the element sal in (Gamla) Uppsala denoted a simple shieling, a seter, and therefore (Gamla) Uppsala must have begun life as a seter. There are accordingly grounds for a new and thorough discussion of Gamla Uppsala from many aspects (cf. Gräslund 1993; Brink 1993; Brink MS 1).

To start with, there is nothing that argues that sal in this name must have had the original meaning of ‘seter’. In both Bo Gräslund’s and my opinion—as discussed above—a more plausible meaning of sal in (Gamla) Uppsala was ‘hall’. Of further interest is a settlement-historical and fiscal analysis of the genesis of Gamla Uppsala made by the historian Sigurd Rahmqvist (1986). From a map of 1640, he has shown that Gamla Uppsala was one of the largest hamlets in Sweden during the Middle Ages, divided into two halves, Kyrkbyn (the Church village) and Kungsgårdarna (the Royal farms). Uniquely, all the farms were obviously originally of a regal character (Fig. 7). Thus, we have here a large royal domain, consisting of 20 farms with 30 markland of arable land. This hamlet, and its regal character, certainly have prehistoric roots. It is obviously not accidental that a cathedral was erected here or that the hamlet is situated beside several huge mounds, dated to the middle of the first millennium and with—reinterpreted (Arrhenius 1995; Arrhenius & Sjøvold 1995)—finds that put the graves in an aristocratic or regal context.

Recent archaeological excavations have also thrown new light on this site (cf. Gräslund 1993; AMGU). Just north of the church, on the Kungsgården land, an elevated clay plateau is situated. On this, archaeologists have found an impressive long-house, 60 m long. This hall can be dated
to the Vendel Period and the early Viking Age, and an even older house has been noted underneath it. Palaeo-ecological investigations in progress, especially pollen analyses, show that there has been continuous cereal-growing for two thousand years on this site. Furthermore, new datings of house remains under the church are as early as the Roman Iron Age (AD 0–400).

With all these new results and indications as a background, one can conclude that Gamla Uppsala was probably a veritable central place, obviously the actual “fundation estate” for a royal dynasty, with its probable origin at the start of our chronology. From at least the middle of the first millenium, a magnificent and widely famous hall stood here on the Kungsgården land, the royal estate. It was most probably the representa-
tion hall for the king, where cultic, judicial and other activities took place. It seems highly likely, as hinted above, that it was this hall that Adam of Bremen had described to him and which led him to write of the "Pagan Temple" in (Gamla) Uppsala.

†Skíringssalr

Another example of a veritable central place is Skíringssalr in the parish of Tjølling in Vestfold, Norway. To begin with, it seems appropriate to first visit Viking-Age England. Here, in the kingdom of Wessex, there lived a king during the 9th century who was very interested in cultural matters. His name was Alfred. He had several works translated into his mother tongue, Old English, among others the "Seven books. The history against the pagans" written in Latin by the Spanish priest Paulus Orosius. For some reason, in this translation there are interpolated two short descriptions of journeys, one by the Norwegian Ottar and the other by a Wulfstan. One assumption is that the chieftain Ottar from Halogaland in northern Norway visited Alfred in Wessex and Alfred had Ottar's description written down. Ottar describes not only the conditions in the northern parts of Norway, but also how one travels southwards, to the Continent. Here one can read (Foote & Wilson 1980, p. 224):

Othere said that the province he lived in was known as Hålogaland. Nobody, he said, lived further north than he did. There is a port in the south of that land which is called Sciringes heal [...] From Sciringes heal he said he sailed to the port known as æt Hæþum [Hedeby] in five days;

This Sciringes heal was obviously the name of some place in Tjølling parish in Vestfold. Maybe at some time it was a settlement-district name. The actual settlement district is quite unique in many aspects.

