

Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in the Rogaland or Vest-Agder county in south-western Norway, most likely at the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex on the Lista peninsula in the Vest-Agder county

**Ohthere's report in the Old English *Orosius*:
a critical approach**

The following electronically published text, which is also printed in limited numbers, is from a volume due for publication as hard copy in 2008 or 2009. Some changes will undoubtedly be made to this text prior to the publishing of the volume. I apologize for the errors, inconsistencies and repetitions that might be found in this text. I state with reservations the title of the volume, but on the date when this website is published (February 2006), the title is intended to be: Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in the Rogaland or Vest-Agder county in south-western Norway, most likely at the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex on the Lista peninsula in the Vest-Agder county. The subtitle is intended to be: Ohthere's report in the Old English *Orosius*: a critical approach.

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Scholars *en masse* uncritically accept the popular theory – the nationalistic dimensions of which are obvious – that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in the Vestfold county in south-eastern Norway. To my best knowledge, only the present author (Birgisson, 2004, 75-78) has raised doubts against it. This theory does, however, neither harmonize with the cumulative evidence nor is it compatible with Ohthere's report. Can this theory, which so far has escaped scientific critique and on which much learned ink has been spilt, be written off as a romantic failure? In my view, the answer is yes, and moreover, this theory is an excellent example of pure national historiography.

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Preface

In this study I predominately occupy myself with the description in Ohthere's report of Ohthere's ninth-century voyage south along the Norwegian coast from his home in Hålogaland towards a place named *Sciringes heal*, which was situated in the southern part of ninth-century Norway, and from there to the Danish trading town Hedeby. I also discuss the South Danes and the North Danes and where they resided, according to the account in the Old English *Orosius* (not in Ohthere's report) and according to the information that can be elicited from Ohthere's report. I leave out dubious and far-fetched speculations, but stick to the text in question, what is logical and what is in agreement with other evidence. For the sake of completion, I make an effort to put my hypotheses and conclusions in a clear context with Scandinavian history of the period in question.

In 2004, I put forward the hypothesis that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was probably situated somewhere in south-western Norway, but not in the Vestfold county in what was to become south-eastern Norway. In this study, I develop this hypothesis further and draw attention to the evidence which supports it. I consider that there are absolutely no objections to place Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* according to the information in Ohthere's report, i.e. in south-western Norway. This location fits perfectly with Ohthere's report, other accounts in the Old English *Orosius* and, furthermore, is in agreement with both the geographical and historical requirements. Therefore, in this study, I point out the obvious: Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in the Rogaland or Vest-Agder county in south-western Norway, but not in the Vestfold county in what was to become south-eastern Norway. The most likely location is at the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex on the Lista peninsula in Vest-Agder. The various historical implications of this conclusion are briefly outlined.

Some may think that my evaluation does not have much weight *vis-à-vis* the evaluation of prominent scholars. Nevertheless, a civilized debate about the hypotheses put forward in this study is needed and to be preferred (rather than jumping into the trenches). Ultimately it does not matter whether I am correct in every minor detail: what matters is the whole picture, i.e. the broader view. Readers can judge by themselves whether my effort was worthwhile. Finally: I apologize for and accept responsibility for the hopefully minor shortcomings, mistakes and imperfections which doubtless remain in this study.

Keywords: Ohthere, *Sciringes heal*, Skíringssalr, Huseby, regional division, geography, orientation, etymology, Vestfold, Kaupang, Vestlandet, Østlandet, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, South Danes, North Danes

The following text is not intended to constitute an article with a completely coherent structure but is composed predominately of extracts (with the necessary modifications, however) from the forthcoming volume. See my statements above. My intention is to inspire readers so they will begin their own investigations. Note that the issues discussed below are, of course, only some of the issues discussed in the forthcoming volume.

(i) The geography of Norway

One of the keys to correct understanding and interpretation of the parts of Ohthere's report that concern us in this study is to become somewhat knowledgeable about the geography of Norway and its five main geographical and cultural regions. With this it will be easier for us, for instance to (i) understand the settlement pattern, both at present and in former times, (ii) define the regions of present-day Norway, which according to Ohthere's report and other evidence were, prior to and during the ninth century, inhabited by Swedes or people of Swedish origin, (iii) demonstrate that geographical barriers (mountains and plateaux) were one of the major reasons why the land of the Norwegians was, originally, predominantly limited to the coastal areas of the *Vestlandet* region, and (iv) to put the relevant parts of Ohthere's report in a clearer historical context than otherwise possible.

The geography of Norway is, however, only briefly outlined here. For the reader who needs more information, I refer to my main sources of geographical information, which are (i) Helvig & Johannessen's (hereinafter abbreviated as H & J) treatise of Norway, first printed in 1966 (I use the revised third edition from 1970), and (ii) Foote & Wilson's (hereinafter abbreviated as F & W) description of Norway from 1970 (pp. 36-40). It may be advantageous for the reader to have good maps of Scandinavia to hand, especially those which make a clear separation between the mountainous and lowland areas.

A major part of Norway consists of large mountains, mountain ranges, plateaux, heaths, vast forest areas, rivers and lakes. An overwhelming majority of the total population resides in the relatively large lowland areas of south-eastern Norway around Oslofjord (the Viken region), the lowland areas of the *Trøndelag* region around Trondheimsfjord, and on narrow strips of relatively flat land in western Norway. Long and broad valleys originate around Oslofjord and Trondheimsfjord and penetrate the mountainous areas further away from the coast.

We learn in H & J (1970, 9-10) that the division of Norway into five main regions has its origin in olden times and is due to various factors, mainly geographical, economic and cultural. These clearly defined main regions are (fig. 1): (1) *Østlandet* 'the east-land, the eastern land, the land to the east' (corresponding to eastern and south-eastern Norway), (2) *Sørlandet* 'the south-land, the southern land' (the most southern part of Norway comprising

the Agder counties), (3) *Vestlandet* 'the west-land, the western land, the land to the west' (the western part of Norway, extending to the *Trøndelag* region), (4) *Trøndelag* (the territories around Trondheimsfjord), and (5) *Nord-Norge* (northern Norway (nord 'north, northern')) comprising the Nordland, Troms and Finnmark counties.

In former times, the name Hålogaland (named Helgeland at present) was used for the territories north of *Trøndelag*.¹ Hålogaland corresponds more or less to present-day northern Norway (the *Nord-Norge* region). We learn in H & J (p. 34) that the *Østlandet* region was traditionally oriented towards Sweden, Denmark and Germany, which is understandable in light of Ohthere's report and other evidence. In *Østlandet* several large counties are found, which are Telemark, Buskerud, Oppland and Hedmark (their boundaries define *Østlandet*'s boundaries), along with the smaller counties (Vestfold, Østfold, etc). Note that the Møre og Romsdal county which is hereinafter usually named Møre or the Møre county (divided into Sunnmøre and Nordmøre) is included with *Vestlandet* (fig. 1).

A huge mountain range runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula. This mountain range is traditionally divided into three mountain ranges or massifs, the names of which are, counted from south to north: (i) the *Langfjellene* 'the long mountains' mountain range, where can be found the highest peaks in Scandinavia; (ii) *Dovrefjell* (a relatively small but high mountain massif); (iii) the long mountain range which is called *Kölen* in Swedish and *Kjølen* in Norwegian, both of which mean the Keel. The *Langfjellene* mountain range (along with the *Dovrefjell* mountain massif to some degree) divides the southern part of Norway into a western half, *Vestlandet*, and an eastern half, *Østlandet*. See H & J (pp. 10 and 28) and Figures 1 and 2 where this is made clear. This mountain range, which corresponds to the southern part of Ohthere's wild mountains (wilde moras), thus divides *Vestlandet* and *Østlandet* from each other.

There are no significant geographical barriers (mountains, plateaux or rivers) separating the Oslofjord region in *Østlandet*, the Møre county and *Trøndelag* from each other. These territories are reasonably well connected by long and broad valleys, for instance Østerdalen, Romsdalen, Gauldalen and the great valley system called Gudbrandsdalen. There are no significant geographical barriers between these regions and Sweden. South-eastern Norway, in fact, displays similar geographical features to the Swedish territories to the east. We learn in H & J (1970, 12) that in many aspects *Trøndelag* is similar to *Østlandet*, and that *Trøndelag* is frequently considered as a northern extension of *Østlandet* (presumably both geographically and

¹ It is entirely possible that the name Hålogaland means 'the land of the Northern Lights' (the Northern Lights is the *Aurora Borealis*) as hå means 'high'; logi (the verb is (að) loga) means 'flame'; and land means 'land, territory, region'.

culturally). On the other hand, there are significant geographical barriers (mountains and plateaux) separating *Vestlandet* from the Oslofjord region, Møre and *Trøndelag*. The ancient Norwegian heartlands, i.e. the Hordaland and Rogaland counties, can be found in *Vestlandet*. *Sørlandet* (the Agder counties) can be observed as a separate entity because of the geography.

