

Rodskarl, Trynta and Spænnklo.
 Bynames in the Town Court Record Book of Arboga from a
 Name-Semantic Point of View

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Abstract

The town court record book of Arboga is a valuable source relating to life in Sweden during the Middle Ages. It includes legal records and particulars of economic transactions such as transfers of real estate, donations and inheritances. Consequently, these records contain a large number of names which are of great interest to the onomastic researcher.

In this paper I will discuss and give examples of bynames from the different name-semantic categories that are represented in the records: 'descent and kinship', 'origin and place of residence', 'occupation and social status', 'external characteristics', 'internal characteristics', 'clothing and equipment', and finally 'habits and events'.

In a study of bynames, the semantic analysis is probably our main focus of interest. We come across names such as *Drukkin* 'drunk' and *Trynta* 'clumsy, ragged woman' and we reflect upon their meaning and why a person was given a certain name. Was it his or her looks or other characteristics, or something else? In this paper I will discuss and give examples of some of the names I have come across in my study of bynames in the records of the town council of Arboga between 1450 and 1500, and discuss the reasons for the giving of these names.

The town of Arboga is situated some 100 kilometres west of Stockholm in Sweden and was one of the major towns involved in the trans-shipment of iron and other goods that were transported on to Stockholm and other places in Sweden and northern Europe (Arboga 1976: 8). Arboga was also the place of several important political and ecclesiastical meetings in the Middle Ages (Ljung 1949: 28 f., 43 ff., 50 ff. and *passim*).

In my corpus I have only included people who were not burghers of other towns or living elsewhere, and who were not nobility or their servants, court officials, clergymen or other ecclesiastical persons. The reason for this is that I want to reflect naming customs in a defined environment. In this study, I regard as bynames names that are formed with a byname prefix or suffix, as well as occupational designations and inhabitant names. My material comes from the town court record book, which above all consists of particulars of economic transactions, but also includes the names of individuals who held offices or enjoyed the franchise.

To begin with, I will mention a few problems that may be encountered in an analysis of this kind: in a name-semantic study, it is first necessary to examine and establish the meaning of the name (when I give the meaning in Old Swedish, the information may be assumed to come from Söderwall's *Ordbok öfver svenska medeltidsspråket*). Many words are relatively easy to identify, and names like *Diævul* 'devil' and *Tumaløs* 'without thumb' are not a problem. Others are more complicated. For example, *Naghel* could have different meanings: 'fingernail', but also '(metal) nail' or 'clove'. This must have consequences for the name-semantic analysis, as there are then

several possibilities when it comes to the reasons for giving the names. In this study I will use the following groups to categorize the data: 'descent and kinship', 'origin and place of residence', 'occupation and social status', 'external characteristics', 'internal characteristics', 'clothing and equipment', 'habits' and 'events' (Andersson 2003: 601 ff.; for slightly different categories, cf. Brylla 1999: 15 f. and Kousgård Sørensen 1975: 123). For practical reasons I will combine 'habits' and 'events', as it is difficult to decide what occurred only on very rare occasions and what happened frequently.

Certain categories of bynames can be interpreted more easily than others. The category 'descent and kinship' contains bynames whose name-semantic content is fairly certain. Examples like *Mettomagher* and *Stubs* tell us that someone is Metta's son-in-law or married to a person by the name of *Stub*. Among the bynames in the group referring to origin and place of residence, we find *Jæmte* 'person from the province of Jämtland' and *Skæriakarl* 'man from the archipelago', both of which are assumed to be interpreted fairly safely in name-semantic terms. Occupational designations, which are also believed to be easily interpreted, nevertheless involve an element of uncertainty from a name-semantic point of view. Outside the Arboga corpus, there is for example a vicar in the parish of Husby-Oppunda called *herr Hanos Guldsmid* 'goldsmith' (Brieskorn 1912a: 136 f.), who apparently did not work as a goldsmith, and a *Per Rytther Skypper* (Brieskorn 1912a: 146), who seems to have been both a horseman and the master of a ship. These individuals could have inherited their bynames, or else their names could bear witness to an earlier occupation (Brieskorn 1912a: 136 f., 146).

