

CHAPTER 7  
 TRADING HUBS OR POLITICAL  
 CENTRES OF POWER? MARITIME  
 FOCAL SITES IN EARLY SWEDEN

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In all early complex societies we find places that have had a special function of some kind, apart from being agrarian or fishing communities (in some cases with no agrarian/fishing activity at all). Normally we call them *Central Places*, and the definition is that these places had some function or significance exceeding the particular site or settlement, hence some kind of ‘power’ over a wider area, a hinterland (cf Brink 1996, 237). In Sweden, especially eastern Sweden, we know of, from the early medieval period (AD c1100–1300), some royal strongholds or farms, often called Sw *husabyar*, being part of a *bona regalia* (see eg Brink 2000). From the Scandinavian prehistoric period (hence before AD c1100) we can deduce some other focal sites in the landscape, the most notable settlements containing the element *-tuna* (see eg Brink 1996, 263–264; Hellberg 1985). It is notable that the *-tuna*-settlements very often geographically coincide with the later *husaby*-settlements. Whether this is an indication of succession or just accidental, due to the fact that both are located on sites suitable for a central place, is unknown. Furthermore, the *-tuna*-settlements occur in a landscape setting, where we can see that they are the focal site within a *central-place complex*, where we have other neighbouring settlements indicating some special or specialist function, such as forging, communal cult, communal assembly or even perhaps a military force (Brink 1996, 238; 1999). These central-place complexes are still to a large extent to be identified, analysed and dated. At the moment we only have a vague knowledge of them.

In some of the identified Late Iron Age (probably AD c600–1000) central-place complexes we find a settlement with a name containing the element *-husa(r)* in a prominent situation in the landscape. Most of these cases are to be found along the eastern coast of Sweden, and the sites are always, with one or two exceptions, located strategically along the coast. These so-called *-husa*-names are very enigmatic, but also problematic in several ways. As for today several scholars have noted their existence and commented on them, but no comprehensive analysis have yet been conducted. Many have seen the obvious resemblance between the *husaby*-names and the *husa*-names, which has led some scholars to assume a genetic relationship and a functional

succession from *-husa* to *husaby*, but others have denied this. In this article I will try to shed some light on this enigmatic name group. I will start by presenting a few cases, and their toponymic and geographical context (more cases can be found in Brink 1998), which might be indicative of the origin and background to these enigmatic place names. I cannot yet present a comprehensive list of *-husa* names, nor discuss a precise dating, but can point out that the *-husa*-names and settlements are to be found mainly along the Swedish east and south coast and must be an Iron Age phenomenon (AD c1–1100).

#### \*HUSAR IN TJUST

In the north-west part of the province of Småland in southern Sweden we find the old folkland or *land* Tjust. It is mentioned already in the middle of the 1st millennium by Jordanes in his *Getica* as *theu(s)tes*, but the settlement district has an obvious root back in the Bronze Age. Tjust is situated by the coast and the core settlement is located at the inner part of two extensive gulfs (Figure 7.1). During the Iron Age we find an obvious central-place complex (or perhaps two, see Brink 1999, 426) around the church at *Lofta*, where we find some remarkable ancient monuments and place names. The church has obviously been built on land belonging to a today lost settlement called *\*Husa(r)*<sup>1</sup> (Moberg 1962, 123). This settlement has been divided into three parts: *Norrsjö* < *Nordr-Husar* ‘the northern part of Husar’, *Södersjö* < *Sudr-Husar* ‘the southern part of Husar’ and *Vivilsjö* < *Vivils-Husar* ‘the vivil’s Husar’. The latter name is most interesting since it probably contains a word for a pagan cult leader, *\*vivil*, ON *vifill* (Hellberg 1979, 129), underlining the typical character of and specialist functions found at a central-place complex.

During the Iron Age (AD c1–1100) it was possible to reach *\*Husar* in Tjust from the sea, via a long and narrow inlet. This settlement *\*Husar* has a centrally, strategically and well-defended location in the old *land* of Tjust. It is well protected although easily accessible from the sea, and it is strategically located along the Swedish coast. In this case it looks as if this settlement with the name *\*Husar*, is the focal site in the central-place complex we find here, not *-tuna* or any other central-place element.