The lowland areas of *Østlandet* (Vestfold, Østfold, etc) are east of the *Langfjellene* mountain range which (along with the *Dovre fjell* mountain massif to some degree) divides *Vestlandet* and *Østlandet* from each other. This mountain range corresponds to the southern part of the wild mountains (wilde moras) mentioned in Ohthere's report; where we learn that the land of the Norwegians was west of these wild mountains and the land of the Swedes was east of them.

(ii) The Old English *Orosius*

King Alfred the Great of Wessex in England was extremely interested in cultural matters and had several classical works translated into his mother tongue.² One of these works was the *Historiarum adversum Paganos Libri Septem*, written in Latin in the second decade of the fifth century by Paulus Orosius. This work is frequently named after him and simply entitled *Orosius* or the Latin *Orosius*. In the course of the translation, a lot of additions (classical, patristic and geographical), omissions and changes were made. Among the best-known of the geographical additions are the reports of Ohthere and Wulfstan.

Alfred's "translation" is entitled the Old English *Orosius* (hereinafter referred to as the OE *Orosius*).³ The translator of the Latin *Orosius* was obviously a very learned man with an excellent knowledge of classical and post-classical literature. We learn in Bately (1980, cix) that Alfred gathered around him prominent scholars, almost certainly also foreign ones.⁴ Bately (pp. lxxxvi-xciii) informs us that the OE *Orosius* must have been completed sometime

² In the ninth century, England did not form one kingdom but was divided up into a varying number of smaller kingdoms. Alfred's reign lasted from 871 until his death in 899.

³ Old English (also called Anglo-Saxon) is an early form of the English language that was spoken in parts of what is now England and southern Scotland between the mid-fifth century and the mid-twelfth century. It is a West Germanic language and therefore is similar to Old Frisian and Old Saxon. It is also quite similar to Old Norse (and by extension, to modern Icelandic).

⁴ It has been hotly debated whether Alfred himself or somebody else made the translation. Most scholars have the opinion (with good reason) that learned men in his entourage made the translation, but not Alfred himself.

between 889 and 899, and concludes that the most likely date for the completion, everything taken into consideration, is 890-891.

The text of the OE *Orosius* has survived (to a various degree) in four manuscripts, of which two are the most important: (i) *British Library, Additional 47967* (often referred to as the *Lauderdale* or *Tollemache MS*), and (ii) *British Library, Cotton Tiberius B. i.* (often referred to as the *Cotton MS*).⁵ It is important for the reader to be aware that according to the *Cotton MS*, the name *Sciringes heal* is written as two words, i.e. *Sciringes heal*, but not written as one word, i.e. *Sciringesheal*. See lines 6, 7, 11 and 15 in the relevant leaf from the *Cotton MS* where this is clear (the leaf can be seen in Bately inserted between pp. 16 and 17). Some may find it of minor or no importance whether *Sciringes heal* was written as one or two words but, in my view, the opposite is true. Ohthere's report can be seen in *inter alia* Janet Bately (1980) (*The Old English Orosius*), Henry Sweet (1876/1940) (*Anglo-Saxon Reader*), Henry Sweet (1883/1959) (*King Alfred's Orosius*) and in Lund *et al* (1984). Note that there are some errors in the translation in Lund *et al*; some of which border on changing the context.

(iii) Ohthere's report – Ohthere and his voyages

Ohthere⁶ – described as a chieftain, farmer and trader – lived in Hålogaland in northern Norway and visited the court of King Alfred presumably some time before 890-891 (see above).⁷ Ohthere's description of his voyages was recorded at the court. The transmitted text is considered to be quite an accurate reproduction of Ohthere's report. It is most likely, but not at all entirely clear, that what Ohthere is quoted to say is based on notes made from his verbal report. However, according to Bately (pp. lxxi-lxxii), nothing can be found in the OE *Orosius* which supports the theory that Ohthere made his report directly to King Alfred. Perhaps Bately is correct, but it has to be kept in mind that the first sentence in Ohthere's report seems to support the opposite view: Ohthere sæde his hlaforde, Ælfrede cyninge... (cf. *inter alia* Henry Sweet, 1940, 17).

Ohthere seems to have been well-informed and knowledgeable about the geography of the North Atlantic area and the information in Ohthere's report is considered accurate and reliable. Ohthere may have lived somewhere in the southern part of the Troms county, perhaps near or on the large island of Senja which is situated somewhat south of the city of Tromsø. Ohthere may also have lived somewhere on the Lofoten archipelago, where three *Husebys*

⁵ See Bately (pp. xxiii-xxvi) for a detailed description of the four manuscripts.

⁶ The name Ohthere probably corresponds to the OScand. name Óttarr (Ottarr).

⁷ In theory, Ohthere's visit to the court could have been anywhere between 871 and 899.

can be found (see section (vii)). These guesses are partly based on Ohthere's sailing times and presumed sailing routes. Admittedly, a more precise estimation is difficult to corroborate and therefore it is impossible to locate his home with any reasonable accuracy.

In Ohthere's report, there is quite an accurate description of Ohthere's voyage south along the Norwegian coast from his home in Hålogaland towards a place named *Sciringes heal*, which was situated in the southern part of ninth-century Norway, and from there to the Danish trading town Hedeby (*Haithabu* in German, *Heiðarbær* in Icelandic and *æt Hæpum* in Ohthere's report), the location of which was on the (at that time) southern border of the Danish kingdom (fig. 3).⁸ Scholars often claim that Ohthere was doing trade in *Sciringes heal* and that *Sciringes heal* was a trading town; no actual evidence can be found for this claim in Ohthere's report, where, however, the term *port* is used to describe both *Sciringes heal* and Hedeby. This does not necessarily mean that *Sciringes heal* was a trading town or equal to Hedeby in importance. The OE word *port* can have various meanings depending on the context and does not necessarily refer to a trading town, although it did so in the case of Hedeby; it can, for instance, refer to a place along a coast that gives ships and boats protection from storms and rough water, i.e. a harbour.

Ohthere's *Sciringes heal*, however, was most likely a rather large maritime trading place situated in an important central-place complex/settlement district, and it was definitely an important milestone *en route* between Ohthere's home and the trading town Hedeby. The central-place complex/settlement district in question was most likely the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex on the Lista peninsula in the Vest-Agder county (see section (vi)) (figs. 4 and 5). Ohthere probably did some trade in *Sciringes heal* but most likely (which is reasonably clear from the context) his main destination was Hedeby where he could, presumably, fetch a high price for his trade goods.

The hypothesis that Ohthere's *Iraland* 'the land of the Irish' was Iceland will be dealt with in the forthcoming volume. A closer look reveals that this hypothesis harmonizes perfectly with the geographical and historical requirements (see above the links to my other websites and Birgisson, 2004, 75-78). Björn Þorsteinsson (1965, 72-81) – in his article entitled *Íraland=Ísland?* – reached the same conclusion. See also Alvar Ellegård (1954-55, 6) in his treatise in *Lychnos*. In the forthcoming volume I will also discuss in detail W. C. Stokoe's untenable and speculative "sea-route" theory; a theory which so far, unfortunately, has escaped scientific critique.

⁸ Hedeby is now situated in Germany (Schleswig-Holstein), more precisely on the edge of *Haddebyer Noor*, an inlet of the river *Schlei*.

(iv) *Skíringssalr/Sciringes heal*

To my best knowledge, the present consensus states that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was the name of an important central-place complex/settlement district – of which the trading town Kaupang belonged – which can be found within what is now the Tjølling district in the Larvik municipality in the Vestfold county, i.e. safely within the *Østlandet* region. Note that the previous consensus stated that *Sciringes heal* corresponded to Kaupang only. However, these consensuses, of which the present one is only a minor variation of the previous one, neither harmonize with the cumulative evidence nor are compatible with Ohthere's report of his voyage.

I want to make it clear that I do not doubt at all that the central-place complex/settlement district in question was an important one in former times and that the name for it may well have been *Skíringssalr*; a theory which may be supported by various Icelandic medieval sources (see below); but Ohthere's *Sciringes heal*, which was not even situated in Vestfold, was therefore neither the *Skíringssalr* central-place complex/settlement district nor the ancient trading town Kaupang. The *Skíringssalr* in *Ynglingatal*, *Ynglingasaga*, *Fagrskinna* and in one of the Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur* 'tales of the distant past' was, beyond any reasonable doubt, situated in Vestfold. We can rest assured that this *Skíringssalr* was some other place than Ohthere's *Sciringes heal*, which in Ohthere's report is referred to as a port.