Another difficulty is that a certain byname may be found in different name-semantic categories. A man named *Rødhe* 'the red one' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 103 and Peterson 1996: 24) could have had red hair or a red complexion, or worn red clothes, or perhaps have had a false and unreliable temperament (Jónsson 1907: 210). From a modern point of view and in a modern environment, he could also be politically radical. These different interpretations mean that the byname could be placed in different semantic categories. Consequently, we should be careful when interpreting names semantically, as there is great risk that the explanation could be misleading and it is necessary to be aware of this problem. I also wish to point out that the interpretation of the byname which I put forward is tied to the known name bearer in my corpus, but that the name could have its source in a previous generation. A certain byname could be used by several generations and by several members of the same generation. It is not certain that it was the name bearer himself who had the qualities reflected in names such as *Horkarl* 'whoremonger', *Biur* 'beaver' or *Brysting* 'the one with the peculiar chest'.

The category referring to descent and kinship is the easiest one to give satisfactory interpretations to, in terms of establishing both what words form the basis for the names and what the reasons are for giving the names. Here we find the large number of compounds ending in *-magher* 'son-in-law', for example *Pukamagher*, *Svennungsmagher*, *Karamagher* and *Vibymagher*. These bynames express kinship with someone named *Puke* 'devil', *Svennung* and *Kare* (both first names), and finally someone living in the village of Viby (in the rural parish of Arboga). Another large group consists of what are termed 'wives' names', where women are connected to their husband by their husband's first name or byname in the genitive. Examples include *Bangs*, *Estens*, *Gamblesmidhs*, *Styrkars* and *Bakares*, which link the women concerned to men called *Bang* 'ado, noise', *Ester* 'man from Estonia', *Gamblesmidh* 'old smith', *Styrkar* which is a first name, and *Bakare* 'baker'.

Bynames emanating from a person's place of geographical origin and residence also form a large group. This category includes unchanged place-names, which are frequently used as bynames; it is possible to find bynames consisting of place-names from the neighbourhood of Arboga, like *Helvetet* and *Bakka*, as well as more distant names of places such as *Folkvi* (in the parish of Kräklinge) and *Jwleta*, a well-known monastery and also a parish.

To denote origin and place of residence, it was also possible to use final elements when constructing bynames, for example *-bo* 'inhabitant of', *-ing(e)* 'inhabitant of', *-karl* 'man' and *-man* 'man'. Examples in this category are *Dalbo* 'person from the province of Dal(sland)' and *Hälsing* 'person from the province of Hälsingland' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 106 and Brylla 1999: 17; for a partly alternative interpretation, cf. also Lind 1920–21: 143 concerning OWScand. *Helsingr* and Jónsson 1907: 181, 308). The last-mentioned name probably designated people who moved to the area from Hälsingland. Examples of names ending in *-karl* are *Butnakarl* (cf. Hellquist 1912: 106) and *Rodskarl*. Men called by the byname *Butnakarl*, which was very commonly used in Arboga, came from the regions around the Gulf of Bothnia or did business with those regions. A man with the byname *Rodskarl* was from the district of Roden, Roslagen. *Angerman* 'man from the province of Ångermanland' is the only occurrence in this group of a name formed with the final element *-man*. Other examples of bynames in this name-semantic category include *Jæmte* 'man from the province of Jämtland', *Ester* 'man from Estonia', and the frequently used *Finne* 'Finn' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 106; for a partly alternative interpretation, cf. also DGP 2: 271 concerning ODa. *Finne*). The name *Garper* 'German living in Scandinavia' is relatively common, in Arboga as in other parts of Sweden (cf. Hellquist 1912: 106; for a partly alternative interpretation, cf. also Lind 1920–21: 103 concerning OWScand. *Garpr*).