To start with, one can focus on several place-names in the parish (Fig. 8) (cf. Hoel 1985, pp. 128 ff.). The parish name Tjølling emanates from an older Pjødalynge, a name to be compared with words like hjoðstefna ‘the people’s thing’ etc. The place-name is of a well-known kind and it goes back to the name of the gathering or thing site. It tells us that there were obviously public gatherings on a ling heath here. The old name †Skíringssalr is, in my opinion, an old name compounded with
sår ‘hall’ (cf. Fries 1980, p. 94; Hoel 1985, pp. 128 ff.; Kousgaard Sørensen 1989, p. 13). It denoted some centrally situated hall-building. Regarding the first element in this name, I am inclined to follow the suggestion put forward by Sigurd Fries (1980) that it originally was an old name *Skiringr on the inlet, Viksfjorden, which led into Kaupang and †Skiringssalr. However, it is worth noting that Kåre Hoel (1985, p. 129) has quite recently preferred the traditional interpretation, namely that the first element in this place-name contains the name of a pagan god, *Skiringr, another name for Freyr. Immediately south of Tjølling church, the farm of Huseby is situated, one of the largest farms in the parish. It is obvious that Huseby has, in the normal way, cast the old name of this farm aside, and that name was, in my opinion, †Skiringssalr (cf. Hoel 1985, p. 132). As demonstrated by Asgaut Steinnes (1955, pp. 21 f.), this was a central farm in this settlement district from ancient times, and Norwegian historians seem to agree that there can be no doubt that we here have an old royal farm. Just south of Huseby is the farm of Kaupang. Here, intensive archaeological investigations were conducted during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The results show that Kaupang was an equivalent to Birka and Hedeby, and thus a trading place with a harbour during the 9th and early 10th centuries, something that the name itself also reveals. In the vicinity lie large burial grounds that stretch up to Huseby. Obviously, it is Kaupang that Ottar refers to in his description.

This Norwegian settlement district is hence of unusual interest, espe-
cially when we note the name †Skíringssalr in connection with Uppsala. Both were old, central, royal estates, and both names contain the element sal. However, even more interesting is perhaps the direct connection between these two places through the poem entitled Ynglingatal. This poem starts by enumerating a royal dynasty, the ynglingar, whose seat was in Uppsala but which was later moved to Vestfold and Skíringssalr. The poem was made for Ragnvald Heiðumhár, a king of Vestfold. He was the son of Olafr Geirstaðaalf, who, according to the Ynglingatal, was buried in “Geirstaðum”, probably Gjerstad, just north of Huseby in Tjølling. But this Ragnvald was also the nephew of king Halfdan Svarte, who, according to Fagrskinna, was buried in Skíringssalr. Also the mighty king Halfdan Hvitbein was buried in Skíringssalr, according to the Ynglingatal. In an Icelandic “fornaldarsaga”, there is mention of a man called Eysteinn, king of Vestfold, and the saga continues by relating that Pá váru höfðablót í Skíringssal (by then there was a major sacrificial feast [blot] in Skíringssalr). In this context may I also mention that it has been assumed that the huseby institution was introduced into Norway from Sweden, i.e. from Uppsala (Steinnes 1955). Of course, a lot of what has been written above is literary evidence, and not taken from historical sources. Taking this for what it is worth, the saga tradition and the archaeological results indicate that this settlement district had an unusual history.

In my opinion, this statement is underlined by the unbiased place-names. In the light of toponymy, the historical picture seems to become clear. We find here a veritable major farm with a hall (veizlu hall), namely †Skíringssalr, that was transformed into a royal farm and was then called Huseby. Nearby, there was a gathering and probably a thing site, Tjølling (< Pjoðalyng), ‘the public gathering-site on the ling heath’, where also the church was erected later on and the name was transferred to the parish. In the south, the harbour and trading place were situated, the Kaupang, which was probably supervised by the king and which had far-reaching contacts, for example, with Hedeby, according to Ottar.

*English revised by Neil Tomkinson*
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Notes

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The idea for this interpretation of the “Pagan Temple” in Uppsala emanated from Prof. François-Xavier Dillmann, of the École pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne, Paris, who, in a lecture at the University of Uppsala in 1994, and more exhaustively during a lunch, noted Adam’s use of the Lat. triclinium on this occasion and also that the normal meaning of the word in Classical Latin was ‘dining-room, -house’ and not ‘temple, cult-house’.

Abbreviations

Lat. = Latin
ODa. = Old Danish
OE. = Old English
OHG. = Old High German
OSax. = Old Saxon
OSw. = Old Swedish
OWN. = Old West Nordic
Proto-Germ. = Proto Germanic
Sw. = Swedish

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Political and social structures in Early Scandinavia


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