The first element in *Skíringssalr* probably refers to the name *Skíring(r)*, which may mean *the shining one* or *the bright one*, a metonym for the god Frey. This interpretation gets support from eddic poetry. Therefore, *Skíringssalr* probably means 'Frey's hall' (Skre & Stylegar, 2004, 66).⁹ The *Skíringssalr* central-place complex/settlement district in Vestfold was probably ruled by a powerful local chieftain or local king who resided at the *Huseby* (an obvious candidate for a *central place*) which was strategically situated in the district. The previous name of this *Huseby* may have been *Skíringssalr* which, as stated above, probably means 'Frey's hall'. The actual Frey's hall, i.e. the *Skíringssalr* from which the central-place complex/settlement district in question may have derived its name, was perhaps situated at or near this *Huseby* (Skre & Stylegar, 2004, 65-71). The primary role of this hall, presumably one of royal dimensions, was probably a cult place, where both religious and secular assemblies were held. In the context of this study it is

⁹ In the present context it is interesting for us to observe that there are only a few place names known within the boundaries of present-day Norway which contain the element *sal*. These few, which have fallen out of use long ago, are Tesal in Østfold, Odinssal in both *Trøndelag* and Østfold, and our *Skíringssalr* in Vestfold (Skre & Stylegar, 2004, 65). The geographical distribution of these place names is understandable and needs no further explanation.

appropriate to mention that the god Frey was the main god of the Swedes and the mythical ancestor of the Swedish royal family of the Ynglings.

We can almost take it for granted that the element *Sciringes* in the name *Sciringes heal* is cognate with the name *Skíring(r)* in *Skíringssalr*. However, it is essential for the reader to know that very serious doubts can be cast on the dubious but popular theory that the second element in the name *Sciringes heal* means the same as the second element in the name *Skíringssalr* (*salr* 'hall'). See for instance Bately (1980, 193 (16/3)),¹⁰ Stefan Brink (1996, 251-255) and Christine E. Fell (Lund *et al*, 1984, 62-63).¹¹ Bately and Fell rightly express their serious doubts and their observations are more or less in agreement with each other. Note that the name *Sciringes heal* is composed of two words, i.e. *Sciringes heal*, but not written as one word, i.e. *Sciringesheal* (see section (ii)). We learn in Bosworth & Toller (1921), that the OE *healh* has various meanings depending on the context, etc. Four points are made concerning the meaning, of which point (iii) is especially of interest to us: (i) a corner, an angle; (ii) a retired or secret place, cave, closet, recess; (iii) a bay; (iv) a stony slope (this last point is open to debate). Actually we can safely put aside the above-mentioned theory; a theory which is the backbone of the theory that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in Vestfold.

In the final words of this section it is appropriate to point out that the excavations at Kaupang, along with a considerable body of other evidence drawn from historical sources and archaeological research, indicate in no uncertain terms that this important trading town and aristocratic centre was founded by the Danes (as expected) around 800, i.e. either during the reign of the Danish king Godfred or his (probable) father King Sigfred, Godfred being the more likely candidate (Skre & Stylegar, 2004, 33-34). This makes perfect sense in that the coastal territories of present-day Norway east of Ohthere's *Sciringes heal*, which was most likely situated in the Vest-Agder

¹⁰ "The ON equivalent is generally supposed to be *Skíringssalr*, with the second element *salr*, 'hall', replaced in the OE by *heall*. However, *heall*, 'hall', is feminine in OE, while 16/9 refers to masculine *þone Sciringesheal*; and 16/8, 12, and 15 dative *Sciringesheale* seems to indicate a second element *healh*."

¹¹ "*Sciringesheal* has usually been taken to be an Anglicised form of Old Norse *Skíringssalr* with the assumption that the second element meant 'hall'. However the grammar of the Old English form implies a masculine second element *healh*, and it is besides hard to see why an original *salr* should not have been Anglicised as *sele* using the cognate word, since *sele* is perfectly possible as an Old English place-name element. *Heall* 'hall' is exceedingly rare in pre-Conquest English place-names whereas *healh* is common in the general sense of 'a nook or corner of land' or with a more precise topographical meaning, and to an Anglo-Saxon writing in the ninth century it would make perfect sense as a place-name element."

county, were almost certainly – prior to and during the ninth century – to some considerable degree Danish-controlled territories, but populated by Swedes whose aristocracy may have chosen to identify with the Danes (see e.g. note 13).

(v) Ohthere's report – some important points

Obviously we will never know what Ohthere said exactly in an attempt at an actual geographical description of Norway, but as we want to reveal the possible location of *Sciringes heal*; we have to look thoroughly for hints in Ohthere's report that guide us to our goal. So let's look at what Ohthere is quoted to say and, speculations put aside, what can be concluded from Ohthere's report about the size and geographical position of ninth-century Norway. I want to stress that the following points are among those which can guide us (my remarks are in square brackets):

(i) The land of the Norwegians is very long and very narrow (swyðe lang & swyðe smæl).

(ii) The land lies by the sea and the width of the (inhabited) land (see section (xii) concerning the discussion about *byne land/bynum lande*) is c.3-60 OE miles (c.4-120 km). Note that the maximum width of present-day Norway is c.430 km.

(iii) "All of it [i.e. the land of the Norwegians] that can be used for grazing or ploughing lies along the coast [actually the sea (sæ)] and even that [i.e. the land along the coast (sea)] is in some places very rocky [swyðe cludig]" (...& þæt is þeah on sumum stowum swyðe cludig...) (Lund *et al*, 1984, 20-21). The above description harmonizes perfectly with the geographical description of the coastal areas of the *Vestlandet* region (see section (viii)).

(iv) To the east, above (wið uppon), and alongside the (inhabited) land of the Norwegians, there is a huge (presumably so because of its width, cf. point (vii) below) and wild mountain range (wilde moras) with an approximate north/south direction. Beyond all doubt, this is the huge mountain range that runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Note that the southern part of this mountain range divides the *Vestlandet* region and the *Østlandet* region from each other and corresponds to the *Langfjellene* mountain range (figs. 1 and 2).

(v) It is stated explicitly that this wild mountain range at all times lies to the east of the (inhabited) land of the Norwegians (...& licgað wilde moras wið eastan & wið uppon, emnlange þæm bynum lande). To paraphrase the above: the (inhabited) land of the Norwegians is bordered at all times with these wild mountains, that lie to the east of the land and which are somewhat away from the western coast.

(vi) The *Finnas* inhabited these wild mountains and on the other side of/on the other half of these mountains (on oðre healfe þæs mores), parallel

to/alongside (toemnes) the southern part of the country, i.e. Norway, there was Sweden (Sweoland 'the land of the Swedes'); parallel to/alongside the northern part, Cwena land.¹²

(vii) In some places (sumum stowum) the width of these wild mountains is so great that it takes two weeks (twam wucum) to cross them, while in some other places it takes six days (syx dagum) to cross them (oferferan). What is meant in Ohthere's report is obviously that it takes somewhere between six and fourteen days to cross these wild mountains, depending on where you are. This point and the above points fit perfectly with the obvious observation that the wild mountains in question correspond to the huge mountain range which runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula. The southern part of this mountain range, i.e. the *Langfjellene* mountain range, divides *Vestlandet* (in our case, the land of the Norwegians) and *Østlandet* (in our case, the land of the Swedes) from each other.

(viii) All the way to *Sciringes heal*, Ohthere constantly sailed south (approximately) and had Britain (*his land*) to starboard (to the right) on the last part of his voyage. This demonstrates clearly that *Sciringes heal* was somewhere in south-western Norway.

(ix) To the south of *Sciringes heal* a great sea, which is too wide to see across, penetrates *the land* and Jutland is opposite (ongean) on the other side (on oðre healfe) and then Sillende (...& is Gotland on oðre healfe ongean & siððan Sillende). This great sea flows into *the land* for many hundred miles. This indicates that *Sciringes heal* was situated where Skagerrak (and by extension also Kattegat and the Baltic Sea) "starts" penetrating *the land*, i.e. in the Vest-Agder county. Note that, in this case, *the land* should be understood in a general sense. In light of this point, Vest-Agder is a more likely candidate than Rogaland for the location of *Sciringes heal*.

(x) It is clear that Ohthere never turned east or north (north-east) before reaching *Sciringes heal*. Hence, he can not have sailed along the coast between the Lindesnes peninsula in Vest-Agder and the Vestfold county. Note that the sailing distance between the Lindesnes peninsula, which is the southernmost point of Norway, and Vestfold is c.220 km, and that the coastline has an approximate north-east direction (see also point (viii)).