#### NORSA AND RUNSA IN UPPLAND

In central Uppland we find some central-place complexes, which are very complex and difficult to analyse (Figure 7.2). One of them — or rather two — are situated very close to Stockholm airport, *Arlanda*, which is a modern name constructed from the name of the medieval hundred (OSw *hundare*) of *Ärlinghundra*, and the even older folkland or *land*, *Arland* (see Brink 1999, 428–429). The central-place complex of interest for us on this occasion is the one we find by Lake Fysingen, where three hundreds meet. Close to the church at Norrsunda, we find a *husaby*: *Husby* or *Åshusby*. On this farm we have one of the largest burial mounds to be found in Sweden, the so-called *Nordians hög* (Nordian’s Mound) (60 × 9m). Lake Fysingen is connected to Lake Mälaren and the sea by a river, Verkaån. These waters were of great importance during the Late Iron Age and have been used for travels to the inner

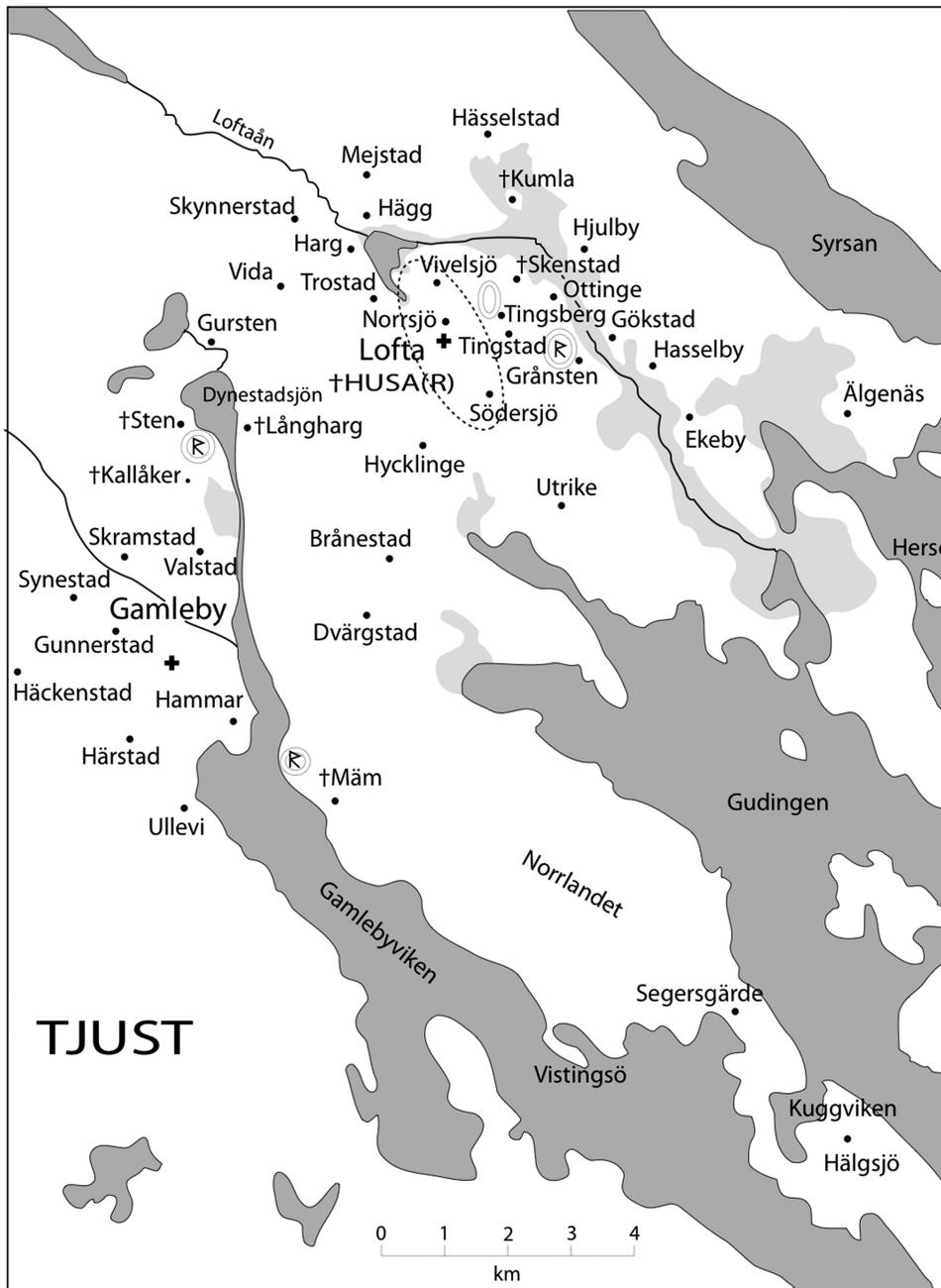


FIGURE 7.1 The central parts of the hundred (*härad*) *Tjust* in the province of Småland, eastern Sweden, with the parish Lofta. In the centre of this parish we find a lost †*Husar(r)*, which has been split up in *Vivelssjö* (< *Vivils-Husar*), *Norrsjö* (< *Norðr-Husar*) and *Södersjö* (< *Suðr-Husar*) (S Brink)

