



Geography, toponymy and political organisation in early Scandinavia

by Stefan Brink

The accounts of the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan are, together with Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, the oldest written descriptions of Scandinavia that we have, although Jordanes' listing of several ethnic groups in *Ultima Thule* around the year 500 is more than three centuries earlier. We are here for the first time in writing introduced to a number of place names and historical matters. Although these travel accounts contain few descriptions and provide little information about Scandinavia, the sources are of extreme importance for the understanding, or rather interpretation, of the geography and political structure of the early Viking Age.

To begin with the geography: in the account of Ohthere's report to King Alfred, it is stated that it took more than a month for Ohthere to travel by ship from his home in Hálogaland (mod. form Hålogaland) in northern Norway down to Kaupang (*Sciringes healh*) in Vestfold, following the coast with a favourable wind and camping at night.¹ This account seems fair enough if one compares it with the information Rimbert gives for Ansgar's second journey to Birka around 850;² here it says that this trip from Schleswig to Birka took twenty days.

This often used sailing route along the Norwegian coast, from Hálogaland in the north down to Viken, which Ohthere describes from his home down to Kaupang, became so identified with the land along the route that it gave its name to the country, namely *Norway*, and the second oldest reference to this is to be found in the account of Ohthere's report (*Norðweg*, 'North way'); in a Latin source from ca 840 we have the Latinized form *Nortuagia*.³ Hence, by the 9th century the name *Norway* was already in use.

Later, the name occurs in a runic inscription from Jelling (ca 980) in the form *Nuruiak*. The form of this name on one of the two Jelling stones has caused problems to philologists, who would have expected the dental (ð) in the name. Adolf Noreen therefore assumed that the first element was *nór* 'short river, narrow bay' and that the name was to be interpreted as 'the narrow way'.⁴ This is not necessary, since we have the dental in the oldest surviving forms of the name, *Nortuagia* and also *Norðweg* in the Old English *Orosius*. Most certainly *Norway* goes back to a Proto-Nordic **Norð(r)vegr*, where the fricative dental must have been lost early, reduced between two other consonants, in the same way as in the Old Norse adjective *norraenn* 'northerly' (< *norðraenn*). We may compare Old Norse *vestrvegr* 'land to the west', *austrvegr* 'land to the east' and *sudrvegr* 'land to the south' (used in particular of Germany, Italy etc.).⁵

Initially *Norway* must have been the name of the sailing route along the Norwegian coast, from Viken and Agder up to Hálogaland, most certainly a very important trade route with the *kaupangr* at *Skiringssalr* as the - or, at least, a - hub, where luxury commodities from the arctic regions were stored and traded with Danish, German, English and Frisian merchants. It is generally accepted that the name of this well-known sailing route must, through metonymic transfer, subsequently have been extended to the actual land mass along the northerly route. We may compare the transfer of the name *Redväg* 'the riding path or route', used of a land route from the sea to Falbygden in the province of Västergötland, to a 'hundred' district (*härad*). I would suggest that the transfer of

1. Cf. Sawyer 2002: 87.
2. *Vita Anskarii* 26.
3. Seip 1923: 9–19; Stemshaug 1976: 129.
4. Noreen 1897: 22.
5. Cf. Stemshaug 1976: 130; Andersson 2000c: 558.

the name *Norway* very probably originated with Danish travellers and merchants sailing in these waters and visiting Kaupang.

A name that is related both geographically and toponymically to *Norway* is *Jæren*, the name of the large settlement district south of Stavanger. It is derived from ON *jaðarr* 'edge', an appropriate description for the sharp coast line between Eigersund and Stavanger,⁶ and its name, the 'edgy' part, was most certainly given to it by people sailing on the 'North way', hence given from the perspective of the sea.

Central to Ohthere's description and most certainly very central for early Viking Age Norway is *Sciringes healh*. This place name is in my opinion a corrupt form of *Skíringssalr*, the second element *-salr* having been wrongly identified with OE *healh* (corresponding to modern Scottish and Northern English 'haugh', southern 'hale') by an Anglo-Saxon note-taker or interpreter. Since the archaeological discoveries at Kaupang, the *Sciringes healh* of the report of Ohthere's voyages has been identified with that place. However, this is only partly correct. To understand the names ON *Skíringssalr* and ON *Kaupangr* one has to look at the actual settlement historical situation here and the toponymical milieu.