(xi) Ða he þiderweard seglode fram Sciringes heale, þa wæs him on þæt bæcbord Denamearc & on þæt steorbord widsæ þry dagas... Here it is reasonably clear that when Ohthere left *Sciringes heal* and sailed towards Hedeby, Denmark was immediately to port (to the left). We also learn here that the open sea was to starboard (to the right) for three days. After these

¹² It seems that the people east of the southern part of these mountains, i.e. the people in *Østlandet* 'the east-land, the eastern land, the land to the east' were also called *Austrmen* 'east-men, the men who lived to the east'; a term which referred to Swedes or men of Swedish origin. See also Ekblom (1941-42, 136) and Bately (1980, 179 (13/27-8)).

three days Ohthere had the Jutland Peninsula to starboard (fig. 3). I discuss this point in more detail in the next section.

(xii) From Ohthere's report, it is clear and beyond any reasonable doubt that soon after leaving *Sciringes heal*; he directly crossed Skagerrak and headed for the northern part of the Jutland Peninsula; and then sailed south along the eastern coast of Jutland towards Hedeby. Ohthere's sailing time between *Sciringes heal* and Hedeby (only five days) is one of the indicators for this.

(xiii) It is stated explicitly in Ohthere's report that sailing between Ohthere's home and *Sciringes heal* can be done in a month (but only just) if (i) the journey was by the coast the whole way, (ii) camp was made at night (i.e. the ship was put to shore and anchored for the night), and (iii) there was favourable wind. No such statements are given for the latter part of Ohthere's voyage, i.e. his voyage between *Sciringes heal* and Hedeby.

(xiv) Contrary to popular belief, there is nothing at all in Ohthere's report which indicates that he made camp at night in the latter part of his voyage or that he sailed along the coast of what is now southern and south-eastern Norway (approximately east of the Lindesnes peninsula) and western Sweden. Furthermore, nothing can be found in Ohthere's report which indicates that he sailed faster (i.e. more km per hour) in the latter part of his voyage than in the first part; he obviously only sailed more hours per 24 hours as he did not make camp at night like he did in the first part of his voyage. In support of this hypothesis is also that Ohthere sailed between *Sciringes heal* and Hedeby in only five days. I will discuss Ohthere's sailing speeds and sailing times in detail in the forthcoming volume.

(vi) Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was most likely situated at the Huseby/Lunde central-place complex on the Lista peninsula in the Vest-Agder county

It is reasonably clear that according to Ohthere's report, *Sciringes heal* was on the border zone between Denmark (presumably the territories of the North Danes) and Norway (see point (xi) in the preceding section).¹³ This is supported by the account in the OE *Orosius* about the South Danes and the North Danes, where it is clear that the North Danes also resided on the Scandinavian Peninsula north of the Jutland Peninsula, i.e. in present-day southern and south-eastern Norway (see section (ix)). The above-mentioned border zone was almost certainly located in or was part of an important central-place complex/settlement district which was probably ruled by a powerful local chieftain or a local king who resided at a *central place* which was strategically situated in the district.

¹³ Here, Denmark can mean various things; for instance Danish-controlled territories populated by Swedes, whose aristocracy (but not necessarily the lower classes) chose to identify with the Danes.

Therefore, I suggest that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was connected with and situated at or near a *Huseby* (cognate with *Husaby*, etc.) which is an obvious candidate for a *central place*. A *Huseby* can be found on the Lista peninsula in the Vest-Agder county, directly south of the town of Farsund, c.18 km (*as the crow flies*) west-north-west of the Lindesnes peninsula (figs. 4 and 5).¹⁴ This *Huseby* is strategically situated c.800 metres away from the coast of a bay named Lundevågen, where exceptionally good natural conditions for a harbour can be found (fig. 5). *Lunde* (a farm) is strategically situated by Lundevågen about 1.2 km away from *Huseby*. Prior to and during the ninth century, the *Huseby* site was probably a part of a larger complex which included the *Lunde* site and perhaps also the sites of other nearby farms. For lack of a better term, this complex may be named the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex. Note that the *Huseby* name indicates that the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex was an important *central place* prior to (and perhaps also during) the tenth and eleventh centuries. See also Westerdahl & Stylegar (hereinafter abbreviated as W & S) in Viking (2004, 101-138).

The area around *Lunde* has produced extremely rich archaeological material and is well represented by large (burial) mounds, as seven large mounds can be found at *Lunde* and two at *Huseby*. The archaeological material seems to indicate that a veritable regional maritime trading place with far-reaching international connections was situated by Lundevågen sometime in the early Migration Period (c.AD 300-550). *Lunde* (alone or as part of a larger complex) was most likely a *central place* and a political centre sometime in this period which, for instance, probably reflects the excellent potential of the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex to exercise control over nearby trade routes on sea and on land, and the exceptionally good natural conditions for a harbour at Lundevågen.

It can be elicited from Ohthere's report that *Sciringes heal* was a veritable regional political centre and *central place* as it was obviously the most important milestone *en route* between his home in Hålogaland and Hedeby. The powerful local chieftain or local king who controlled *Sciringes heal* probably also controlled the adjacent territories as well as the trade routes on sea and land. The *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex is perfectly located for exercising control over the coastal route as well as (indirectly) the portage route by way of the *Listeid* isthmus. See also W & S, 2004, 119. In light of the *Huseby* name and the archaeological material at *Lunde*, we can suggest that a rather large maritime trading place was probably situated by Lundevågen at the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex prior to and during the ninth century.

¹⁴ A rune stone can be found situated close to this *Huseby*. You can read about the rune stone at this link (N 212):

<http://www.arild-hauge.com/innskifter3.htm>

As I have mentioned before, it is reasonably clear that according to Ohthere's report, *Sciringes heal* was on the border zone between Denmark and Norway. In light of this and the above discussion about the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex, it is appropriate to inform the reader that we learn in W & S (p. 119) that the *Huseby* on Lista may have been one of the first and one of the most important *Husebys* in Norway. W & S (ibid) also inform us about the following (*den* means here the *Huseby* on Lista): "Kanskje er den å betrakte som et «etappemål» for en i utgangspunktet vestnorsk kongemakt på fremmarsj østover?"¹⁵

In my view, the most likely location for Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was at the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex; a complex whose name in the second half of the ninth century may have been *Sciringes heal*. An alternative location for *Sciringes heal* is at or near the *Husabø* (also cognate with *Husaby*, etc.) which can be found in southern Rogaland, represented by the dot on the map (fig. 4) which is closest to the *Huseby* on Lista. *Sciringes heal* could theoretically have been connected with and situated at or near this (presumably) important *central place*. However, in light of the above, point (ix) in section (v), and in what context the terms *easteward*, *eastewerd* are used in Ohthere's report, I opt for the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex.¹⁶

The *Huseby*, *Husaby*, *Husabø*, etc. place names seem not to have been in use on the Scandinavian Peninsula prior to and during the ninth century, and therefore we can guess that the previous name of the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex may have been *Sciringes heal* in Old English. What form the name took in the local language of the area must be a matter for conjecture. *Sciringes heal* may also have been the name of one or more of these: (i) the harbour itself which must have been situated with the Lundevågen bay; (ii) a rather large maritime trading place situated close to the harbour; (iii) the name of one of the bays near the *Huseby* (presumably the Lundevågen bay); (iv) the name of the district in question. Point (ii) is especially of interest to us as, in Ohthere's report, *Sciringes heal* is referred to as a port.

¹⁵ This thread can not be discussed any further as it exceeds the scope of this study to discuss the complicated political processes that eventually led to the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula being united into one kingdom, which was named Norway.

¹⁶ In my view, the context in which the terms *easteward*, *eastewerd* appear allow us to reason that the coastline of ninth-century Norway inclined considerably eastwards in the southern part. Somewhat south of Stavanger (c.35 km away along the coast) in southern Rogaland, the direction of the coastline starts to incline towards the south-east and this direction is the prevalent one all the way to the *Huseby* on Lista (c.100 km) and to the Lindesnes peninsula (c.120 km).

