

## **METAPHORICAL AND METONYMICAL PLACE NAMES IN SWEDEN**

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### **Metaphorical and metonymical place names in Sweden**

**Abstract:** The place names of an area have normally been coined at different times and by different social groups. They present a rich material for the study of human perception and relations to the environment. Many names can be seen as natural descriptions of the named entities, formed from topographically based generics corresponding to the features, and often combined with a specific that modifies the quality of the feature in question. In other cases natural features have been named by means of metonymy or metaphors, e.g. because they remind the name giver of something particular, like a piece of furniture, a tool, or an article of clothing. In this paper I present a small study of metaphorical or metonymical place names in three areas in Sweden. I have categorized the names, I compare them and relate the similarities and differences to the specific culture and milieu of each area.

**Keywords:** onomastics, place names, metonymy, metaphors, field collections.

Some years ago I applied for funding from one of the European research bodies called HERA (Humanities within the European Research Area). It was a joint application together with onomastic colleagues from Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Norway and Slovenia. Our project aimed at studying similarities and differences in landscape approach in various linguistic regions in Europe by means of place names. As we all know, place names are an integrated part of any language and an indispensable instrument for defining place and space. Place names are addresses which enable members of a linguistic group to communicate smoothly and effectively with each other within a certain geographical area.

We did not get any funding at all from HERA even though we did advance quite far in the evaluation process. I still think, though, that this project was a fine initiative and a very good idea with many interesting aspects – one of them being the use of metaphors and metonymy when naming the landscape.

One of the purposes of the project was to investigate to which degree there are general or universal principles for naming topographic features. We took as a starting point that it is a fundamental human need to give and to use place names. In all the countries and areas involved in the project – as well as elsewhere – a number of studies have shown that place names normally are formed by means of topographical/geographical words (generics) that correspond to the feature in question. In addition, most names have a specific that specifies or modifies the quality of the feature, for instance saying something about vegetation, fauna,

ownership, human activities, various ways of exploiting the area, etc. In some cases the name is given in relation to another, already named entity. The study of any representative place name material will surely reveal a variety of human approaches to the surrounding environment, and the words used in the names will differ according to local topography, history and human use of the natural resources. This is probably obvious to any name scholar.

The place names of an area have normally been coined at different times and by different social groups. Thus they present a rich material for the study of human perception and relations to the environment. As said above, many place names can be seen as natural descriptions of the named entities, formed from topographically based generics corresponding to the features (like Swedish *Viken* ‘the bay’, *Ön* ‘the island’ or *Berg* ‘mountain’) and often combined with a specific to modify the quality of the feature in question, like for instance in these two Swedish (from now on Sw.) names.

*Storholmen* = *stor* ‘big’ + *holme* ‘island’ + *n* ‘definite article’ = ‘the big island’  
*Lillängen* = *lill(a)* ‘small’ + *äng* ‘meadow’ + *en* ‘definite article’ = ‘the small meadow’

In some special cases natural features have been named by means of metonymy, for instance when only a small part of the object, some conspicuous detail, has caught the full attention of the name giver and therefore has been used to name more than just itself. The terms *metonymy* and *metaphor* are of course familiar to most onomasticians but as a reminder, see the quotations below from Fiske (1990) and Knowles and Moon (2006) respectively. The two concepts are exhaustively treated in Dirven and Pöring (2002).

If metaphor works by transposing qualities from one plane of reality to another, metonymy works by associating meanings within the same plane. [...] The representation of reality inevitably involves a metonym: we choose a part of “reality” to stand for the whole.

Metonymy and metaphor also have fundamentally different functions. Metonymy is about referring: a method of naming or identifying something by mentioning something else which is a component part or symbolically linked. In contrast, metaphor is about understanding and interpretation: it is a means to understand or explain one phenomenon by describing it in terms of another.