The site now known as *Kaupang* is situated in a small settlement district (*bygd*), which in some early documents is identified with the name *Skíringssalr* (an areal denotation which is probably secondary).⁷ The *bygd* contains only a handful of settlements. At its centre is a farm by the name of *Huseby*. This name goes back to an administrative term, the appellative *husaby(r)*, which, at least in central Sweden, referred to a royal farm or hamlet, probably part of the *bona regalia*, the *Uppsala ødh*.⁸ As can be demonstrated, these administrative terms have replaced an older name for the settlement.⁹ Very often these older names were of a special kind, theophoric or denoting a centre of power, such as *Óðinssalr*, *Tésalr*, *Ærnavi* etc. There

seems to be no doubt that the older name for *Huseby* in Tjølling was *Skíringssalr* (or maybe *Skírings-al*, though, if so, to be seen in the same semantic field as a name in *-salr*).¹⁰ The first element in this name is unclear, it has been variously suggested that it is to be interpreted as a by-name for a god, *Freyr* or *Ullr*, as a name **Skíringr* 'the clear one' for the inlet to *Skíringssalr* and *Kaupang*, and as a name of the actual *salr* 'hall', 'the glorious, "shining" hall building'.¹¹

Janet Bately, taking as her starting point the Old English term *healh*, notes amongst the wide range of meanings found for this place-name generic that of 'slightly raised or low-lying land in close association with water' (possibly 'land beside an inlet or bay'),¹² and suggests that 'Sciring's haugh' seems an appropriate description of the site of the trading place and harbour now under excavation at Kaupang. However, she emphasises that we can only conjecture as to what Norse word or phrase may have lain behind the choice of the topographical term *Sciringes healh*, which the Old English text gives as the name of the *port* ('port', 'harbour', 'trading centre') on Ohthere's route to Hedeby.¹³

This is a possibility to be considered, but it rests upon the assumption that this area had a name such as **Skíringr*, **Skíringsangr* or something like that. Unfortunately no such name is recorded. What we do know is that in medieval times a place called *Skíringssalr* was located in this area. Hence I find as the most plausible interpretation that Old Norse *Skíringssalr* and Old English *Sciringes healh* are to be seen in context, and I assume that the latter is a misunderstanding and an Old English adaptation of a misheard or misinterpreted Old Norse name, so that the Anglo-Saxon writer used the, to him well known, word OE *healh*, 'bend (perhaps also bay)', hence *Sciringes healh*. This is the common interpretation of toponymic scholars who have looked into the matter.¹⁴ Presumably Ohthere used this place name because it was the 'place of domination', which the harbour

6. Sandnes & Stemshaug (eds) 1980: 177; Andersson 2000a: 1.

7. For the occurrence of *Skíringssalr* in early documents, cf. *NG* 6: 304 and Skre this volume.

8. Brink 2000a.

9. Brink 1999; Brink 2000b.

10. Hoel 1986: 132 – For names ending in *al* in Scandinavian place names, see Brink 1992.

11. For interpretations of the element *Skíring-* in the name, see *NG* 6: 304-306, Fries 1980, Sandnes & Stemshaug 1980: 281, Hoel 1986, Nordberg 2003; cf. Brink 1996: 271-273; Andersson 2000b: 340.

12. See above, page 000 and the bibliography there cited.

13. See above, pages 000 and 000.

14. *NG* 4: 304-6; Fries 1980: 94; Sandnes & Stemshaug 1980: 281; Andersson 2000b: 339.

and trading place (the *kaupangr*) were under the control of and to which they belonged.

It is important to understand the first element, but for a cultural historical interpretation of the settlement the second element is vital. It is the word *salr* (or *al*, with probably similar meaning), an element found in some other prominent place names, such as (*Gamla*) *Uppsala* (< *Upsalir*), *Óðinssalr*, *Tésalr* etc., a word that can be demonstrated to have denoted a major banqueting hall, a king's or a chieftain's hall;¹⁵ the old Scandinavian word for a 'hall' was *salr*, cf. OE *sele* in the poem *Beowulf*. In a paper from the mid 1990s I tried to 'provoke' Norwegian archaeologists if not to stop excavating in Kaupang, at least to 'put the shovel in' in Huseby, which is the most 'interesting' site here in Tjølling. This has now been done under the new leadership of Dagfinn Skre, Oslo, and here at Huseby, on an elevated plateau, they have found the site of a large hall building, the actual *Skíringssalr* or a successor or predecessor of that hall. We thus today have evidence of a large hall both in (*Gamla*) *Uppsala* as well as in Huseby/*Skíringssalr*. It would be fascinating also to start looking for a hall at sites such as *Óðinssalr* and *Tésalr* in Østfold.