(vii) The distribution of the *Huseby* place names in Scandinavia

It is appropriate to inform the reader about the curious distribution of the *Huseby*, *Husaby*, *Husabø*, etc. place names in Scandinavia (fig. 4). They are clustered together in eastern Sweden, south-eastern Norway and in the *Trøndelag* region. Concerning Norway, these place names can also be found in (i) the northern part of the Møre og Romsdal county (Nordmøre), (ii) the districts around Sognefjord (one of the longest fjords in the world), (iii) Hålogaland, and (iv) in south-western Norway. The *Husebys* in Nordmøre can probably be explained in light of the proximity to *Trøndelag*. We learn in F & W (1970, 38-39) that the connections between the districts around Sognefjord and the Valdres district in the Oppland county in *Østlandet* were particularly close in former times. The Valdres district is adjacent to the great valley system called Gudbrandsdalen, i.e. in former times there may have been close contacts between *Østlandet* and the districts around Sognefjord. This seems to be a logical explanation for the *Husebys* in the districts around Sognefjord.

The powerful rulers called *Hlaðajarlar* 'earls of Lade' (singular *jarl* 'earl') after their estate in *Trøndelag* undoubtedly controlled all trade in that region and, moreover, most likely controlled all trade and trade routes in Hålogaland, where extremely valuable trade goods could be obtained. The *Hlaðajarlar* dynasty previously resided in Hålogaland and their principal aim with moving southwards to *Trøndelag* was probably because of commercial interests (ibid., 40-41). From their strategic location by Trondheimsfjord they could exercise control over the trade with Hålogaland and the trade routes in question. The above indicates a strong connection between *Trøndelag* and Hålogaland, which may be a logical explanation for the *Husebys* in Hålogaland, as there is a large cluster of *Husebys* in *Trøndelag*.

The rich and populous (at the time in question) agricultural inland areas of *Trøndelag* – a region where the worship of the gods Frey and Freya was prevalent – are in this study neither counted with ninth-century Norway nor within the Norwegian sphere of influence. Evidence indicates that *Trøndelag* (especially the inland areas), at the time in question, should be observed as a northern extension of the *Østlandet* region, both ethnically and culturally. It is extremely doubtful that Hålogaland (including the coastal areas) was counted as Norwegian territory prior to and during the ninth century. It is also extremely doubtful that the coastal areas of *Trøndelag* were counted as Norwegian territory prior to and during the ninth century. Apart from this there is good reason to believe that the powerful earls in *Trøndelag* ruled the whole of *Trøndelag* as well as the whole of Hålogaland (and therefore also the coastal areas). Perhaps the Norwegians laid claim to the coastal areas of Hålogaland, but the whole region was beyond any reasonable doubt ruled by the earls in *Trøndelag* or their representatives who resided at various central-place complexes (see for instance fig. 4). Hålogaland, at the time in question,

should probably be observed as a northern extension of *Trøndelag*. We learn in *Historia Norwegie* – an anonymous Latin work which was probably written during the period c.1150-1175 (Ekrem, 2003, 23) – that *Trøndelag* had been settled by Swedes: “The ancient family of Norwegian kings traced its beginnings from Sweden, from which Trøndelag, the chief law province of Norway, was also settled” (ibid., 75).

As Ohthere was a Norwegian, he may have exaggerated how far north the land of the Norwegians extended. The Norwegians obviously had commercial interests in the northern part of Hålogaland where there were evidently some Norwegian settlements that prospered on exploiting the Arctic riches. The main players in the region must, however, have been the earls in *Trøndelag* and their representatives, who presumably resided at strategically located central-place complexes. Even for some Norwegian settlements in Hålogaland I consider it doubtful that the coastal areas of Hålogaland, *Trøndelag* and the Møre og Romsdal county were to any considerable degree populated by Norwegians prior to and during the ninth century. However, I acknowledge the complexity of the issue and therefore state this with reservations.

In my view, the distribution of the *Huseby* place names in present-day Norway shows (i) in which areas the opposition to Norwegian royal power was strongest in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and (ii) in which areas Danish and/or Swedish influence was strongest prior to and during the tenth and eleventh centuries. We learn in W & S (2004, 114-116, 125-127) that the *Huseby* system most likely originated in Denmark, more specifically on the Jutland Peninsula.¹⁷

¹⁷ A closer look at the distribution of the *Huseby*, *Husaby*, *Husabø*, etc place names in Denmark and Norway reveals the following: On the Jutland Peninsula can be found eight *Husebys* (4 + 4), one on the island of Funen (Fyn) and one on the island of Zealand (Sjælland). Two of the eight on the Jutland Peninsula are actually situated in Germany but are within the ancient Danish cultural sphere. Around Oslofjord in south-eastern Norway can be found 23 *Husebys*. It is not easy to evaluate how many they were originally. Four *Husebys* can be found in the inland areas of *Østlandet* and four in south-western Norway. Furthermore, four *Husebys* can be found in the districts around Sognefjord and four in Nordmøre. In the inland areas of the *Trøndelag* region (around Trondheimsfjord) can be found eight *Husebys*, which seem to be divided into a southern cluster of four and a northern cluster of four. The northern territories of Norway are also well supplied with *Huseby* place names, as four *Husebys* can be found very evenly distributed on the stretch between Trondheimsfjord and the Lofoten archipelago, where can be found three *Husebys* (perhaps four originally). I state the above with reservations as this counting is simply based on the number of *Husebys* shown on the map (fig. 4) but not on any research from my side. However, it is clear that the *Huseby*, and especially its precursor, was an important part of the ritual

(viii) Ohthere's report – geography

It is entirely clear from Ohthere's report that ninth-century Norway was (i) a coastal country, (ii) very long and very narrow, (iii) had an approximate north/south direction, (iv) the width of the (inhabited) land was c.4-120 km, (v) the land was bordered at all times to the east by a huge mountain range, and (vi) that Sweden was on the other side of (on *oðre healfe*) the southern part of this mountain range, which had an approximate north/south direction and was somewhat away from the western coast. It is entirely clear from the context that the mountain range in question, i.e. Ohthere's wild mountains (*wilde moras*), corresponds to the large mountain range which runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula and whose southern part is named the *Langfjellene* mountain range. The reader may be reminded that it is stated explicitly in Ohthere's report that Sweoland 'the land of the Swedes' was on the other side of the southern part of these wild mountains (i.e. the *Langfjellene* mountain range).¹⁸

The reader can ponder how the information in Ohthere's report about the size and geographical position of ninth-century Norway is compatible with the theory that Vestfold, Telemark, Oppland¹⁹ and the other counties in the *Østlandet* region were – prior to and during the ninth century – Norwegian territories. We can, for instance, ask ourselves: where are the wild mountains in question – inhabited by the *Finnas* – which lie to the east of Vestfold and may take somewhere between six and fourteen days to cross? The answer is clear: these mountains are nowhere, they do not exist. Vestfold is obviously east of these wild mountains, i.e. the *Langfjellene* mountain range which

landscape where number symbolism was of major importance. See Birgisson (2004) for discussion about ancient number symbolism in Scandinavia.

¹⁸ Beyond doubt, various peoples in various "lands", chiefdoms and petty kingdoms inhabited the land of the Swedes immediately east of the southern part of the wild mountains, i.e. in the *Østlandet* region and farther to the east. However, in Ohthere's report there is no distinction made between, for instance, the Swedes and the Gauts nor the people in Vestfold, Telemark, Oppland, Hedmark, etc. The information in Ohthere's report implies that the various peoples east of the southern part of the wild mountains (i.e. the people in *Østlandet* and farther to the east) were sufficiently related ethnically and culturally to be grouped together as one people, i.e. the Swedes. With this, Ohthere (or the learned men in King Alfred's entourage) wishes to distinguish clearly between the Norwegians, the Swedes and the Danes.

¹⁹ *Gamla Uppsala* 'old Uppsala' in Sweden is in the *Uppland* county. In Iceland in former times, the name used for Oppland was *Upplönd*. The names Oppland, *Upplönd* and *Uppland* correspond to each other. In former times the Oppland region encompassed a larger territory than is within the present-day Oppland county.

divides *Vestlandet* and *Østlandet* from each other, and is therefore safely within the ancient Swedish and Danish cultural sphere.

It is entirely clear from Ohthere's report that (i) the narrow coastal zone of present-day Norway, between Ohthere's home in Hålogaland and Ohthere's *Sciringes heal*, which most likely was situated at the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex on the Lista peninsula in Vest-Agder, constituted the land of the Norwegians (or was claimed by them) in the second half of the ninth century, and (ii) that Ohthere's wild mountains correspond to the mountain range that runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula, and whose southern part, i.e. the *Langfjellene* mountain range, divides the southern part of present-day Norway into *Vestlandet* and *Østlandet*.

