

Ingevald Panka and Kalle Braxen Bynames in Medieval Arboga and Modern Sigtuna

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the bynames represented in the medieval town court record book of Arboga and in an oral corpus from 20th-century Sigtuna. I analyse the data mostly from a name-semantic point of view and categorise them into the following groups: names which originate in a person's 'descent and kinship', 'origin and place of residence', 'occupation and social status', 'external characteristics', 'internal characteristics', 'clothing and equipment', or 'habits and events'. I have also added a morphological group 'names which are a play on or formed from a family name'. The study shows that there are examples of bynames from both periods in all of these categories except the last one, which is found exclusively in the modern corpus.

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Introduction

Over the last ten years, I have devoted much of my time to bynames from different points of view. My interest has mostly been in the bynames of medieval Arboga, collected from contemporary court records. In recent times, I have also studied bynames from Sigtuna in the 20th century. In this study, I combine the two corpuses and will examine the way people designate each other.

The data originate from two small Swedish towns with quite a similar geographical and economic background, situated by or close to Lake Mälaren to the north or west of Stockholm. Both towns were of great political importance in the Middle Ages. During the time when bynames were frequently used, crafts and trade formed the economic base for life there.

My Arboga corpus is collected from court records, which mostly consist of particulars of economic transactions, but also the names of individuals who held office or enjoyed the franchise. I have restricted my material to the years 1450-1500. The 20th-century corpus contains about a hundred bynames used by my father Sigurd Christensén, born in 1927 and living in Sigtuna since he was 3 years of age. Many of the names were used from the beginning of the 1930s onwards. For ethical reasons, I do not mention the name bearers' official names.

There are differences between the two corpuses, and on the whole these are reflected in the names they contain. The medieval source consists of court records, it is a written one, and it is 500 years older than the modern data. Because of the time factor, the interpretation of the semantics of the names could be uncertain and perhaps even deceptive. The modern

source, on the other hand, is oral and young. This could make the name-semantic interpretation easier, as users may still be alive. Another difference is the size of the corpuses, the medieval one containing about 400 names, while the modern one comprising slightly more than 100. However, even with these problems, I believe that a comparison is of interest.

Examples of previous research on bynames during medieval times are Elof Hellquist's article 'Fornsvenska tillnamn' (1912) and Ivar Modéer's survey of bynames in *Svenska personnamn* (1989). Eva Brylla has studied bynames in several articles, including 'Anna Mædh inga hænder, Karl Dængenæf and Ingridh Tiuvafinger' (1999). For further examples, see Sundström (2006: 12-14). Modern bynames have recently been studied by Katharina Leibring in her article 'Karl mä kappa, Börje lata och Kockla: Binamn i ett värmländskt brukssamhälle' (2004). Other works relating in some way to urban bynames are Ruben G:son Berg's (1936) study 'Några stockholmska vedernamn på 1840- och 50-talet' and A.T. Ålander's (1944) article 'Personbeteckningar i en svensk småstad omkring sekelskiftet'. J.A. Lundell's articles (1932-1944a, 1932-1944b) deal with names in the Swedish provinces of Möre and Öland and are worth noting as they contain name-semantic explanations, even if his study is mostly rural. One chapter in Ivar Modéer's handbook *Svenska personnamn* (1989) also concerns modern bynames.

I do not give an account of all my data, neither the medieval nor the modern material, though the complete corpuses do of course form the basis for my conclusions. I have analysed the data primarily from a name-semantic point of view and have categorised them as follows.

Classification

In my study I have categorised bynames in terms of their semantics, and have therefore examined the reasons the names were given. I have categorised the data into the following groups: 'descent and kinship', 'origin and place of residence', 'occupation and social status', 'external characteristics', 'internal characteristics', 'clothing and equipment', and 'habits' and 'events' (Andersson 2003: 601-603). For practical reasons I will combine the two final groups, as it is difficult to decide what occurred only on rare occasions and what happened frequently. Slightly different categories have been used for the same purpose by other scholars (Brylla 1999: 15-16, Kousgård Sørensen 1975: 123). In my investigation, I have added another, morphological category, 'names which are a play on or formed from a family name' (see Leibring 2004: 77). The basic analysis used in categorising the material has been described previously (Sundström 2006, 2008b and 2012). In this study I will present and compare the different corpuses. What has happened in 500 years? What similarities and differences can be discovered? Did women also have bynames, or were they reserved for men?