A couple of kilometres to the north is the parish church of this *bygd*, in the parish called *Tjølling*. This name goes back to an ON *þjóða(r)lyng*, which is to be translated as 'the peoples' heath', and most certainly to be understood as 'the heath where people gather for Things and other assemblies', hence the name of an assembly site to be seen in the same semantic field as *Thingvellir* etc.¹⁶ Many of the northern Swedish and Norwegian parish names have this background, as the name for an assembly site for a *bygd*, a district or a congregation.¹⁷ It is not so easy to understand the links between *Tjølling* and *Huseby*. Do they belong to the same chronological phase, or to different historical periods? The semantic content of the former is 'site where people meet for assemblies etc.', while the latter breathes power and authority, 'the hall of the

king or chieftain'. Maybe it is possible to relate the two sites to each other, by interpreting them as belonging to the same historical period, but to two different socio-political 'layers' in society, where *þjóða(r)lyng* was the 'stable' geographical focus over time, the site where to meet, and *Husaby(r)/Skíringssalr* the site of a chieftain or a king, whose political power could grow or diminish, so that the site could lose or gain 'importance', perhaps, in some cases, to the degree that it could 'vanish' from the socio-political scene, and sink down to become an ordinary farm.¹⁸

Circa 2 km south of Huseby/*Skíringssalr* we have the famous settlement *Kaupang* (ON *Kaupangr*). This name contains an appellative ON *kaupangr*, OSw *køpunger*, ODa *køping* denoting a trading and market place, obviously for an organised and controlled market; several of these early markets today have the name *Køping(e)*, *Kaupang*, *Købing*, *X-køping(e)* etc.¹⁹ In Ohthere's description we read of "an port ... þone man hæt Sciringes heal", i.e. a harbour, trading place which is called *Sciringes healh*. In the light of what has been discussed above, this is in my opinion to be understood as "the harbour and trading place 'belonging to' or 'under the control of' *Skíringssalr*". When shortly afterwards Ohthere refers again to *Sciringes healh* as the place he visited on his voyages, he does not of course use the name *Kaupangr*, because there were several 'kaupangs' along his travelling route in Scandinavia. It is hence, in my opinion, wrong to assume that *Kaupang* had the older name *Skíringssalr*. That it was an important place ("port") has been confirmed by the archaeological excavations here during the last four or five decades.²⁰ These excavations reveal the most important harbour and trading place in Norway during the Viking Age, and this site is to be seen in context with the nearby centre of power, which probably owned the harbour and controlled the trade, namely *Skíringssalr/Huseby*.

All this discussion of *Kaupang*, Huseby, *Skíringssalr* etc. leads to the conclusion that

15. Brink 1996: 255-58; Meulengracht Sørensen 2003.

16. Cf. Brink 2004: 64-66.

17. Cf. Brink 1990.

18. Cf. Brink 1999.

19. See Ljunggren 1937, Ljunggren 1965, Pelijeff 1988, Ersgård 1988.

20. See **Skre this volume: 000**.

one has to look at the settlements in their landscape context, not just at individual sites. Any attempt to understand them in isolation creates a problematic stance for interpretations. Instead settlements have to be seen in relation to each other, in a settlement complex. Typically for early Scandinavia it is the settlement district (*bygd*) that was the important corner stone in society, something that is very well illustrated here in Tjølling parish.

The homeland of Ohthere was *Hálogaland* (mod. form *Hålogaland*). The first written evidence of this name we find in his account as *Halgoland*, the first element of which has been assumed to have been wrongly identified with the word for 'holy',²¹ probably by the Anglo-Saxon writer, in very much the same way as I believe *Skíringssalr* to have been misinterpreted as *Sciringes healh* and *Bleking* as *Blecinga eg*. In this province lived the people known as the *háleygir* (cf. *Háleygjatal*), and the name means 'the land (province) of the *háleygir*', the first element here being an older form, genitive plural *háloga-*. No evident convincing etymology of *háleygir* has yet been proposed;²² in my opinion the first part is probably to be understood as the ON adj. *hár* 'high', denoting the remote situation of Hálogaland in the north, but *-leygi/-loga-* is more problematic.