Let's observe how *Vestlandet* is described in modern terms: "The western land was fertile but restricted in area, narrow strips on the shores and mountain sides..." (F & W, 1970, 39). We also learn about *Vestlandet* in H & J (1970): (i) "...characterized by its narrow coastal zone..." (p. 11); (ii) "...the least forested region, the greater part actually being treeless" (p. 12); (iii) "The rugged ground is in an exposed position, and the soil is more or less leached" (p. 61); (iv) *Vestlandet*, with a few exceptions, "...has only small and scattered patches of cultivated land..." (p. 12). It is absolutely clear that the above description of *Vestlandet* harmonizes perfectly with the description in Ohthere's report of ninth-century Norway (my remarks are in square brackets): "All of it [i.e. the land of the Norwegians] that can be used for grazing or ploughing lies along the coast [actually the sea (sæ)] and even that [i.e. the land along the coast (sea)] is in some places very rocky [swyðe cludig]" (...& þæt is þeah on sumum stowum swyðe cludig...) (Lund *et al*, 1984, 20-21). In most areas of *Vestlandet*, agriculture must have been carried out under marginal conditions in former times.

A case to consider is the name Norway, in Icelandic Noregur < *Norðvegr (cf. OE Norðweg and MHG Norwege). These names mean 'a way in the north direction, a way to the north, the northern way' (cf. *ÍO*). This implies, as geography is concerned, that the land of the Norwegians had an approximate north/south direction and was predominately coastal areas, which harmonizes perfectly with Ohthere's report.

We learn in point (xi) in section (v) that when Ohthere left *Sciringes heal* and sailed towards Hedeby, Denmark was to port (to the left). This indicates that the coastal areas of the Scandinavian Peninsula, from approximately the location of Ohthere's *Sciringes heal*, which was most likely situated in Vest-Agder, and eastwards to some point in southern Sweden, were in the second half of the ninth century called Denmark (presumably the territories of the North Danes). This is of no surprise and there is no special evidence of any kind which contradicts this. There is some considerable evidence available which supports this account in Ohthere's report, for instance the account about the South Danes and the North Danes in the OE *Orosius* (see section (ix)).

Therefore – if we keep strictly to Ohthere’s report – we can suggest that in the second half of the ninth century, the land of the Norwegians corresponded only to the narrow coastal zone of present-day Norway, between Ohthere’s home in Hålogaland and Ohthere’s *Sciringes heal*. However, there are indications that the land of the Norwegians, prior to and during the ninth century, corresponded to the Hordaland and Rogaland counties (the ancient Norwegian heartlands), the Sogn og Fjordane county and a part of the Vest-Agder county. The Norwegians, however, may have laid claim to the coastal areas north of the Sogn og Fjordane county. In my view, other parts of present-day Norway than the above-mentioned were not, prior to and during the ninth century, populated by Norwegians except for some sparsely distributed settlements in the coastal areas north of the Sogn og Fjordane county. However, I acknowledge the complexity of the issue and therefore state this with reservations.

(ix) The South Danes and the North Danes

References to the South Danes, West Danes, East Danes and North Danes can be found in the following sources:

- (i) A reference to the South Danes can be found in a tenth-century runic inscription on the *Sædinge* rune stone on Lolland, a Danish island which is south of Sjælland (Zealand) (Jacobsen & Moltke, 1947, 50).
- (ii) In *Beowulf*, there are references to the South Danes, West Danes, East Danes and North Danes.
- (iii) A reference to the South Danes is found in *Widsith*.
- (iv) We learn in the OE *Orosius* (not in Ohthere’s report) about the South Danes and the North Danes and where they resided (see below).
- (v) The Icelanders are called North Danes in a reliable Icelandic source from the twelfth century, i.e. in the Icelandic *Merlínússpá* (see above the links to my other websites).

Of these points, point (iv) is clearly of major interest to us in the context of this study. It is clear that the references to the cardinal directions in the OE text in question coincide with actual states of reality (or approximately so).²⁰ If we interpret in a logical manner the clear and straightforward text in the OE *Orosius* about the South Danes and the North Danes, we learn this: the South

²⁰ Note that there is good reason and common sense to suggest that in the OE *Orosius* only one system of geographical orientation is used, i.e. the normal (sometimes called *true* or *astronomical*) orientation (the 4-bearing and the 8-bearing system). See Lund *et al* (1984, 12), Fowler (1966, 142, (9)), Ellegård (1954-55, 1-20) and Bately (1980, lxiii-lxxi), whose conclusions are in line with and support the evaluation of the present author.

Danes lived only on the Jutland Peninsula. The North Danes lived on the Danish islands east of Jutland and also on the *main lands* north and east of Jutland (the plural *þæm maran landum* refers to the *main lands* (see also Lund *et al*, 1984, 17)). The *main lands* clearly refers to the territories on the Scandinavian Peninsula (presumably the coastal areas) which are found to the north and east of the Jutland Peninsula. As the South Danes lived on Jutland, the *main land* to the north of them refers to what is now southern and south-eastern Norway (presumably the coastal areas) and the *main land* to the east of them refers to western Sweden (presumably the coastal areas). It is an untenable theory that the use of the plural (*þæm maran landum*) refers to western Sweden only and, furthermore, it is stated explicitly that the North Danes (also) lived on the *main land* north of the South Danes, who lived on Jutland.

Therefore it is entirely clear that according to the OE *Orosius*, the North Danes also lived in what is now southern and south-eastern Norway. This harmonizes perfectly with Ohthere's report, where it is reasonably clear that Denmark was immediately to port when Ohthere sailed from *Sciringes heal* in the Vest-Agder county towards Hedeby. The account in the OE *Orosius* about the South Danes and the North Danes is very clear and straightforward and it is an uncomplicated matter for the reader to verify my understanding by reading the OE text in question and/or the translation in Lund *et al* (1984, 17). Note that it is stated reasonably clearly that it was the North Danes who lived on the Danish islands, not the South Danes. In light of point (v) it is appropriate to mention that the typical geographical locations for the course of events described in the Icelandic *Fornaldarsögur* 'tales of the distant past' are Gautland, Denmark and southern Norway (Krag, 1991, 219-220).

It is clear that Ohthere's description of the size and geographical position of ninth-century Norway – as well as the account in the OE *Orosius* about the South Danes and the North Danes – completely contradicts the popular theory that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in the Vestfold county in the *Østlandet* region. It is appropriate to remind the reader that we learn in H & J (p. 34) that *Østlandet* was traditionally oriented towards Sweden, Denmark and Germany, which makes perfect sense in the present context.

(x) The OE mile

Some scholars have found it hard to accept the description in Ohthere's report concerning the width of the (inhabited) land of the Norwegians, and claimed that what is there described as *byne land/bynum lande* was only a small part of ninth-century Norway; which in their opinion is the same size today as it was in the ninth century (see section (xii) concerning *byne land/bynum lande*). There have also been attempts to convince us that the mile used in Ohthere's report was not the OE mile but some "expanded size" of mile. We are, however, not informed about any such mile in historical sources. Both

these theories are essentially speculation, as no evidence can be produced in favour of them and they firmly contradict the information in Ohthere's report. The above theories have served the obvious purpose of extending the width of the ninth-century Norway which is described in Ohthere's report so it matches the width of present-day Norway. The nationalistic aspects of these theories are clear for everyone to see.

As mentioned above, there have been attempts to convince us that the mile used in Ohthere's report was not the OE mile but some "expanded size" of mile (see *inter alia* Bately, 1980, 192 (15/26-7)). Bately considers that a mile of c.1.5-1.7 km was used (i.e. 3-4 miles as equivalent to 5-6 km). Claus Krag (2000, 52) agrees with this as he states clearly and without any reservations that one OE mile was approximately 1.5 km "1 gammelengelsk mil var ca. 1,5 km". With this, Krag acknowledges that Ohthere's evaluation of the width of the (inhabited) land of the Norwegians was most likely correct. In support of Bately's and Krag's evaluation is the size of Britain given in the OE *Orosius* (Bately, 1980, 19). See also Connor (1987, 70-77). Even if the OE mile used in Ohthere's report was around 2 km, this does not change much about the width as it was according to Ohthere's report. The maximum width would, anyway, only have been c.90-120 km. Note that the maximum width of present-day Norway is c.430 km.

(xi) Claus Krag's cautious approach

Claus Krag's discussion (2000, 50-52) of Ohthere's report is definitely somewhat at variance with what we are used to seeing. Krag's cautious approach here is to be preferred. Of relevancy, and what concerns us in the context of this study, are the points noted below, but see also Krag's evaluation in the preceding section concerning the OE mile and his (indirect) evaluation in the succeeding section concerning *byne land/bynum lande*:

- (i) Krag does not display any map of the presumed sailing route between Ohthere's presumed home and the presumed location of *Sciringes heal* in Vestfold. This is at variance with the usual.
- (ii) Krag neither mentions Kaupang nor claims that *Sciringes heal* was situated in Vestfold. Considering the context of his discussion, this can not slip our attention.
- (iii) Krag expresses his doubts that the name Norway, at the time in question, was used for the territories east of the Lindesnes peninsula in the Vest-Agder county. From Lindesnes to Vestfold is c.220 km sailing in an approximate north-east direction.