Names Referring to Descent and Kinship

There are quite a number of bynames referring to a person's descent or kinship. In Sigtuna, we find several women who were given bynames for that reason: *Grevinnorna Plåt och Plunta*, their name meaning 'the countesses tinplate and pocket flask' (Sundström 2012: 274), were two ladies who were fastidious about their appearance, and who were also friends and the daughters of a tinsmith and a brewer, respectively. *Kolas Märta* 'Märta the wife of Kolas' (Sundström 2012: 274) was married to a man called *Kolas*, while *Bad-Olle* 'Bath-Olle' (Sundström 2012: 274) shows that Olle was the son of a female bath attendant.

In Arboga, the same group is frequently used. Here we find, for example, compounds ending in *-magher* 'son-in-law', e.g. *Svennungsmagher* (Sundström 2008b: 434), a byname showing kinship with a person called Svennung. In this group there are also so-called 'wives' names', connecting women to their husband by their husband's first name or byname in the genitive. Examples are *Bakares* (Sundström 2008b: 434) and *Julahustru* (Sundström 2006: 40, 105), which link the women concerned to men called *Bakare* 'baker' and *Jul* 'Christmas'. Men, too, could be given similar designations, as in the case of *Vendelabonde* (Sundström 2006: 39), where *-bonde* 'farmer' is used in the sense of spouse and the byname shows that the person called by it is married to a woman called Vendela.

Names Referring to Origin and Place of Residence

Bynames emanating from a person's place of geographical origin or residence are not unusual in the Sigtuna corpus. Here, names like *Humparn* 'man living at the farm Humparboda' (Sundström 2012: 275) and *Glädjen* 'the pleasure' (Sundström 2012: 275) can be found. The first-mentioned bearer lived at the farm Humparboda and the latter at a cottage called Glädjen, both situated a few kilometres north of Sigtuna. A woman called *Kullan*, meaning 'Dalecarlian woman' (Sundström 2012: 275), was born in the province of Dalarna.

In Arboga this group is quite common. It includes unchanged place names, which are frequently used as bynames, both names of places close by, such as *Djupmyra* and *Helvetet* (Sundström 2008b: 434) and names of distant places, such as *Lunger* (a village in the parish of Götlunda) (Sundström 2008b: 435). Other bynames showing people's places of origin and residence are *Rekbo* 'person from the province of Rekarne' (Sundström 2008b: 435) and *Skæriakarl* 'man from the archipelago' (Sundström 2008b: 434). *Finne* 'man from Finland' (cf. Hellquist 1912: 106, Sundström 2008b: 435; for a partly different interpretation, cf. DGP 2: 271 concerning ODa. *Finne*; also cf. Lind 1920-21: 80 concerning OWS scand. *Finni*) and the feminine equivalent *Finska* were common bynames in Arboga.

Names Referring to Occupation and Social Status

Names referring to a person's occupation or social status represent one of the most common categories in Sigtuna. *Snickar-Olle*'s 'carpenter-Olle's' occupation as a carpenter is obvious, as is the fact that *Möbel-Anders* 'furniture-Anders' was the owner of the furniture store. *Kalle Braxen*, where *braxen* means 'bream', was a fisherman and was also called simply *Braxen* (Sundström 2012: 275). The byname of *Buss-Jerker* 'Bus-Jerker' tells us his occupation is

that of a bus driver. Only one woman is represented in this group, *Krog-Alma* ‘restaurant-Alma’ (Sundström 2012: 276); Alma did the waiting in the only restaurant in the town.

Many bynames in Arboga derived from people’s occupations, and to some extent also from their social status. We find *Jakob Tunnobindare* ‘cooper’ (Sundström 2006: 42), who obviously made barrels, *Jönis Skræddare* ‘tailor’ (see Sundström 2008b: 435; cf. Hellquist 1912: 105, Brieskorn 1912: 149 ff.), and *Sone Nøtakarl* (cf. Hellquist 1912: 105), who took care of the cattle of the town. The byname of *Birger Almosogubbe* ‘old man who lives on alms’ clearly tells us about his social status (Sundström 2008b: 436). The woman who was called *Sapokonan* ‘the soap woman’ (Sundström 2004: 129) may have fabricated and sold soap (or been married to a man with that profession), and was at least well known, as there was clearly no need for a first name. There are also other bynames belonging to this group which are not occupational designations, for example *Gester* ‘stranger; stranger staying in the town; guest’ (cf. DGP 2: 332 concerning ODa. *Gest*, with a partly different interpretation; also cf. Lind 1920-1921: 108 concerning OWScand. *Gestr*, again with a slightly different interpretation).