The account of Wulfstan's voyage contains a description of the route that he took between the two trading places Hedeby and Truso. The land he passes on his port side belongs mostly to the Danes and that on his starboard side to the Wends. It is notable that Bornholm (*Burgenda land*) is said to be a "land" of its own, with its own king. The intriguing part of this geographical description is when he enumerates the "lands" on the port side after Bornholm, namely *Blecinga eg*, *Meore*, *Eowland* and *Gotland*, easily recognisable as the provinces *Blekinge* and *Möre*, and the large islands of *Öland* and *Gotland*, and says that they belong to or were the subjects to the Svear (*þas land hyrað to*

Sweon). We have absolutely no knowledge of the political situation in Sweden (the early *Svipjóð*) around 900.²³ We believe that at that time *Svipjóð* was a polity around Lake Mälaren in central Sweden, with the province of *Uppland* at its core, and the provinces of *Södermanland* ("the land belonging to the people living to the south [of Uppland]"), *Västmanland* ("the land belonging to the people living to the west [of Uppland]") and perhaps also including the province of *Närke* (in the west). When the larger Sweden was formed, including in particular the provinces of *Öster-* and *Västergötland* ("the land of the *gautar* living in the east" and "the land of the *gautar* living in the west" respectively), is a very much debated problem, but maybe this is to be placed as late as in the late Viking Age or early Middle Ages, hence after the time of Wulfstan. An interesting reminiscence of this integration of the provinces into the "new" Sweden is probably the so called *Eriksgata*, the journey a newly appointed king among the Swedes had to undertake to each of the above mentioned provinces, to attend their provincial assemblies and there to be anointed and accepted as their new king.

In the light of this it is most peculiar to find Wulfstan in the late 9th century declaring that Blekinge, Möre, Öland and Gotland "*hyrað*" to the Svear. Does this mean that these provinces were part of a kingdom of Svear (*Svipjóð*)? Probably not. I assume that given the wide range of reference of the collocation *hyran to*,²⁴ the provinces are being described as part of the Svear's sphere of influence - and not that of the Danes; that this area was part of the cultural region where the Svear dominated, including in respect of trade, or even that these provinces were subject to the Svear.

We know that toponymically and on the evidence of the dialects, the eastern part of present-day Sweden, down to and including Möre (but not Blekinge), is and has been very much influenced by the Mälaren region. The dialects are so closely related that the

21. Andersson 1999: 455; This assumption may be questioned on linguistic grounds, see Translation notes.

22. Sandnes & Stemshaug 1980: 169; Andersson 1999: 454-5. See also **Storli this volume: 000**.

23. For a plausible political interpretation see **Sawyer this volume: 000**.

24. For the ambiguous expression *hyran to* see **Bately this volume: 000**.

'languages' down to Möre are placed in the large group of "Sveamål", i.e. dialects related to Swedish (spoken around Lake Mälaren),²⁵ and the toponyms down to Möre have a notable affiliation to the place-name structure around Lake Mälaren. We do not know how old this influence is, but judging from the evidence of several of the place names, this influence from central Sweden seems to have been active during the late Iron Age.

Gotland has always stood somewhat apart, but dialect and place-name evidence indicate an influence from east central Sweden.²⁶ According to the *Guta Saga*, Gotland agreed during the late Iron Age to become a tributary of the Svear, paying each year a tribute to the Svear king.²⁷ Öland shows greater influence from the north, with the place name *Svibo* (from *Svea-boþ*) on the southern part of the island as an intriguing piece of evidence. *Möre*, on the mainland, was an old 'land' of its own with a central place at *Hossmo* (**Husar*), which is some kind of predecessor to the town of Kalmar.²⁸ Another ancient 'land' to the north, mentioned by Jordanes, is *Tjust* (*Theustes*). The dialects and toponymy of both these 'lands' reveal the influence of, and contacts with, central Sweden.