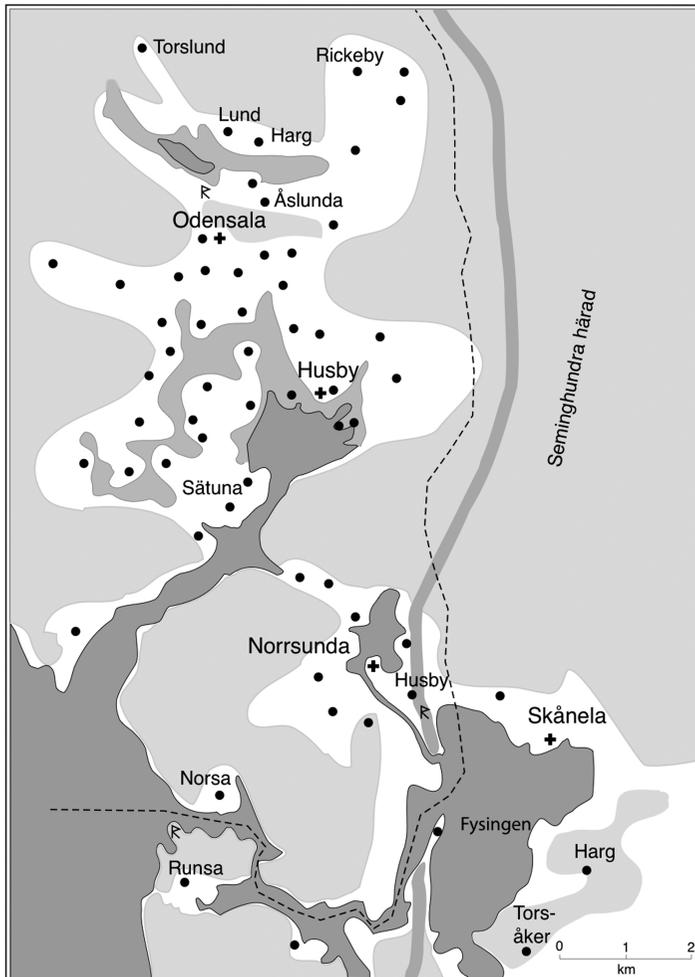


FIGURE 7.2 The hundred (*hundare*) of Ärlinghundra (older Arland) in the province of Uppland, central Sweden, with the two *husa(r)* names *Norsa* (< *Nor-Husar*) and *Runsa* (< *Run-Husar*) (S Brink)

parts of southern Uppland. Verkaån debouches into the main sailing route to Lake Mälaren and the sea. On each side of the river we find two *-husa(r)*-names: †*Norsa* (< *Nor-Husar*) and *Runsa* (in Runusum 1313) (< *Run-Husar*).

At Runsa we have an impressive and strategically situated hillfort (Olausson 1995, 31–32, 131–142), which may be looked upon as a fortified settlement. The first element in the name is obscure, but may refer to some rune stone standing in this *\*Husar* settlement. The latest phase of the hillfort seems to be the Migration Period, and it is not impossible that the name *Runsa* is to be connected to this fortified settlement/hillfort. The lost †*Norsa*, on the opposite side of Runsa, is today incorporated in the manorial estate of Rosersberg. Some field names and old survey maps indicate that the settlement of *\*Norsa* must have been located close to the manor. The first element *Nor-* is also rather obscure, it may denote the narrow inlet, or some small basin, suitable as a harbour (see Hellberg 1986).