The main point of interest to us is that Krag does not claim that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in Vestfold and that he does not even mention Vestfold or Kaupang in his discussion about Ohthere's report. This is, mildly

expressed, at variance with the usual. Without exceptions, scholars do not hesitate to claim that *Sciringes heal* was situated in Vestfold, and they do so completely without reservations: despite the fact that there is no evidence found in the OE *Orosius* or in other historical or semi-historical sources for such a claim. I leave it up to the reader to figure out an explanation for Krag's cautious approach.

(xii) Ohthere's report – *byne land/bynum lande*

As mentioned in section (x), some scholars have claimed that what is described in Ohthere's report as *byne land/bynum lande* was only a small part of ninth-century Norway. In Lund *et al* (1984, 21) we observe the following translation of the OE text in question: "The cultivated land is broadest in the south, and the further north it goes the narrower it becomes. In the south it is perhaps sixty miles broad or a little broader; and in the middle, thirty or broader; and to the north, he said, where it is narrowest, it might be three miles across to the mountains." There is good reason for us to be sceptical of this translation and, therefore, some comments and criticism are required.

What concerns us here is exclusively the translation in Lund *et al* of *byne land/bynum lande* which is, without reservations, translated as "cultivated land". Apart from not stating any reservations, which is inappropriate in this case, there is some fundamental misunderstanding here, as the width of what Lund *et al* translated as cultivated land is clearly in Ohthere's report equated to the inhabited land and, moreover, to the land that can be grazed or ploughed (see below).

Note that the following closely-related OE word forms are used in Ohthere's report which, considering the context, mean the following: *buan*: stay, dwell, live; *bude*: lived; *gebun*: settled, inhabited; *byne*: inhabited; *bynum*: inhabited. *Byne land/bynum lande* can also refer to cultivated land, but considering the context in Ohthere's report and what we know about Norwegian geography, it is more appropriate to translate it as "inhabited". Whatever translation we opt for, it is clear from the context that *byne land/bynum lande* refers to the inhabited land of the Norwegians and also to the land that can be grazed or ploughed.

Actually, it also seems to be clear from the context that *byne land/bynum lande* refers to the entire land of the Norwegians. This interpretation gets support from Claus Krag (2000, 52) who mentions neither cultivated land nor inhabited land: "Da Ottar seilte sørover, hadde han, etter det han fortalte, hele tiden «nordmennenes land» på babord side. Landet var langt og smalt, i nord mange steder bare tre «mil» inn til fjellet, i sør fra 30 til 60 «mil» (1 gammelengelsk mil var ca. 1,5 km)." *Landet var langt og smalt* means here: the land of the Norwegians was long and narrow.

He sæde ðæt Norðmanna land wære swyðe lang & swyðe smæl. (Trans.) He (Ohthere) said that the land of the Norwegians is very long and very narrow

(swyðe lang & swyðe smæl). This is the first sentence in an obvious attempt at an actual geographical description of ninth-century Norway. We have to be aware that it is never stated in Ohthere's report that the mountainous areas (wilde moras) belonged to the land of the Norwegians, but it is stated explicitly that they were inhabited by the *Finns*.²¹ Even so, we can almost take it for granted that the western part of these mountainous areas (however, perhaps only up north to the Møre og Romsdal county) was within the Norwegian sphere of influence and was possibly counted with Norway.

To paraphrase the above and offer a logical conclusion: it is clear from Ohthere's report that the land of the Norwegians only extended to the wild mountains, which correspond to the huge mountain range that runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula, and that the land between this mountain range and the sea was inhabited and used for cultivation and grazing. In the second half of the ninth century, the (inhabited) land of the Norwegians had a width of c.4-120 km, and only extended to this huge mountain range to the east. It does not matter in the context of this study, nor is it relevant, whether the western part of this mountain range was counted with Norway or whether the narrow (*very narrow* in Ohthere's report) coastal zone was described as (i) cultivated, (ii) inhabited, or (iii) used for grazing or ploughing, as we are primarily occupied with defining the size (width, etc.) of ninth-century Norway in an attempt to locate Ohthere's *Sciringes heal*.

²¹ It is actually possible that the *Finns* inhabited the mountainous areas in question in the ninth century, as we learn in H & J (1970, 63) that – in former times – the mountain pastures, in general, were of great importance and that the mountains in *Vestlandet* and *Østlandet* were the main areas for transhumance farming. Therefore, these mountainous areas were indeed habitable, although the people there probably lived under marginal conditions.

Conclusions

The description in Ohthere's report of the size and geographical position of ninth-century Norway, as well as the report in the OE *Orosius* about the South Danes and the North Danes, indicates in no uncertain terms that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in the Rogaland or Vest-Agder county in south-western Norway, but not in the Vestfold county in what was to become south-eastern Norway. This conclusion is also supported by various factors not discussed in any detail on this website, for instance Ohthere's sailing speeds and sailing times. In my view, the most likely location for Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was at the *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex on the Lista peninsula in Vest-Agder.

I want to underline that nothing can be found in Ohthere's report or in other historical or semi-historical sources which supports the theory that Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* was situated in Vestfold. Furthermore, it is obvious from Ohthere's report that the *Østlandet* region was within the Swedish and Danish cultural sphere and that this region was not populated by Norwegians prior to and during the ninth century. It is therefore entirely clear that, prior to and during the ninth century, Vestfold and the other counties in *Østlandet* were neither Norwegian territories nor populated by Norwegians.

It is also entirely clear and beyond any doubt that the wild mountains (*wilde moras*), which divided the land of the Norwegians and the land of the Swedes from each other, correspond to the large mountain range that runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula, and whose southern part (i.e. the *Langfjellene* mountain range) divides the *Vestlandet* region and the *Østlandet* region from each other. Therefore, *Østlandet* (and probably also the major part of *Sørlandet*) was populated by Swedes or people of Swedish origin. Excluded here are the mountainous areas where the *Finns* seem to have lived.

If we keep strictly to Ohthere's report, we can conclude that the narrow coastal zone of present-day Norway, between Ohthere's home in Hålogaland and Ohthere's *Sciringes heal* in Vest-Agder, constituted the land of the Norwegians (or was claimed by them) in the second half of the ninth century. However, in light of various evidence drawn from historical sources and archaeological research, we can suggest that the land of the Norwegians, prior to and during the ninth century, primarily corresponded to the Hordaland and Rogaland counties (the ancient Norwegian heartlands), the Sogn og Fjordane county and a part of the Vest-Agder county.