The greatest problem is provided by Blekinge. It seems obvious that this province has played an important role in seafaring and trade, both from the topographical situation on the 'corner' between the north- and east-going sailing routes and the one south-bound to Denmark and Hedeby, where the strategically placed islands of Senoren, Has-slö, Aspö, Tjurkö, Sturkö and Utlängan must have been of particular importance.²⁹ This is indicated by e.g. the famous gold bracteate from Tjurkö, by the fact that several place names along the coastline bear witness of the presence at some time of Frisians, Danes, Jutes (from Jutland), Gutar (from Gotland) and Est(onian)s, and also by the form taken by two eponyms in the form of *Heaby(holm)* from Hedeby and *Truso*, which actually seems to be derived from the much more famous

trading place Truso.³⁰ Utlängan, the eastern- and southernmost island, must have been well-known to all sailors along the coast, and this is evidenced by a rune stone, standing in Ny Larsker on Bornholm, with the inscription: **kobu suain raisti stain þina a[f]tir bausa sun sin tr[i]n þan is tribin ua[r]þ i [ur]ostu at ut la[nk]iu..**, i.e. "-- Sven erected this stone after Bøsi, his son --, the one who was killed in battle at Utlängan... ". In other words, at the time of the erection of the rune stone a young man from Bornholm was killed in a battle (at sea) off Utlängan. The cultural and trading activities are obviously to be tied in with the eastern part of Blekinge, around the islands mentioned above and on the mainland. It is probably to this area that we can locate the name *Blekinge*, which seems to go back to an old bay name **Bleking* or **Blek*, 'the glittering, the calm', on, as has been suggested, the bay *Hammarbyviken*.³¹ It is unique that a name for a bay has been given to a whole province, and this is probably to be explained in the light of the importance of the ancient sailing route here. The name form given to Blekinge in the account of Wulfstan's voyage is *Blecinga eg*, like *Sconeg* (< *Skán-ey*) a name with second element Old English *ieg, êg, îg* 'island', Old Norse *ey*, Old Swedish *ø* (< *øy*), that is to say *Blekinga ey* "the island of the people of Blekinge", denoting one (Utlängan) or several of the islands mentioned above, rather than a misinterpretation by the writer, which has been a common explanation.

We have already touched upon the political situation around the late 9th century. The anonymous translation of Orosius' *Historiae* begins with a geographical overview, which the author has expanded with a description of northern Europe, and it is in this expanded part that we find the insertion of the accounts of the reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan, almost as "eyewitnesses" for the geography in the periphery. Ohthere describes how several ethnic groups interact in the far north, and how the *háleygir's* main income

25. Hesselman 1905; Fries 1962.

26. Hellberg 1988.

27. For a discussion regarding Gotland and its connection to the Svear, see Blomkvist, N. 1995: 222-4 and Blomkvist, T. 2002.

28. Hellberg 1979.

29. For the importance of the Utlängan area and these south-eastern islands, see Stenholm 1995.

30. Ohlsson 1939: 27.

31. Ohlsson 1939.

was the tribute the Sami (*Finnas*) paid them in fur, feather, whale bone and skin from whale and seal etc. Why the Sami paid this tribute, we do not know, but an assumption may be that the *háleygir* stood on a higher societal level, with some kind of organised power, with chieftains and retainers etc., and therefore could demand these kind of tributes.³²

Ohthere describes the “land” of the northmen as long and narrow, which seems accurate and a good description of Norway. From this, we may assume that the area forming what is present day Norway was looked upon, certainly not as a united kingdom, but in any case as the “land” where the northmen lived, so there must have been a feeling of some kind of unity among the different regions, *Hálogaland*, *Þrændalög*, *Møre*, *Hörðaland*, *Jaðarr*, *Agðir* etc., already in the late 9th century, at least according to Ohthere. If Opland and Hedmark could also be included is uncertain. It is also interesting to note that Ohthere states that to the east of the mountains (*moras*) we have Sweden or the land of the *Svear* (*Sweoland*). This statement is somewhat bewildering. It has been assumed that Ohthere simply means that Sweden is to be found to the east (hence quite a long distant away, probably around Lake Mälaren),³³ but it may also suggest that “Sweden” by this time had a larger extension. Is this then to be interpreted as indicating that the *Svear* already had a firm influential grip on provinces like Värmland, Dalarna, Jämtland and Hälsingland, where the first three today all border on the mountains and on Norway (and so did Hälsingland before 1645)?