Today a bay (also a natural harbour) on the island Kymmendö in the Stockholm archipelago is called *Asken*, meaning ‘the ash tree’. Many years ago a big ash tree was growing there close to the beach. Not far from there, another beach is called *Kolgården* because there used to be a coal house (Sw. *kolhus* or *kolgård*) there. In these names the denotation of the name has shifted from very local points or objects to covering larger areas.

In other cases – and more often – the object as such has caused the name giver to associate to something quite different because of how the object looks – like a piece of furniture, a tool, an article of clothing or an animal (such as *Getryggen* ‘the goat back’) – or how it sounds, smells or sometimes what emotions it evokes. In the following I will focus mainly on the many different metaphors used when naming the landscape but I will present a few more examples of metonymy as well. I will also point to some of the difficulties arising when trying to determine exactly which ones of all the existing place names are in fact metonymic or metaphoric.

## A pilot study

I have made a small study of such place names in three different areas in Sweden. Altogether I have found approximately 240 metaphorical or metonymical names to be included in my material. Probably, even more names than that do exist, but at this stage of the investigation I only need the rough outlines of things. As pointed out earlier, what is described in this article is to be regarded as a small, tentative pilot study only.

The areas I have chosen to examine can be seen in Figure 1:

1. Stockholm archipelago (5 parishes): Dalarö, Muskö, Nämndö, Ornö, Utö.
2. An agricultural area in the province Östergötland (15 small parishes): Allhelgona, Bjälbo, Fivelstad, Herrberga, Högby, Sjögestad, Skeppsås, Styra, Sya, Vallerstad, Varv, Veta, Viby, Vikingstad, Västerlösa.
3. A mountainous and sparsely inhabited area in the northern province Jämtland on the Norwegian border (9 parishes): Alanäs, Frostviken, Föllinge, Hotagen, Kall, Laxsjö, Offerdal, Ström, Åre.

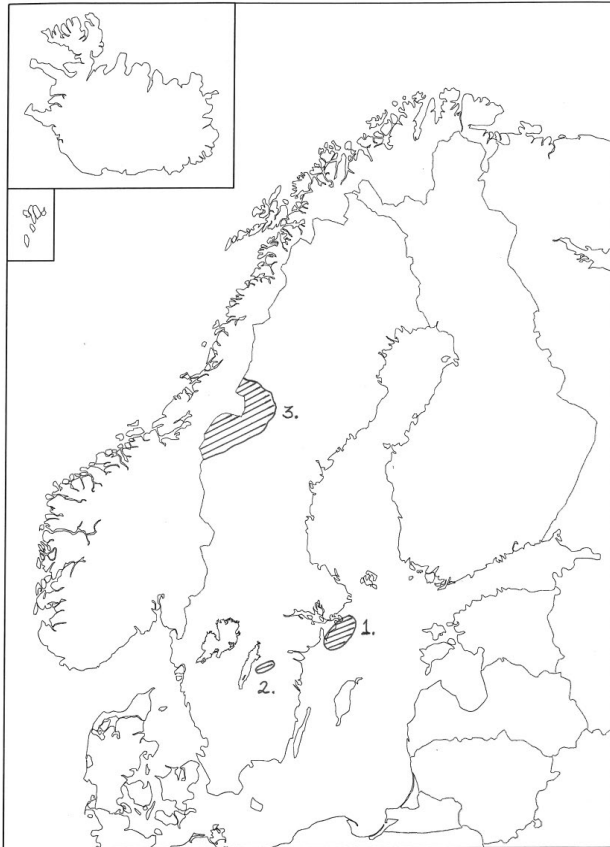


Figure 1. Map of Scandinavia showing the three areas in Sweden where the place names were examined.

To find the relevant names I have looked through and extracted examples from the extensive place name collections in the Institute for language and folklore in Uppsala, using the field collections made mostly in the 1930s and 1940s. The names are found on 9x11 cm cards like the one depicted in Figure 2. This card shows the name *Broken* in the parish Kall in Jämtland, registered by Bertil Blomstrand in 1936. The name is pronounced *Bróka* (with a long *o*-vowel) and it refers to a bog. On the card the collector has drawn a small picture showing the shape of the bog with the southern part looking like a pair of trousers and named accordingly. *Brok* is an old, dialectal Sw. word for ‘trousers’. The northern part is *Hängslena* ‘the braces’. Bogs are a very common natural feature type in this part of Sweden.

