Summary

Place-names I keep coming back to

By Lennart Elmevik

This article essentially reproduces the lecture given by the author at the annual meeting of the Place-Name Society of Uppsala in April 2013. It describes his research on Swedish sacred place-names, actual or, as he sees it in some cases, supposed. He dwells at greatest length on his view that the goddess name Fröja (OWScand. Freyja, OSw. *Froia) cannot be shown to occur in Swedish place-names. He gives several examples of names for which he believes other interpretations are to be preferred, including the parish names Friel, Fryele and Fröjel. These contain as their final element an Old Swedish word *al, which in his opinion does not mean ‘sacred place, shrine’, as has commonly been assumed, but refers to a ‘protected, enclosed place’, intended for various purposes. The village and parish name Friggeråker in Västergötland, he suggests, contains a counterpart of OWScand. friðgerð ‘conclusion of peace, settlement’, Norw. dial. fredgjerd, rather than, as previously supposed, the goddess name OWScand. Frigg. He questions the existence of a goddess OSw. *Niærdh and argues that, where place-names have been seen as referring to such a deity, we are concerned rather with a counterpart of the god’s name OWScand. Njörðr. As for the name Härnevi/Årnevi, which occurs in four places in Uppland and which earlier scholars have assumed to contain a goddess name OSw. *Hærn as its specific, he prefers to interpret the first element as a word for ‘vegetation god’, OSw. *ærin or *æri m. In his view, a word with the same meaning also forms the first element of Luggude härad (Skåne), Ludgo (a parish name in Södermanland) and Luggavi (a village name in Närke). According to the author, the final element of Locknevi (the name of a parish in Småland) was not originally vi ‘sacred place, cult site’, but OSw. -vidhi ‘wood, forest’; as the first element he posits a word OSw. *lodhkona, *lodhkona ‘sorceress, witch’.

In a handful of names, among them OSw. Lytislund, modern-day Janslunda, on Selaön in Lake Mälaren, he interprets the first element as a word for ‘pagan priest’, OSw. *lytir ‘lot teller, soothsayer’. Of the other names discussed, mention may be made of the village name Disevid in Östergötland, which the author does not regard as an original -vi name, but as compounded with -vidhi ‘wood, forest’; a group consisting of Åsaka (in six places in Västergötland), Asige (in Halland), and Asak and Åsåker in Norway; and finally Gödåker in Uppland.