A great many bynames in Arboga originated above all in the name bearer's occupation, but also in their social status. In such cases, as already mentioned, it is important to remember that the name bearer may not have practised the actual occupation referred to in his name.

In Arboga there are several examples of people whose bynames show that they manufactured containers of various kinds. For instance, *Sven Fatmæstare* 'master at making barrels, containers, a cooper' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 105 and Brieskorn 1912b: 5) and *Niklis Laggare* 'barrel maker'. There were also a large number of smiths whose speciality is shown in their byname: *Jakob Gulsmidher* 'goldsmith' (cf. Brieskorn 1912a: 136 f.), *Peter Klensmidher* 'locksmith' and *Klemet Knivasmidher* 'cutler'. Articles made of fur and leather were manufactured by several people, for example *Laurens Sæmskare* 'maker of chamois leather' and *Bengt Barkare* 'tanner' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 105). The inhabitants of Arboga also had to keep cattle, as is shown in the bynames of *Andres Fækarl* 'herdsman, keeper of the herd' and *Sven Oxatæmiare* 'one who tames oxen'. There was also a strong connection with trade and shipping, evident in the bynames of *Henrik Skipmæstare* 'shipbuilder' and *Peter Skipman* 'sailor'. The latter held office as a baker for several years and his experience as a sailor must have been years ago. The close connection with forestry and mining in the town of Arboga is also expressed in the bynames of *Klemet* and *Simon Kolare* 'charcoal burner'. Simon is additionally called *Kolabrännare*, also meaning 'charcoal burner', and *Kalkbrännare* 'lime burner', while *Hans Bærghsbrytare* 'mine worker' probably worked in the initial stages of iron production. The name *Birgher Almosogubbe* 'old man who lives on charity' certainly tells us about the bearer's social status.

External characteristics of the inhabitants of Arboga were also a source of many bynames. Compound names referring to parts of the body are very common. This is one of the types which are easy to characterize name-semantically. Several names deal with their bearers' obvious problems with their legs. In the case of a man who was named *Grytofoter* 'foot of a pot' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 98 and Sahlgren 1912: 63 f.), his foot was compared to a pot or a pot stand; *Krokfoter* had a crooked foot (cf. Jónsson 1907: 220 concerning OWScand. *Krókfótr*; for an alternative interpretation, cf. Lind 1920–21: 220 and 1920: 305 f. concerning OWScand. *Krókfótr*); and *Surben* (cf. Hellquist 1912: 101) probably had a 'wet leg, i.e., a leg with a running sore' (see Salberger 2002: 46 ff.). *Tumaløs* was probably missing a thumb; *Enhænde* (written *Eenhæmde*; see Hellquist 1912: 102 concerning *Enhænt*) and *Mædh ena handene*, both meaning 'the one with one hand', had only one hand; and *Slaksidha* had a slack, flabby part of his body, perhaps part of his face (see Wiktorsson 1983: 52). Names such as *Ludhin* 'hairy' (cf. Hellquist

1912: 103 and Peterson 1996: 24) and *Slæt* 'smooth' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 103; for partly different interpretations, cf. Wiktorsson 1983: 47, DGP 2: 1010 f. concerning ODa. *Slet* and Lind 1920–21: 340 concerning OWScand. *Sléttr*) probably refer to the bearers' growth of hair.