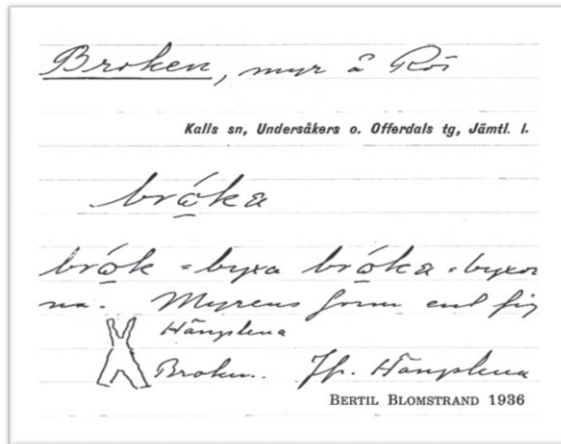


Figure 2. Archive card showing the metaphorical place names *Broken* ‘trousers’ and *Hängslena* ‘the braces’ collected in 1936.

Most other archive cards show no picture of the locality, for instance the name *Stekpannan* ‘the frying-pan’ collected by the same person, Bertil Blomstrand, in 1935. Instead a comment on the card provides us with an explanation: “A small rounded promontory connected to the mainland by a narrow strip of land”. Today, almost 80 years later, we have to use our imagination even more to understand the intention of the metaphor.

After having excerpted the relevant names I have categorized them in different ways (mostly to see the proportions of things) and I have tried to compare them and relate the similarities and differences of the three name stocks to the specific geography and culture of each area.

### Some metonymical names

To start with I will mention three more names I regard as metonymical:

*Signalen* meaning ‘the signal’ is the name of a promontory in the Stockholm archipelago. There used to be a navigation mark there, normally causing names as *Signaludden*, *Signalviken* or the like (with a generic *-udden* ‘the promontory’ or *-viken* ‘the bay’ in the end), but in this case the navigation mark itself is enough to name the whole area.

*Tunnan* ‘the barrel’ is a hill on an island in the archipelago. Barrels were used when making geodesic investigations, i.e. when measuring the world with triangle points. The surveyors nailed a barrel at the top of a natural tree or a high pole to function as a point of aim. We have several *Tunnberget* ‘barrel mountain’, *Tunnkullen* ‘barrel hill’ etc. in Sweden reminding us of this old technique.

*Äpplet* ‘the apple’ is a small island outside Stockholm. It has nothing to do with the fruit. The story is that a big ship, the man-of-war *Riksäpplet* ‘the orb’ ship-wrecked and sunk here in 1676, close to the island. The ship stayed on the bottom of the sea for hundreds of years, very well preserved. But in 1921 it was blown to pieces because people needed the black oak it was built of. Today we find remains of the ship used for various purposes in Stockholm, for instance to build the main doors of the Stockholm City Hall (or at least that is what rumour says). Left in the archipelago as a small, intangible part of this story is the island name *Äpplet*.

Now and then the names fool us and make modern interpreters believe we are dealing with a metaphorical name, based on how the object looks, even though the reason for the name is something else! *Skomakarskeppet* ‘the cobbler’s ship’ is a name recorded since 1720 but the real origin of it is not known. A local story tells us that a young girl should row a cobbler in her boat from the town Dalarö on the mainland to one of the many islands in the archipelago. But on the way she got tired and said to the cobbler that she saw a strange animal on a small island that they passed. She asked him to go ashore and have a look. He did, but then she took the boat, rowed away from there and left him alone on the island. He had to stay there for quite a long time. Since then this island is called *Skomakarskeppet* ‘the cobbler’s ship’.