Names Referring to External Characteristics

A focus on external characteristics is very common in designations for people. In Sigtuna we find *Bleka Ville* ‘pale Ville’ (Sundström 2012: 276), who was pale-skinned or fair-haired; *Hak-Johan* ‘chin-Johan’ (Sundström 2012: 276), who probably had a conspicuous chin; and *Storis* ‘big’ (Sundström 2012: 276), who was short in stature. The man called *Klumpfot* ‘club foot’ had such a foot, and *Rödtopp* ‘redhead’ was red-haired.

In Arboga, bynames referring to a person’s external characteristics were frequently used. Examples are *Træfoter* ‘wooden foot’, the bearer of which probably had such a foot (cf. Lind 1920-1921: 386 concerning OWScand. *Tréfótr*); and a person called *Tumalös*, his name meaning ‘thumbless’, who was missing one or both thumbs (Sundström 2008b: 436). *Ragvald Mædh ena handene* meant ‘Ragvald with one hand’ (Sundström 2008b: 436), and *Bleka Luci* ‘pale Luci’ was probably pale in hair colour and complexion (cf. DGP 2: 86-87 concerning ODa. *Blek* and Lind 1920-21: 29 concerning OWScand. *Bleiki*; also Hellquist 1912: 102, Sahlgren 1944: 211, Peterson 1996: 24 and Sundström 2004: 129). The person designated *Mædh rødha hareth*, on the other hand, was endowed with red hair. *Krokfoter* had a crooked or bent foot (see Sundström 2008b: 436; cf. Jónsson 1907: 220 concerning OWScand. *Krókfótr*; for an alternative interpretation of that name, cf. Lind 1920-1921: 220 and 1920: 305-306). A common way of naming people was to refer to their size. Several people in Arboga were designated in that way, for example with a byname *Langher* ‘tall’, though it is not certain that the person was tall; the name could just as well have been used ironically to refer to someone of short stature (cf. the modern *Storis* ‘big’ above).

Names Referring to Internal Characteristics

Bynames stemming from a person's internal characteristics are not frequently used in Sigtuna. There are only a few examples: *Vilden* 'the wild one' (Sundström 2012: 276) was an apt description of the man in question; *Buse* (Sundström 2012: 276) 'hooligan', on the other hand, was not as unpleasant as his name implies.

In Arboga, however, names in this category are not uncommon. References to a person's age are commonly used in designating people, examples being: *Gamle* 'old' and *Unger/Unge* 'young', which are both representatives of this name-semantic group (cf. DGP 2: 321-323 concerning ODa. *Gamal*; Lind 1920-21: 98-101 concerning OWScand. *Gamli*; Hellquist 1912: 102, Peterson 1996: 24 and cf. DGP 2: 1159-1160 concerning ODa. *Ung, Unger*; Lind 1920-21: 391-393 concerning OWScand. *Ungr/Ungi*; Hellquist 1912: 103). The bynames *Urvædher* 'snowstorm' and *Storm* 'storm' may have their origins in a comparison between weather and a person's temper (cf. concerning *Urvædher* Hellquist 1912: 98; see Sundström 2008b: 437 and cf. DGP 2: 1077-1078 concerning ODa. *Storm*; Lind 1920-21: 363 concerning OWScand. *Stormr*; Hellquist 1912: 98; see Sundström 2008b: 437).

Names Referring to Clothes and Equipment

References to the way people dress or their habit of using certain equipment rarely occur in my corpus from Sigtuna. As I see it, there is only one person who was given his byname for either of these reasons: *91:an*, meaning 'number 91' (Sundström 2012: 276), may have taken his byname from a popular Swedish comic-strip character, who is described as a good-natured national serviceman (NEn 14: 185); the person so designated may have been similar in character, and was also well known for his habit of not changing out of his military uniform before starting work mending bicycles while on leave from his military service.