*OPPUSA* AND †SJÖHUSA IN RÖNÖ, SÖDERMANLAND

On a peninsula between Runnviken and lake Sundbysjön we find in a cemetery the largest burial mound in the province, called *Uppsa kulle* (Uppsa's hill) (Figure 7.3). The first element in the name of the mound contains the name of the nearby hamlet of *Oppusa* (i oppusom 1425), which goes back to a *\*Upp-Husa(r)*. *Oppusa* has a most strategic situation at the old watercourse into the ancient Rönö hundred, which has been a rich and large Late Iron Age settlement district (Figure 7.4). If we follow the watercourse downstream to the sea, we find another interesting settlement with the name *Sjösa* (i sösæ 1473, Siösa 1491), which has been — probably correctly — interpreted as a *\*Siö-Husa(r)*. These two names, it seems, relate to each other, *Sjösa* meaning 'the Husa(r) by the sea' and *Oppsa* 'the Husa(r) upstream or higher up' (Vikstrand 2000, 218–220).

As can be seen in the map (Figures 7.3 and 7.4) *Oppusa* (*\*Upp-Husar*) is situated in a central-place complex. There are central places such as *Röntuna* and the hundred thing assembly at *Aspa Löt*. Moreover, there are settlements indicating pagan cult, such as *Torsberga* (Thórr's Hill) and *Ludgo* (Liuthguthuwi 1293), containing — in my opinion — the word *vi* 'pagan cult site' and a much disputed first element (see Wahlberg 2003, 197–198, cf Elmevik 2008).

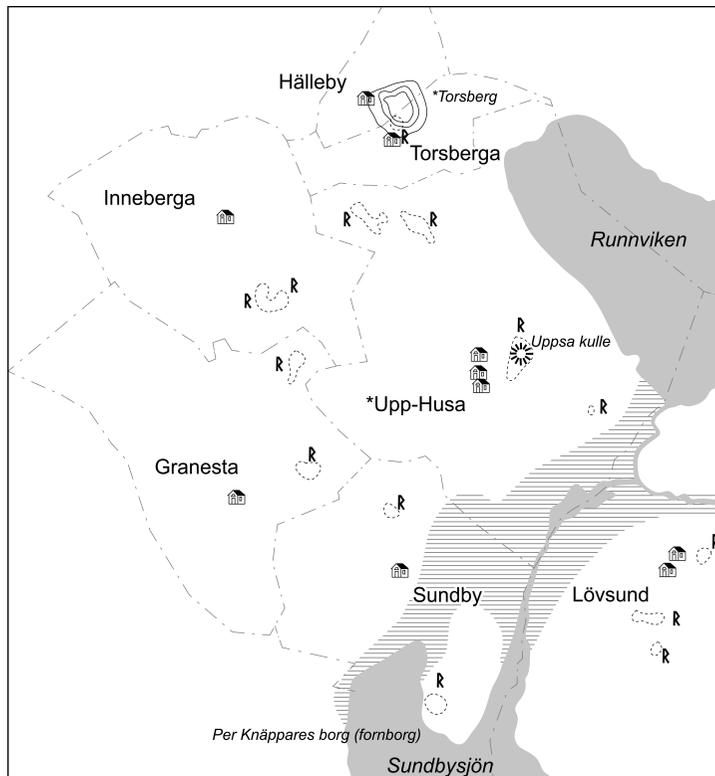


FIGURE 7.3 The hamlet *Oppusa* (< *\*Upp-Husar*) with the large burial mound *Uppsa kulle* (55 × 9m), situated in the parish of Runtuna in the province of Södermanland (S Brink and Vicki Herring after Vikstrand 2000, 220)