Another small island is known as *Brödskutan*. In most cases names like this are based on how the object looks. A *brödskuta* in Swedish is what you use to take the bread out of a big oven, a tool with a long stick, a handle, and a round, flat end, like the one used when making pizza. This island does not look like a *brödskuta* at all, but once when people were hunting there, they shot an otter deep down in its burrow. No one could reach it, so to get it out they had to use such a tool, a *brödskuta* in Swedish.

Names like *Skomakarskeppet* and *Brödskutan* are metonymical in the sense that an unusual part of reality, a startling detail, comes to represent the whole.

### **Metaphorical names**

Let me return to the metaphors! Many old metaphors are bleached today. Especially words for body parts like Sw.  *fot* ‘foot’,  *arm* ‘arm’,  *rygg* ‘back’,  *hals* ‘neck’, and  *huvud* ‘head’ are commonly used as appellatives and as place name elements to capture the different shapes and forms of the landscape: “the foot of the mountain”, “an arm of the river” etc. I have not included simplex names of that kind in my material. Only when they are used in certain, more specific compounds can these words be regarded as parts of real monothematic, metaphorical place names. *Hästryggen* ‘the horse back’ from the Sw. word *hästrygg* ‘horseback’, *Kattskallen* ‘the cat skull’ from Sw. *kattskalle*, and *Svanhalsen* ‘the swan neck’ from Sw. *svanhals* are examples of such genuine metaphorical names in my material. In the following the Swedish names are “translated” quite mechanically into English just to give an idea of the contents of the name. More examples are:

Animals:	<i>Galtryggen</i>	'the boar back'	<i>Oxfoten</i>	'the ox foot'
	<i>Gethalsen</i>	'the goat neck'	<i>Oxögat</i>	'the ox eye'
	<i>Getryggen</i>	'the dog back'	<i>Rävfoten</i>	'the fox foot'
	<i>Hundtasken</i>	'the dog cock'	<i>Simpskallen</i>	'the bullhead scull' (a fish)
	<i>Kalvstrupen</i>	'the calf throat'	<i>Svinryggen</i>	'the pig back'
	<i>Kattrumpan</i>	'the cat tail'	<i>Tikfittan</i>	'the bitch cunt'
	<i>Kräkhuvudet</i>	'the crow head'		



Figure 3. *Gula mären* 'the yellow mare' is a small, rocky island in the Stockholm archipelago. Photo: Staffan Nyström.

When it comes to metaphorical names based on human body parts there are examples like *Magen* 'the stomach', *Skallen* 'the scull', and *Tarmen* 'the intestine', but at least six names in my material are referring to parts below the waist: the bottom, the buttocks or the genitals – male or female.

More examples of monothematic names from other semantic fields (animals, buildings and architecture, clothes, people, objects) are these:

Animals:	<i>Hästen</i>	'the horse'	<i>Kycklingen</i>	'the chicken'
	<i>Galten</i>	'the boar'	<i>Skärsan</i>	'the cricket'
	<i>Grisen</i>	'the pig'	<i>Tuppen</i>	'the rooster'
	<i>Höken</i>	'the hawk'	<i>Ådan</i>	'the eider [female]'
	<i>Hönan</i>	'the hen'		
(Parts of) buildings or architectural details:	<i>Borgen</i>	'the stronghold' (Figure 4)	<i>Oxbåset</i>	'the ox crib'
	<i>Borgslottet</i>	'the stronghold castle'	<i>Predikstolen</i>	'the pulpit'
	<i>Domkyrkan</i>	'the cathedral'	<i>Muren</i>	'the wall'
	<i>Fästningen</i>	'the fortress'	<i>Skafferiet</i>	'the larder; the pantry'