It would have been extremely interesting if Ohthere had said something of the political situation down at *Skíringssalr*, but nothing is mentioned apart from the “port” there. If he had done so, Ohthere might well have told us of an important chieftain or ‘king’ residing in *Skíringssalr* (but certainly not permanently living there), controlling the trade at the *kaupangr*. Maybe the person was placed

there by the Danish king, or perhaps he had accepted the Danish king as his overlord. But Ohthere does not say anything about who ‘ruled’ in *Skíringssalr*, though he does so for Hedeby. May we take it from this that the ‘lord’ at *Skíringssalr* was not under Danish overlordship? Peter and Birgit Sawyer have produced the plausible theory that Norwegian rulers and chieftains during this period probably had accepted Danish overlordship “in order to have safe passage through Danish waters ... and access to Danish markets”.³⁴ It seems plausible to suppose that the Danes had some political, economic and cultural dominance over Viken in particular in this period.³⁵

When Ohthere goes on to describe the voyage from *Sciringes healh*, he states that the land on his port side was Denmark (*on þæt bæcbord Denamearc*). Such a statement fits in well with the early medieval political situation with regard to Skåne and Halland, both old Danish lands. But what about Bohuslän (the old *Ranaríki*)? Was this part of the coast also in the hands of the Danes? Perhaps. It would be no surprise if all the coastal land up to Viken was under Danish control or influence in the last quarter of the 9th century.³⁶

Wulfstan states that Blekinge, Møre, Öland and Gotland belonged to or were subject to the *Svear* (*þas land hyrað to Sweon*).³⁷ As we have seen above, it seems possible to accept this statement with reference to Møre, Öland and Gotland at this time, on the grounds of toponymy, dialects and the traditions of Gotland as being a tributary land to the *Svear*, but Blekinge is more difficult to understand in such a context. However, bearing in mind what Ohthere said above about *Sweoland* being on the other side of the mountains on the Norwegian border, and Wulfstan’s statement that all “land” along the eastern coast of present-day Sweden belonged to the *Svear*, it is perhaps possible to look upon the *Svear* in the same way as, for instance, Åke Hyenstrand has done,³⁸ as a kind of trade organisation, but with the ex-

32. Sawyer, B. & Sawyer, P. 1993: 145.

33. This is the position of e.g. Gahrn 1988: 43.

34. Sawyer, B. & Sawyer, P. 1993: 88; cf. Roesdahl 2001a: 129.

35. On this matter cf. Stanley this volume: 000.

36. Cf. Sawyer 2002: 22 and Sawyer this volume.

37. See Text and translation.

38. Hyenstrand 1989: 11-30; cf. Widmark 2004: 740-46.

tra ingredient of Svear probably forcing different “lands” to pay tribute to them, hence giving the Svear a more political offensive dimension, in the way that, for instance, Lars Hellberg has advocated.³⁹ From Ohthere’s and Wulfstan’s statements it seems possible to assume that already around the late 9th century, provinces like Värmland, Dalarna and Jämtland were under the influential rule of the Svear, perhaps paying tribute, as the Sami did to the Háleygir, and the Gutar to the Svear. This could be the background to Ohthere’s statement that the land of the Svear came after the bordering mountains. It is, however, noticeable that in, for instance, the *Historia Norwegie* (ca 1160-1175) it is stated that to the east of Norway are Sweden, Götaland, Ångermanland and Jämtland (*sed de sole Swethiam, Gautoniam, Angariam, Iamtoniam*),⁴⁰ which implies that in the 12th century different peripheral provinces still had a somewhat independent status vis à vis the Svear and *Svíþjóð*. In a similar way the Svear dominated all the land on the eastern coast, together with the Baltic islands, down to Blekinge. Perhaps the eastern part of present-day Blekinge was some kind of bordering area or a *res nulla* between the Danes and the Svear. The political status of the small but old “land” of *Lister* is difficult to understand. Perhaps it was an “independent” “land” of its own, as it had clearly been a couple of centuries earlier, according to some important rune stones, in the same way as Bornholm obviously was at this time.

The biggest problem, as regards political situation and affiliations, is however provided by *Hedeby*. The name of the port and market place in the 9th century is said in Ohthere’s report to be *æt Hæðum*. i.e. ‘at’ or ‘on the heaths.’ This place name makes good sense; a heath is a suitable site for a meeting place or a market, and such a name is to be seen in the same toponymical light as for example the previously mentioned *Tjølling*, a compound also denoting a heath, where people assembled. The name *æt Hæðum*, and pre-