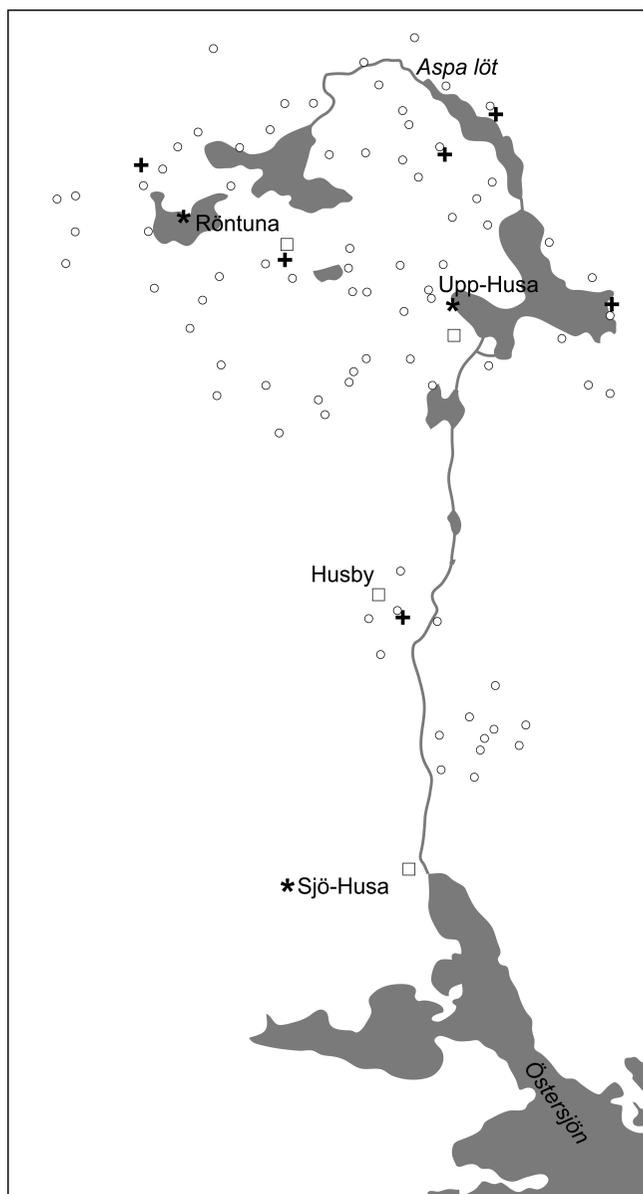


FIGURE 7.4 The two *husa(r)* names *Sjösa* (< \**Siø-Husar*) and *Oppusa* (< \**Upp-Husar*) in the eastern part of the province of Södermanland, Sweden (S Brink and Vicki Herring after Vikstrand 2000, 219)

#### HUSA IN ÖSSEBY-GARN, UPPLAND

At a strategic site along the Iron Age water route from the sea up to Uppsala and the central parts of Uppland we find the settlement *Husa* (Vikstrand 2008, 197). Opposite Husa we find Vada (Figure 7.5), which probably was the main central place in the central-place complex we find here. There is a monumental cemetery containing 114 burials, including three huge burial mounds, *Sjökullarna* (Raä Vada 10:1),