One woman is called *Trynta*. This name has been interpreted as referring to her outward appearance, 'a clumsy, ragged woman' (concerning the meaning of the name, see Lidén 1939: 129 f.). In this case her external peculiarities were reflected in her byname. Some physical characteristic is probably also the reason for the bynames of *Mattis Kalvamule* 'muzzle of a calf' (see Brylla 1999: 16) and *Jønis Brysting*, who could have had a large, strong or otherwise unusual chest. In this group we also find *Kraka* 'crow' (cf. Brylla 1996: 60, 63 f. and Hellquist 1912: 97) and *Biur* 'beaver' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 97). Here, though, the name-semantic interpretation is unreliable, and it is not entirely clear that these names have their place in the 'external characteristics' category. They could also be categorized as referring to 'internal characteristics', 'habits and events' or 'clothing and equipment', and therefore several explanations can be discussed. In the case of *Hari* 'hare', for example, is it the appearance of the animal, its walk, its imagined internal characteristics or something else that is the reason for the name (cf. Hellquist 1912: 97; for a partly alternative interpretation, cf. DGP 2: 412 concerning ODa. *Hare*; for an alternative interpretation, cf. Lind 1920–21: 136 concerning OWScand. *Hári*)? Does the person in question have long ears, is his walk comparable to the bounding of the hare, or is he scared and frightened and 'as timid as a hare'? Depending on the explanation chosen, these names have to be assigned to different name-semantic groups.

The reason for *Anna Pyndare*'s byname is a matter for discussion; a *pyndare* is a pair of scales resembling a steelyard, with a double cone-shaped weight and intended to be held in the hand (Owen Jansson 1936: 18 f.). The scales could have been her attribute or connected with her occupation, or she could have had a waddling gait, but the name could also have been constructed as a comparison between the weight, which is broadest in the middle, and her physiognomy. Perhaps *pyndare*, *pundare* is also an occupational designation, that is to say, if it was a designation for the person responsible for the town scales (Ljung 1949: 187).

Internal characteristics of people living in Arboga also served as the reason for giving particular names. Men designated by the name *Drukkin* 'drunk' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 100, 102 and Brylla 1999: 16) could have led a disorderly life, as could someone with the name *Kærleker* 'love' (see Hellquist 1912: 102 and Brylla 1999: 16), while *Olaf Dandeman* 'capable, good, excellent man' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 104), by contrast, could have been well-known for his high morals. *Visa Katarina* (cf. Hellquist 1912: 103) and *Galna Katarina* (cf. Hellquist 1912: 102) are described as a wise woman and a mad, violent woman, respectively. It is possible that the bynames *Urvæder* 'snowstorm' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 98) and *Storm* 'storm' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 98) have their origins in the name bearers' internal characteristics. The byname *Urvæder* refers to three individuals, probably indicating that the reason for the name is to be found in a previous generation.

A natural way of naming people is with reference to the characteristic clothes or equipment which they wear or carry. Such names are also found in Arboga. *Olaf Ringapunger* 'pouch with rings or made of rings?' could have worn such a pouch. *Erik Spænnklo*, the byname meaning 'claw or hook that fastens something together?', perhaps kept his clothes closed by means of a special hook. And the men named *Ulver* (cf. Hellquist 1912 s. 88, 97) and *Vargher*, both meaning 'wolf' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 88, 97), maybe wore furs made of wolf skins.

As I have already mentioned, it is often difficult to analyse whether something occurred regularly or whether it was an occasional action, and therefore I have chosen to combine the name-semantic categories 'habits' and 'events'. One example from this group is the name *Jønis Gatunasker*: *gatunasker* has been translated 'street-loafer, person who walks the streets aimlessly, sponging on people', but it has also been suggested that it could be a mocking name for a person

who lays pavement or is involved in similar work (concerning the meaning of the name, see Ljunggren 1943: 6). The origin of *Gatunasker*'s unusual name is probably his habit of living on the streets.

The name bearer's habit of using a certain expression is a common basis for a special group of bynames. *Peter i bæzta matto* 'to the best degree' (cf. Brylla 1999: 18 and Modéer 1989: 106) probably regularly used the expression 'i bæzta matto'. In the case of *Peter Thusandag* 'thousands of days' (see Modéer 1989: 106 and Otterbjörk 1982: 324), the expression in his byname, which was often used as a curse, perhaps became a habit. The comparative *værre* 'worse' appears in *Peter Værre*'s byname (regarding the meaning of the name, see Thors 1957: 75; cf. DGP 2: 1185 concerning ODa. *Werre*), and it is possible that this expression was used frequently by the person in question.