Figure 1

The regional division of Norway

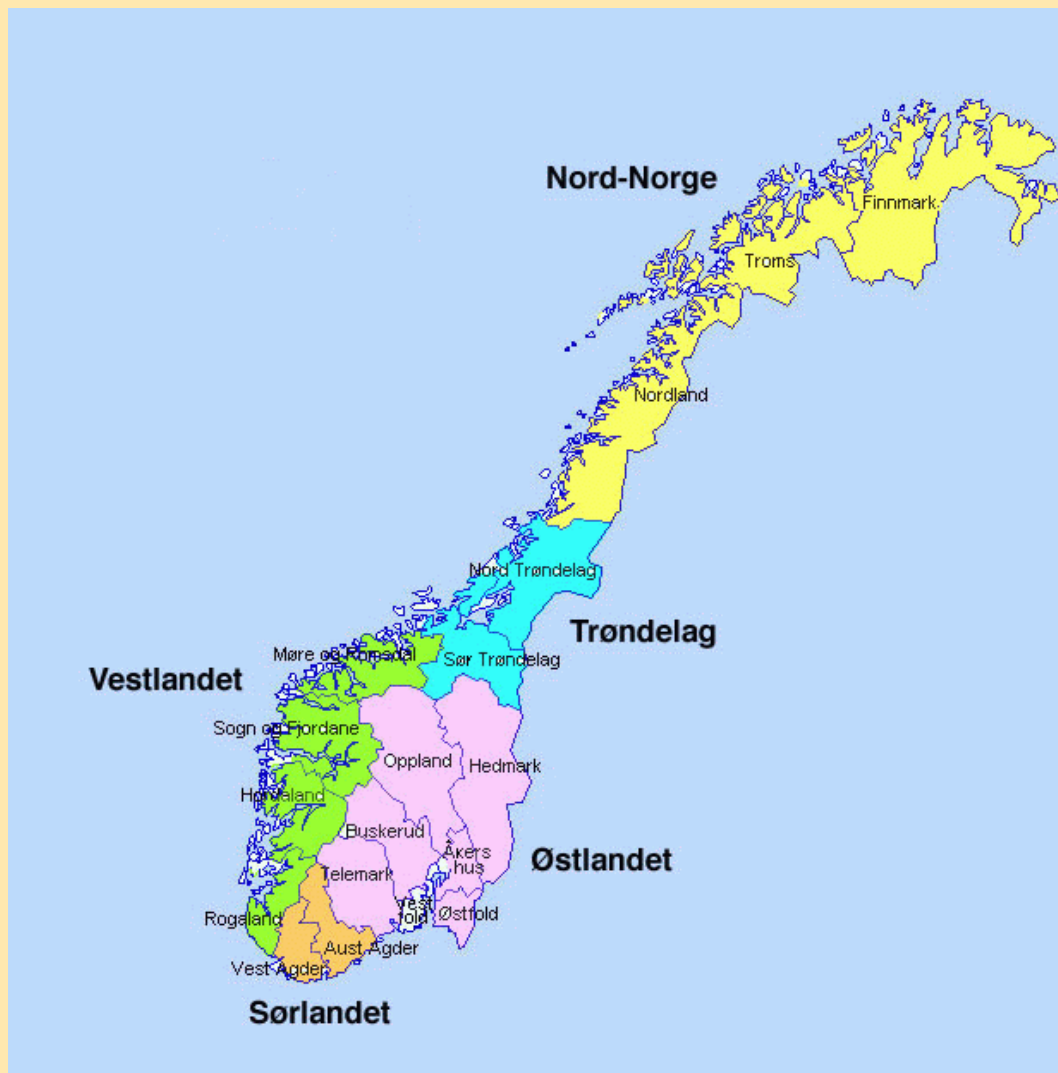


Figure 2

The mountain range that runs through the western part of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Here can be seen the *Langfjellene* mountain range, the *Dovrefjell* mountain massif and a part of the *Kölen/Kjølen* mountain range.



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Figure 3

The part of Ohthere's voyage, between his home in Hålogaland and Hedeby, which concerns us in this study

The black square represents *Ohthere's Sciringes heal* in Vest-Agder

The red square represents the *Skíringssalr* in Vestfold



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Figure 4

The distribution of the *Huseby* (*Husaby*, etc.) place names in Scandinavia

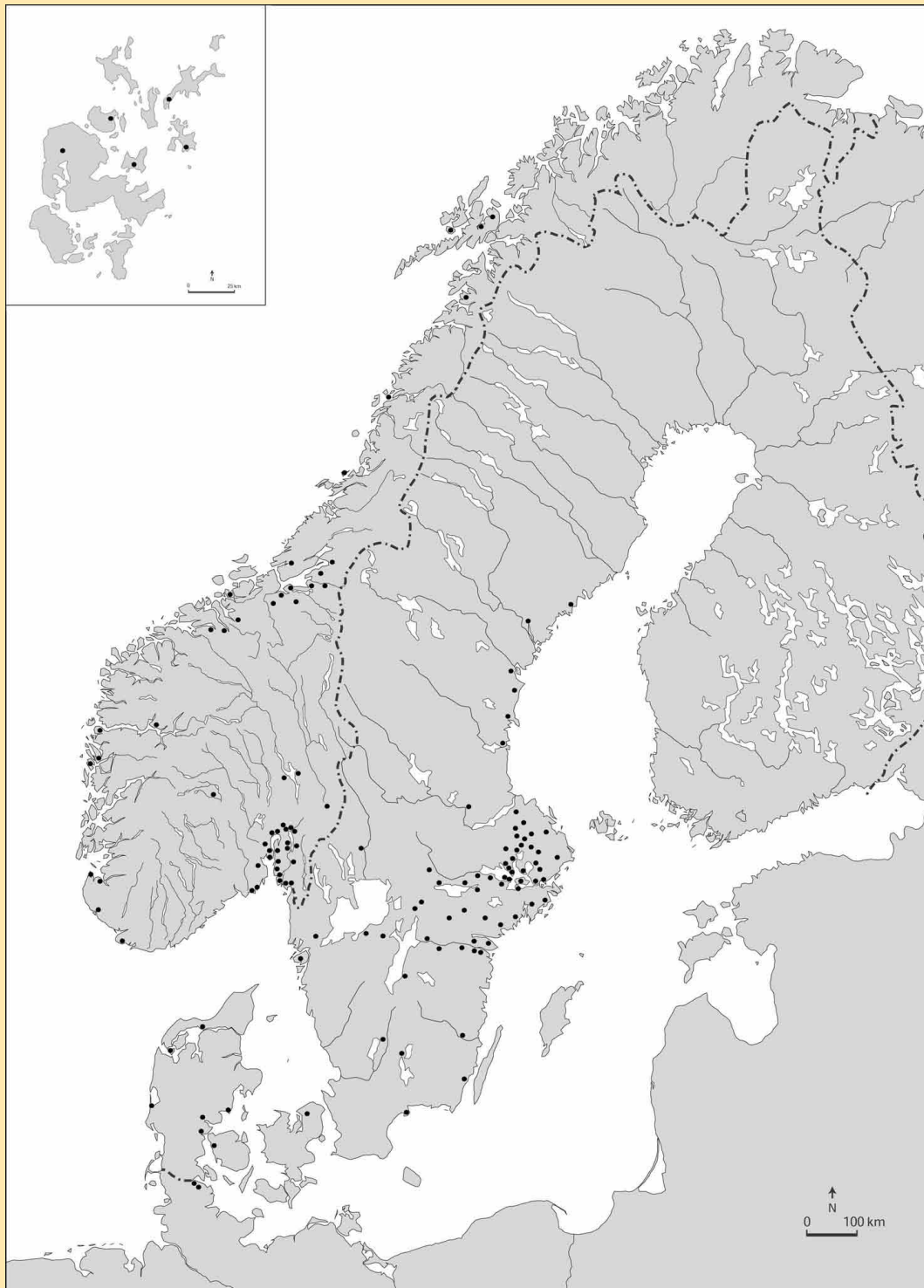
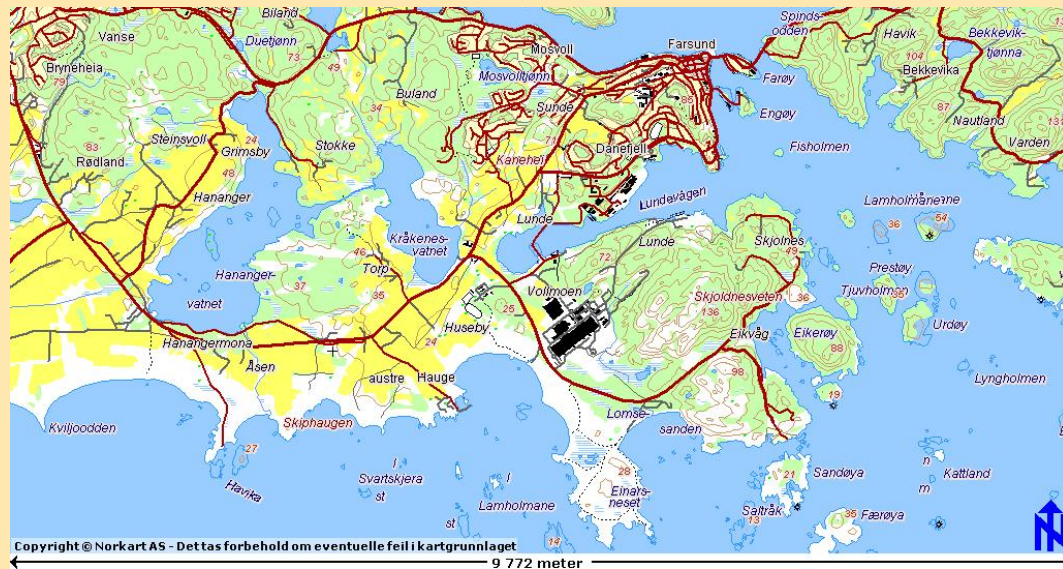


Figure 5

The *Huseby/Lunde* central-place complex on the Lista peninsula
in the Vest-Agder county



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Bibliography and abbreviations

Icelanders are listed under their patronymics or, if more appropriate, under their family names (if any). A and Á (á) are treated as one letter, as are I and Í (í), S and Ś, D and Ð (ð); accents are disregarded. Þ (þ), Æ (æ) and ö follow z, and Aa = Å (å) comes at the end.

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