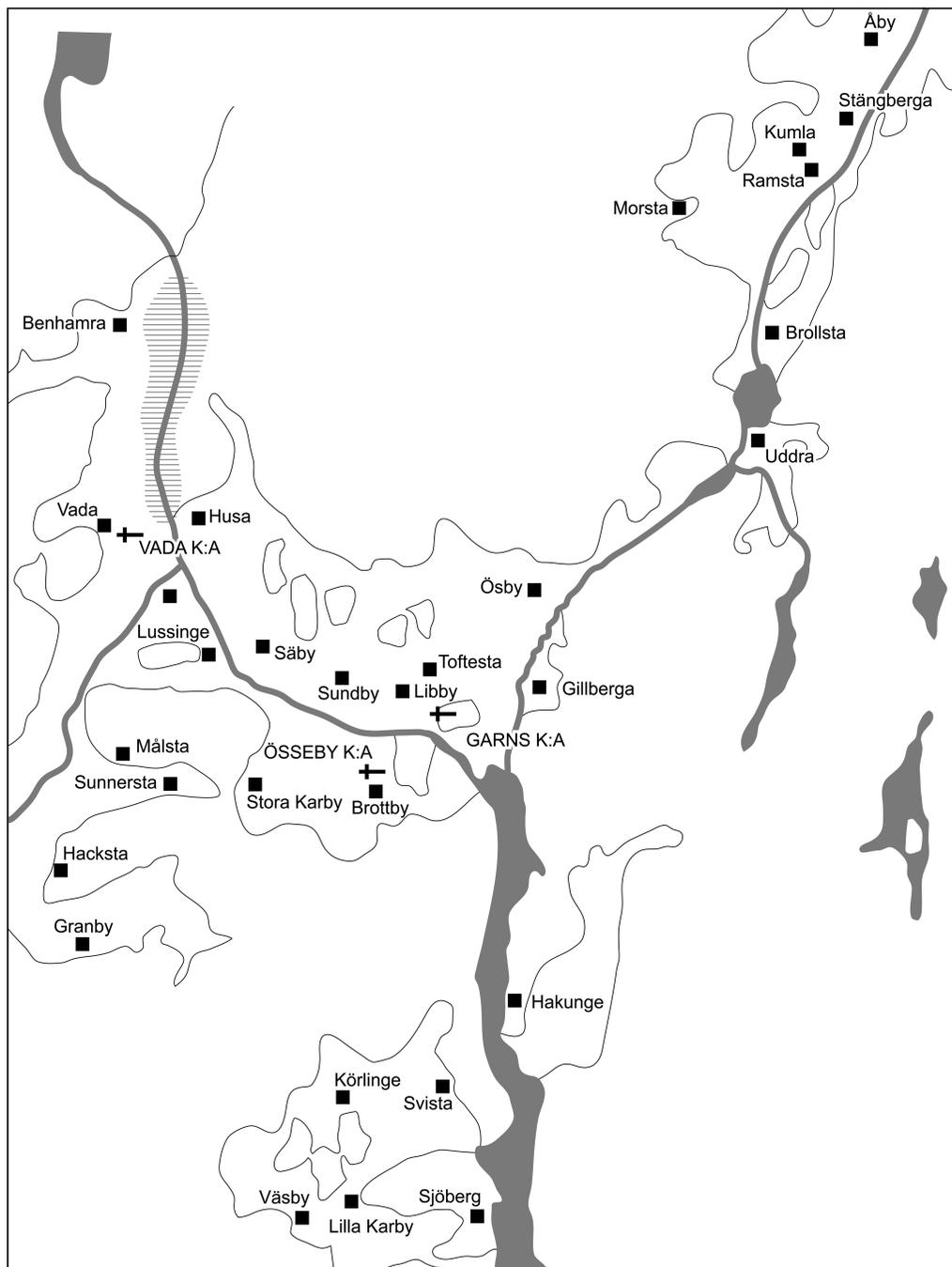


FIGURE 7.5 *Husa* in the parish of Vada, in the province of Uppland, central Sweden (S Brink and Vicki Herring after Vikstrand 2008, 191)

looking very much like the famous three Royal Mounds at Old Uppsala. *Vada* also has an early church, and the name means ‘a place in a stream where you can wade’. Here *Vada* seems to be the major settlement, according to the archaeological remains. However, it is not impossible that also here *Husa* was the main focal site. It is notable that the large cemetery with the three large burial mounds is situated between *Vada* and *Husa*, and it is not impossible that they should be connected to *Husa* instead of *Vada*.

#### SUNNERSTA IN UPPLAND

Where the River Fyris debouches into Lake Ekoln, which in its turn leads out to Lake Mälaren and the sea, we find the settlement *Sunnersta* (in *sundusum* 1295) — again — very strategically located, by the watercourse up to Old Uppsala. Immediately north of *Sunnersta* we have *Ultuna*, famous for its boat burials. No doubt *Ultuna* was one of the major central places in the region (see Hulth 2013). Also the name is very interesting. It contains in the first element the name of the god *Ullr*. On an esker by *Sunnersta* we find a hillfort, and cemeteries are found scattered here and there in the former hamlet.

#### VIKHUS IN VÄSTMANLAND

In the small parish of *Lilla Rytterne* in southern *Västmanland* is the castle *Viksjö*. It takes its name from the nearby *Vikhus by*, during the Middle Ages the largest hamlet in the district, hence the original *Vikhus* (*curie vikhusum* 1288) (Brink 2002). During the Iron Age an inlet went all the way up to the settlement, which the first element of the name alludes to (*vik* ‘inlet’). This name has a direct counterpart in *Viksjö* in *Järfälla*, *Uppland*, mentioned already on a runestone as *i uikhusum* (U92). This *Vikhus* in *Rytterne* does not seem to fit with the rest of the known *-husa(r)* settlements, since it is not part of a central-place complex. It is very much a solitaire. This makes this *-husa(r)* settlement so much more interesting; is it a reminiscence of a lost and by now obscure central-place complex, or does it have some other background (something which is developed below)?

