As in so many other areas, attempts to uncover the methods by which Swedish kings raised finance in the pre-Folkung period begin with later evidence. Besides revealing some forms of taxation that are clearly old, this tells us what the kings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries did not have. The relief taxes that could replace ledung service were almost certainly introduced after 1250. The king and his agents could raise finance from fines imposed for transgressions and from dulgräp and danarv, but many of these too may have been introduced in the mid-thirteenth century or even later. Levies referred to in the laws of Götaland such as the allmäning (common lands) are of uncertain age. In addition the crown held syssel, land administered on behalf of the king, but there is little evidence that this practice was at all widespread in Sweden outside Gotland (which was in itself a syssel), and Värmland, for which evidence is virtually non-existent before the fourteenth century. Whatever (and whenever) their origin, sysler had a greater importance in Norway and Jylland. By the late thirteenth century Norwegian syslemenn had become agents of the crown and the whole country was divided into sysler, akin to the Swedish län (see below). In Jylland the sysel corresponded to the herred (Sw. härad) of other Danish regions, each with a ting and functioning as judicial district for both secular and ecclesiastical authorities as well as having other administrative functions.

Prior to the mid-thirteenth century Swedish kings could draw finance from royal estates, land that belonged to the person of the king as opposed to an individual king’s private landholdings. In his essay Upsala öd [sic] Henrik Schück attempted to show that kungs-gårds, especially those named husaby or husby, were located in such a way that they could have been centres for administrative sub-divisions in each landskap.\(^1\) Despite a number of minor misgivings, his thesis

\(^1\) Henrik Schück 1914a, 1–37.
has been accepted by many later scholars. However, Schück relied on written sources for his interpretation, and there has been much archaeological work since 1914 which has contributed to the discussion. The term ‘Uppsala öd’, to which a king acquired rights after his election, appears to refer to crown domain (cf. ON audr, ‘wealth’, OS ödher). In Snorri Sturluson’s Ynglingasaga its origin is placed in the distant past, when the mythical forefather Yngvi-Frey reigned at Uppsala, and drew all wealth to him. This tells us that contemporary Scandinavians believed it was an ancient institution, nothing more. Upplandslagen assumes that it was familiar, implying that it was old in 1296. An explicit link between husaby-sites and Uppsala öd is made in only one document from 1345, and there are no references to husabyar in any medieval histories or annals. Given the place-name evidence, there is good reason to believe that the name husaby is older than documentary records and that it refers to a specific type of site, but it is not impossible that Uppsala öd was an invention, designed to give sanction to rights claimed by the king. Given Snorri’s tale, it may have been created as late as the twelfth century. Either way, given its name it is probable that its centre was at Gamla Uppsala. Husaby is not the only place-name associated with Uppsala öd, as several of the kungsgårdar of Västergötland listed in Västgötalagen include the place-name component bo, which also seems to have been an alternative name to öd in Östgötalagen.

Among crown possessions husabyar appear frequently in some of the earliest sources, and husabyman were the crown’s servants. Husaby-placenames are concentrated in Svealand, but are also relatively common in Östergötland, Norway, Jylland, Fyn and Lolland. The husaby institution need not have originated at the same time in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, and neither -by nor hus place-name components are useful clues. Both -by settlements and placenames beginning with hus- could be either late Iron Age or medieval in origin.

2 For instance, Lönnroth and Rosén disagree only on minor points, while archaeologists such as Hyenstrand and Wijkander have fitted husabyar into specific stages of their hypothetical hundare reforms: see Lönnroth 1940 p. 43, Rosén 1949 p. 116, Hyenstrand 1974 p. 118, and Wijkander 1983 p. 183.
3 SSH, Ynglinga saga 10, p. 13.
4 See, for instance, Grundberg 2000 and Petterson 2000 p. 53. Despite all his doubts about previous research and the evidence, Petterson (2000 p. 61) still concludes that husabyar were linked to royal power.
5 Rahmqvist 1986 pp. 254–70.