The material from Arboga shows a slightly different picture, as naming people with reference to their clothes and other equipment is not uncommon. Here are a few examples: two men are designated *Mædh bla kapona* 'with the blue gown or coat' (cf. Brylla 1999: 13), and probably they wore such a coat. *Olaf Ringapunger* 'pouch of rings or made of rings?' could have worn such a pouch (Sundström 2008b: 437), and *Erik Spænnklo*, the byname meaning 'claw or hook that fastens something together?', probably kept his clothes closed by means of a special hook (Sundström 2008b: 437).

Names Referring to Habits and Events

As I have already mentioned, it is difficult to determine whether something occurred regularly or whether it was an occasional action, and I have therefore chosen to combine the categories 'habits' and 'events'.

In my material from Sigtuna this group is the largest. A man called *Kanada-Gösta* 'Canada-Gösta' (Sundström 2012: 277) had worked in Canada in his youth, and *Snus-Ejnar* 'snuff-Ejnar' had the habit of using oral snuff (Sundström 2012: 277). *Bandy-Johan* (Sundström 2012: 277) 'bandy-Johan' was well known as a good bandy player, and that the female teacher *Smällan* 'the smacker' (Sundström 2012: 277) sometimes used to give her

pupils a slap was common knowledge. The man by the name of *Ständig semestern* ‘constant holiday’ (Sundström 2012: 277) was often out of work and therefore had a lot of free time, which was explained (by him) as a result of his being on holiday.

Using a person’s habits or a special event as a basis for a byname is not uncommon in Arboga. The men called *Skökendiævul*, the byname being a curse meaning ‘prostitute-devil’ (Sundström 2006: 62), and *Peter I bætta matto* ‘to the best degree’ (cf. Brylla 1999: 18, Modéer 1989: 106 and Sundström 2008b: 437) probably used these expressions regularly. A woman with the byname *Fæhuset* ‘cow-house’ (Sundström 2004: 129 and 2008b: 438) possibly got her name from her habit of living in such a building. In Arboga, the reasons for the name-semantic interpretation are sometimes uncertain, though there are a few examples where we can be fairly sure why a particular name was chosen. The reason *Ingevald* with the byname *Smidh* ‘smith’ was called *Ingevald Panka* is well known. He was accused of stealing small bream, the name *Panka* meaning ‘small bream or similar fish’ (see Alvered 1996: 28, Sundström 2008a: 176-179 and 2008b: 439; cf. DGP 2: 796 concerning ODa. *Panke*, with an alternative origin; and cf. Hellquist 1912: 97). How the man called *Stuten* ‘young ox or bull’ came by his name is not known (cf. DGP 2: 1087-1088 concerning ODa. *Stut*; Lind 1920-1921: 366 concerning OWScand. *Stútr*; Hellquist 1912: 97), but it is probably connected with a special occasion.

Names which are a Play on or Formed from a Family Name

In my analysis I have also used another possibility when categorising bynames, and that is a morphological category: names which are a play on or formed from a family name (see Leibring 2004: 77). The bynames *Ludde*, *Linkan* and *Ljunken* are formed from the family names *Lundin*, *Lindkvist* and *Ljunggren*, respectively (Sundström 2012: 277). This group is only found in the Sigtuna material and is one of the largest categories in that corpus.

Uninterpreted Names

I have been forced to leave some names uninterpreted. Not because they are semantically vague, even if this is sometimes the case, especially in the Arboga material, but because the name-semantic basis is unknown. Concerning the data from Sigtuna, I have usually tried to avoid speculation.

Discussion

One of the interesting observations made in this study is that bynames referring to a person’s occupation or social status are one of the most popular categories in both medieval and modern times. Bynames emanating from habits and events also form a large group in Sigtuna, but in Arboga they are used less often.