	<i>Kyrkan</i>	‘the church’	<i>Slottet</i>	‘the castle’
	<i>Köket</i>	‘the kitchen’	<i>Svinstian</i>	‘the pigsty’
	<i>Torget</i>	‘the square’		
Clothes:	<i>Byxan</i>	‘the trousers’	<i>Mössan</i>	‘the cap’
	<i>Brudslöjan</i>	‘the bridal veil’	<i>Stöveln</i>	‘the boot’
	<i>Hatten</i>	‘the hat’	<i>Trollhättan</i>	‘the troll hood’
	<i>Lapphuvan</i>	‘the Saami hood’	<i>Tröjärmen</i>	‘the sweater’s sleeve’ (Figure 5)

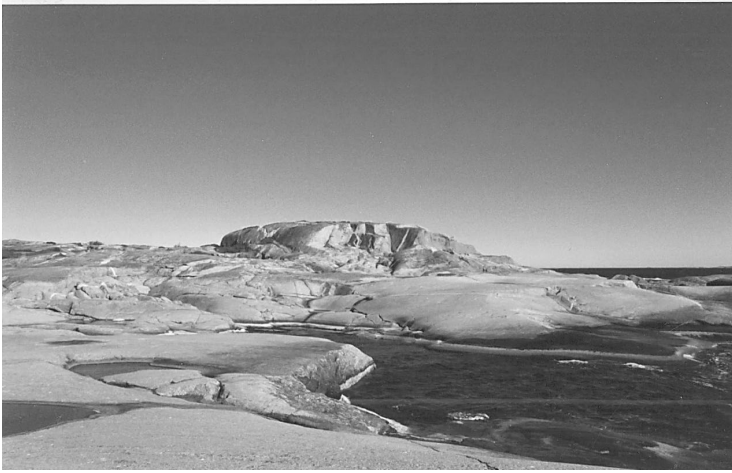


Figure 4. Photo showing the island *Borgen* ‘the stronghold’ with the highest part carrying an individual name *Borgslottet* ‘the stronghold castle’. Photo: Staffan Nyström.

People:	<i>Bagaren</i>	‘the baker’	<i>Mandråparen</i>	‘the man slayer’
	<i>Drängen</i>	‘the farm hand’	<i>Munken</i>	‘the monk’
	<i>Enslingen</i>	‘the hermit’	<i>Skomakaren</i>	‘the cobbler’
	<i>Flickan</i>	‘the girl’	<i>Skomakarpojckarna</i>	‘the cobbler boys’
	<i>Käringen</i>	‘the old woman; the hag’	<i>Skräddaren</i>	‘the tailor’
	<i>Länsman</i>	‘the county sheriff’	<i>Soldaten</i>	‘the soldier’
Objects:	<i>Blompottan</i>	‘the flower-pot’	<i>Bredyxan</i>	‘the broadaxe’
	<i>Brännvinsglaset</i>	‘the snaps glass’	<i>Cigarren</i>	‘the cigar’
	<i>Franska peruken</i>	‘the French wig’	<i>Hölasset</i>	‘the hay-load’
	<i>Kokgrytan</i>	‘the pot; the cauldron’	<i>Kopparnageln</i>	‘the copper nail’
	<i>Kärnan</i>	‘the churn’	<i>Limpan</i>	‘the breadloaf’
	<i>Myrstacken</i>	‘the ant-hill’	<i>Månen</i>	‘the moon’
	<i>Nåldynan</i>	‘the pincushion’	<i>Nålsögat</i>	‘the eye of the needle’
	<i>Sadeln</i>	‘the saddle’	<i>Tratten</i>	‘the funnel’





Figure 5. The island seen in the picture is now called *Tröja*, which means ‘sweater’, but the origin of the name is probably something quite different – an older name *\*Tri-øya* ‘three islands’ has been misinterpreted as *Tröja*. A small and narrow bay on *Tröja* is accordingly called *Tröjärmen* ‘the sweater’s sleeve’. Photo: Staffan Nyström.