#### CONCLUSION

The origin of the *-husa(r)* names is most obscure. Lars Hellberg (1979, 150–152), who was the first to highlight them as a toponymic group, saw them as royal settlements, run by a steward. Hellberg has a very interesting but speculative explanation for the element *-husa(r)*, which also is most difficult to prove. He starts in Schleswig, Germany, where we find *Husum*, 35km west of the important marketplace *Hedeby*. Close by we have the most interesting name *Schwesing* (in *Swezing* 1381, de *Swesen* 1433, *Swesum* 1491), which has been interpreted as *\*Svea-Husar* ‘the Husar belonging to the Swedes’ (Laur 1992, art *Schwesing*). Hellberg is inclined to assume an Iron Age ‘Swedish’ settlement in the area, and he connects this to the idea of a

‘svenskevælde’, a reign of Swedes, around AD 900 in Hedeby and the vicinity (a most disputed idea). We also know that Husum was a Frisian marketplace from AD c700. In this historical context, Hellberg assumes that *Husum* (nom. *Husar*) was transferred, from the ‘prototype’ *Husum*, to Scandinavia as a name for a marketplace, a meaning which he assumes later on changed to ‘central place’ in general, and, in Hellberg’s theory, to ‘an administrative centre under royal control’. Hellberg’s ingenious hypothesis has not been discussed to any extent, and this hesitation is certainly to be seen as a rejection by scholars (cf Brink 2007, 73).

We have seen above that the *-husa(r)* settlements are nearly always to be found in coastal locations and in Iron Age central-place complexes — the one exception being Vikhus in Västmanland. In some cases — especially in Småland — the *-husa(r)* settlement seems to have been the actual central place — the focal site in the complex (†Husar in Lofta, †Husar in Hossmo, †Husar on Bolmsö). In Uppland and Södermanland there is nearly always another settlement in the immediate vicinity, which seems to have been the focal site of power (Ultuna, Röntuna, Vada, etc). Maybe we should separate the southern Swedish *-husa(r)* settlements from the central Swedish ones? In Småland it looks as if the place-name element *-husa(r)* denoted *the* central place in a central-place complex. This seems to have been the case with †Husa(r) in Lofta, and also †Husa(r) in Hossmo (the predecessor to the town of Kalmar) and †Husa(r) on the island of Bolmsö in the large lake of Bolmen.

In central Sweden, hence old Svitjod, we nearly always find Husa(r) beside or in the vicinity of a major central place. In these cases it is tempting to look for another explanation. When I discussed the case of Vikhus in Västmanland I noticed that this settlement had an obvious function turned towards the lake, sea and water ways, and proposed as a possibility that *-husa(r)* could be connected to the ancient naval organization (*ledning*) or to shipping and trade (Brink 2002, 57). Per Vikstrand (2008, 198) has picked up this idea in his discussion of Husa by Vada. He highlights two important cases, namely *Skepphusa* in Kungsåra, Västmanland (j skiphusom 1399) and *Skäsa* in Mörkö, Södermanland (i skædhusa 1444). The first name contains the word OSw *skip* ‘ship’ and the latter OSw *skædh* ON *skeið* ‘long ship, war ship’. These two latter names seem to have the meaning of ‘ship house’, hence a building where you keep a ship, in the case of *Skäsa* (< \**Skædhusar*) obviously a war ship. Actually most *-husa(r)* sites in central Sweden can potentially have had this origin, based on their location. Vikhus was placed in an inlet in Lake Mälaren. Sjösa in Södermanland is where a watercourse debouches into the sea. Runsa, Norsa and Sunnersta are in the same position. They are all in an inlet or at the mouth of a river where it debouches into a larger lake or the sea. Maybe this is the background for the central Swedish *-husa(r)* names?

We end up with something not expected, namely a situation where we cannot see the Swedish *-husa(r)* names along the eastern coast as a coherent group. Instead it seems we have to divide them into two groups, one for southern Sweden and one for central Sweden. This unfortunate result finds support in another way. We also find several *-husa* names in the province of Skåne: *Abusa* (< *Abbahusa*), *Kabusa* (< *Kabbahusa*), *Bjäresjö* (< *Biærghusa*), †*Mattwse* (< *Matthiashusa*), *Skabersjö*

(< *Skaparahusa*), etc (Hallberg 1990). These names seem to be later than the *-husa(r)* names, and most contain a personal name as the qualifier, which is never the case with the older *-husa(r)* names. The *-husa* names in Skåne seem to represent a very local name fashion. Again we have to look not for a general solution, but a regional one.

## NOTE

- <sup>1</sup> In the article a \* denotes a reconstructed name or word (eg \*Husar); † a name which is out of use or a settlement which has ceased to exist (eg †Norsa); < a word or name which is derived from an older form (eg Norrsjö < Norðr-Husar).

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