In Arboga bynames originating in a person’s external characteristics are fairly common, whereas this way of designating people is not used as often in Sigtuna. The categories ‘descent and kinship’ and ‘origin and place of residence’ occur frequently in Arboga, but less often in Sigtuna. Showing a family relationship to a man by constructing a

‘wife’s name’, which connects a woman to her husband by his first name or byname in the genitive, for example *Bakares*, is common in Arboga. Such a name is also found in Sigtuna: *Kolas Märta*, Märta being married to a man called *Kolas*. Names ending in *-magher* ‘son-in-law’ are not uncommon in Arboga, but are non-existent in Sigtuna. Bynames stemming from a person’s place of geographical origin and residence are not unknown in the modern corpus and are commonly used in the medieval one. During both periods, it is common to use bynames based on the name of a farm or village. Compounds with *-bo* and *-karl* are used in the medieval material, but not in the modern corpus.

Compared with the more popular categories, bynames belonging to the groups ‘internal characteristics’ and ‘clothing and equipment’ are not used very often. One way of designating people is only found in Sigtuna: names which are a play on or formed from a family name, and strictly speaking, this is not a name-semantic, but a morphological way of analysing names. Nevertheless, it is useful when discussing bynames. This category is quite a popular one in Sigtuna, but is not represented in Arboga.

The popularity of certain categories is probably due to the fact that a person’s occupation, for example, clearly distinguishes him or her and is therefore useful in designating people (Sundström 2012: 279). In the same way, people’s external characteristics are easily observed and clearly distinguish one individual from another, and therefore frequently give rise to bynames (Sundström 2012: 279).

At the beginning of this article, I asked the question whether anything has happened in the space of 500 years. The answer is, not much. The study shows that all name-semantic categories are used in both periods. But there are small differences as well as similarities. A person’s occupation or social status frequently serves as a basis for a byname in both periods. External characteristics are also often used, though they figure more prominently in Arboga. Using a person’s habits or memorable events as a basis for a byname is more common in Sigtuna than in Arboga. The morphological category of names which are a play on or formed from a family name is only found in Sigtuna. One reason for this could be that there are few family names in Arboga. Inherited bynames, bynames used in two succeeding generations or by two siblings (Ryman 2002: 25), are found in Arboga, though it is difficult to prove that they stem from a play on words. In the court records from Arboga, the names mentioned are the official ones, that being the nature of the source. Perhaps it is possible to regard the above-mentioned *Panka* (see Names Referring to Habits and Events) as unofficial, and individuals who have more than one byname (such as *Andres Finne Mædh bla kapon* ‘Anders the Finn with the blue coat’, and *Hans Krokfoter* ‘crooked foot’, who is also called *Klysnare*, meaning ‘hermit’) may regard one of them as the official one.

The inhabitants of Arboga surely wanted to joke with their neighbours or to play on their names, but it is difficult to prove. The question of official names is also crucial; bynames in Sigtuna are never official, being used in oral contexts to identify a person. In Arboga, the bynames observed are official, as they appear in court records.

One interesting question is: did women have bynames? There are few women with bynames in my data (10% of the entire corpus in Arboga, 9% in Sigtuna). To receive such a name, you have to be part of public life; if that is not the case, you will be less often spoken of and will probably not need a byname (see Leibring 2004: 78-79, Sundström 2012: 278). Women given a byname are rare in Sigtuna, but they are found in all categories except names

referring to clothes and equipment, names referring to internal characteristics and names which are a play on or formed from a family name. In Arboga, women's names occur in all categories in which bynames are found.

Another question is whether there are names that are used in both medieval and modern times. As may be expected, certain names are found in both periods, for example *Laures Snidhkare* has a modern counterpart in *Snickar-Olle* (*snidhkare* meaning 'carpenter'; see Names Referring to Occupation and Social Status); *Mædh rødha hareth* 'with the red hair', has his equivalent in the modern *Rödtopp* 'redhead', both names referring to the bearer's red hair; and *Bleka Luci* corresponds to *Bleka Ville*, both of them probably pale-skinned and fair-haired, *bleka* meaning 'pale' (see Names Referring to External Characteristics).

Conclusion

The result of my investigation is that the same name-semantic categories are used in designating people in Arboga and Sigtuna, the only exception being the morphological category of names that are a play on or formed from a family name, which is new in Sigtuna. In addition, some categories are preferred to others. Often these popular groups consist of names based on easily observed and clearly distinguishing characteristics. The way people thought about these matters remained similar in many ways down the centuries; even if their circumstances were different, when it came to naming people they had similar ideas.

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