### Dithematic metaphorical names

Dithematic place names may be metaphorical too, either by containing a metaphor in the first element as the specific, or – but not very often – in the second element where we normally find the generic. From a distance *Kamelkobben* ‘the camel islet’ is said to look like a camel’s hump. The word *kobbe* is a common Swedish generic meaning ‘small island, islet’. *Torskbaljan* is the name of a group of three sunken rocks close to each other (they also carry individual names). *Torsk* means ‘cod’ and *balja* means ‘tub, bowl’. There are many names in the archipelago indicating good possibilities to catch cod, but only a few show this sense of humour.

Further examples of names with a metaphor replacing the generic as the second element are:

<i>Getkyrkan</i>	‘the goat church’
<i>Grodkyrkan</i>	‘the frog church’
<i>Hundkyrkan</i>	‘the dog church’ (three caves)
<i>Märrgraven</i>	‘the mare grave’
<i>Tullakoppen</i>	‘the Tulla cup’ ( <i>tulla</i> is a verb meaning ‘fall down, slide’)

Examples of names with the metaphor functioning as the specific, first element, are:

<i>Brudstolsberg</i>	‘the bride chair mountain’	<i>Hästskotjärnen</i>	‘the horse shoe lake’
<i>Fingervattnet</i>	‘the finger lake (water)’	<i>Knivskaftskäret</i>	‘the knife handle islet’
<i>Glasögmynnen</i>	‘the goggles (glasses) bog’	<i>Renskinnsmyren</i>	‘the reindeer-skin bog’
<i>Hudskinnsdrolet</i>	‘the dog-skin bog’	<i>Äggsjön</i>	‘the egg lake’

Quite often metaphorical names come in pairs like *Gubben* and *Gumman* ‘the (old) man’ and ‘the (old) woman’, *Skomakaren* ‘the cobbler’ and *Skräddaren* ‘the tailor’, and *Getingen* ‘the wasp’ and *Bromsen* ‘the horse-fly’. These are all names of very small islands or rocks in the sea. In other cases several objects share a common name, a group name – alongside their individual names – such as the islands *Tvillingarna* ‘the twins’, *Kycklingarna* ‘the chickens’ or *Femöringarna* ‘the five öre coins’.



### Some concluding remarks

As is indicated by my chosen examples metaphorical names are much easier to find among the thousands of islands, rocks, bays and promontories in the Stockholm archipelago than in the flat, agricultural landscape of Östergötland, where they are sparse. When metaphorical names are used in that area they usually refer to the shape or the quality of fields such as *Kräkhuvudet* 'the crow head', *Stöveln* 'the boot', *Evigheten* 'the eternity', *Nöden* 'the distress', and *Sorgen* 'the sorrow'. Quantitatively speaking, the mountainous areas in Jämtland are somewhere in between. Quite a few such names do exist there as well, mostly referring to the whole or parts of lakes, bogs and mountains.

Metaphors based on objects of all sorts are the most common type in all three areas, like *Kitteln* 'the kettle' and *Näldynan* 'the pincushion'. This semantic group is – in numbers – followed by the domestic animals: horses, goats, pigs, cats and dogs, a few oxen, chickens and hens turn up in many metaphors, but no cows at all. Of course we do see cows in a lot of other place names but not in the metaphorical names I have found so far. In Jämtland, in the north, we find a few names showing reindeer – not surprising – and in the archipelago we see some names based on fish-metaphors. But apart from that the three name stocks, as far as I can tell, are quite similar. Wild animals like bears, foxes, wolves, elks, badgers and snakes are captured in many ordinary names but almost never in the metaphorical or metonymical names that I have studied.

One final difference between the areas I wish to mention, however, is the fact that metaphorical names based on people are very rare in the northern area. *Tvillingarna* and *Bälingarna*, both meaning 'the twins', are the only ones I have found. In the Stockholm archipelago they are more common, something like 30 in my material: we meet policemen, monks, tailors, cobblers, hermits, old men and women, bakers, soldiers and man slayers.

What we need in order to explain that difference, as well as many other things, is a more thorough study based on a more extensive material. As I pointed out in the beginning of this article, what I have done so far is only a small pilot study.

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