Hans Klysnare has a byname showing that he liked solitude, *klysnare* meaning 'hermit' and maybe alluding to his habit of keeping himself to himself or describing him as living in a lonely place. He is also called *Hans Krokfoter* 'crooked foot', the name-semantic interpretation of which was discussed earlier. It is remarkable that a person has two bynames, both of an unusual kind. A possible explanation is that he was given one of them during his travels to Stockholm or when he later settled in Stockholm (Ljung 1949: 244).

One woman is referred to only by the byname *Fæhuset* 'cow-house'. The reason for this name is probably her habit of dwelling in such a building. A similar designation is found in *Rigspåla*, where there is a bondsman named *Fjósnír*, with the meaning 'one who dwells in cow-houses' (Ney 1998: 107).

The byname *Porse* contains the plant designation *pors* 'bog myrtle'. The same plant is also referred to in the very common byname *Porsøl* 'beer made of bog myrtle'. Bog myrtle was used as a substitute for hops in brewing, to kill vermin, for tanning and also as a yellow dye (Lagerberg 1956: 454). The reason for giving someone a name connected with this plant could be the person's habit of collecting or in some way using bog myrtle. But there is also the possibility that he, or she, was in the habit of drinking beer made from the plant. *Porsøl* is conspicuous among the bynames found in Arboga, as there are no fewer than seven people who are designated by the name, one of them a woman.

In my corpus, the reason for a name is quite frequently to be found in an event. One example is *Peter Konunger* 'king', whose byname is not unusual in the Middle Ages. There are different possible explanations of its name-semantic basis. One is that it may have originated in proud behaviour and a leading social position; another is that the name is based on the title of a person who had been 'seine king', that is, the leader of a seine crew (Thors 1957: 71). But the byname could also refer to the name bearer having a role in a play (Fellows Jensen 1975: 45), or it could originate from the person's clothing (Wiktorsson 1983: 8 concerning *Munk* and *Biskop*). There is also a possibility that the name was given ironically.

The name *Kukuvalder* 'cuckold, a man whose wife has been unfaithful' is an example of the same category. In the Middle Ages, this name is only found in Arboga, but in 1560 it occurs in Åland (Thors 1957: 84) and in 1625 in Stockholm (Hirvonen 2003: 229). The byname is said to contain Latin *cuculus* 'cuckoo' (Danver 1941: 128) and the word OSw. *kukuvalder* can be derived from Old French *cucuault* and is assumed to allude to the cuckoo's habit of laying eggs in other birds' nests (SAOB K: 3121; concerning the name, see Thors 1957: 84 and Hirvonen 2003: 232). The man called by that name has been the subject of another man's intrusion into his nest, so to speak. Probably a real incident can be inferred from the byname.

Words for seasons and feasts can also be used in bynames, with *Jon Somar* 'summer' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 85), *Andres Vinter* 'winter' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 85) and *Jøsse Jul* 'Christmas' (for a partly alternative interpretation, cf. Hellquist 1912: 84 f.) providing examples of this kind.

Perhaps the person was born during the time in question (Thors 1957: 80) or was associated with a certain event which took place during the season or feast referred to.

In many cases the name-semantic interpretation is rather uncertain, and in my study there are only a few instances where one can be sure why a particular name was chosen. One of these is *Panka*, which means ‘small bream or similar fish’ (see Alvered 1996: 28; cf. Hellquist 1912: 97); this name is used only once, when *Ingevald*, with the byname *Smidh* ‘smith’, is called *Ingevald Panka* because he is accused of stealing small bream (ATb 1: 129 ff.).

As mentioned above, there is a great element of uncertainty in studying bynames from a name-semantic point of view. But it is nevertheless both interesting and necessary to try to establish why the name bearers were given their names. By doing so, we may be able to get a glimpse of a society and of ideas which are in many ways different from ours, but also, in other ways, similar.

Abbreviations

ODa. = Old Danish

OSw. = Old Swedish

OWS cand. = Old West Scandinavian

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