sumably later *Heðaby* (> *Hedeby*), seems to be the name of this port and market used by the Scandinavians, hence the people of the north, whereas it has been assumed that the Saxons and the people to the south named the place *Sleswig* (< *Sliaswic*). This assumption is based on a statement by the Anglo-Saxon writer, Æthelweard, who says of Hedeby, that “in the Saxon language [it] is called *Slesuuic*, but in Danish *Haithaby*”.⁴¹ Peter Sawyer has, however, suggested that we are dealing with two different places, and that Æthelweard has misinterpreted his source, a passage in Rimbert’s *Vita Anskari*.⁴² From a Scandinavian toponymic perspective we can see that the latter form, *Hedeby*, must be fairly young. Names in *-by* with a first element in the genitive - often another place name - are normally medieval or at the earliest Viking Age, such as *Visby* on Gotland (‘the port and market town beside the vi/Vi’) and *Hedeby* (‘the port and market town on the heaths’). In these last two cases we must also assume that the second element *-by* is not the ‘normal’ *-by* element found in hundreds of farm and hamlet names, but the Low-German loanword *by* ‘town, trade and market place’, found nowadays in Danish and Norwegian *by* ‘town’.

Ohthere explicitly states that Hedeby, although situated between the Wends, Saxons and Angles, belonged to the Danes (*se stent betuh Winedum 7 Seaxum 7 Angle 7 hyrð in on Dene*). The politico-historical interpretations by historians, onomasiologists, runologists etc. regarding Hedeby has - as is well known - been changing, with the early assumption of the existence of a Swedish overlordship over the town, and later a rejection of this Swedish dominance of Hedeby. We have evidence that the languages spoken in Hedeby during the Viking Age must have been a mixture, with several multilingual persons. The Nordic spoken here was obviously influenced by other languages, acquiring new items of vocabulary and perhaps also undergoing changes in syntax, linguistic traces that later spread

39. See e.g. Hellberg 1979.

40. *Historia Norwegie*, Ekrem & Boje Mortensen 2003: 52-3; for the dating of this text, see Boje Mortensen 2002: 11-24.

41. Campbell 1962: 9.

42. Sawyer 2002: 72.

from Hedeby to the north, into the different dialects of Scandinavia. This language change and this Nordic language in Hedeby were first identified by Bengt Hesselman as *Birkasvenska* (Birka Swedish), later by Gun Widmark as *Hedebynordiska* (Hedeby Nordic).⁴³

In the case of Hedeby, archaeological evidence, written records and annals have all been consulted, as also the famous rune stones in the vicinity, in order to provide the foundation for such interpretations. But one must also take the place-names in Schleswig into account. The task of interpreting does not become easier with this material. On the contrary the picture becomes wider and perhaps also more complex. In the vicinity of Hedeby, for instance, we have two place-names ending in *nor*, normally to be translated with 'narrow inlet, short river',⁴⁴ but found in eastern Sweden and parts of Denmark with a secondary meaning 'small lake or lake-like inlet by the coast, suitable for a harbour'.⁴⁵ This secondary meaning is found

along the Swedish east coast, in parts of Denmark as well as in the place-names *Haddebyer Noor* and *Selker Noor*.⁴⁶ Here we have a classical example of the hen-and-egg problem. The latter meaning is - as etymology shows us - secondary to the former. But where was the new meaning developed, and which area influenced which? It is new evidence of this kind, which may fuel a new debate on the discussion of the historical implications of Hedeby. Furthermore, in Schleswig, not far from Hedeby, we have the place-name *Schwesing*. This name is obviously to be understood as an older *Svea-husar*, dative *Svea-husum*. We can identify the first element as *Svear* and the second element as the word *husa(r)*, which we find in particular along the eastern Swedish coast, in Möre and Tjust and around Lake Mälaren. How this name and other important place names here are to be interpreted and historically understood, we do not know - sorry to say. Here we have an interesting task for the future.⁴⁷

43. Hesselman 1936, Widmark 1994.

44. Strid 1981: 63; Kousgård Sørensen 1985: 44.

45. Hellberg 1986.

46. See Strid 1981: 62. John Kousgård Sørensen (1985) states that the older meaning 'narrow inlet, watercourse' is to be found in some ancient Danish place-names like *Nors* and *Norring*, but that the normal meaning in place names and in dialects in Denmark is 'lake, which has a connection with the sea or a (larger) fjord through a narrow inlet', a meaning, which, according to Kousgård Sørensen, is not to be found in e.g. Sweden. This is not entirely correct, since there are several *nor*-place-names with that secondary meaning in Sweden.

47. I am most grateful to Janet Bately for useful comments on this text.