

## ***Panka, Sokkofoter, Hynda and Kunta. Bynames in medieval Arboga with legal consequences***

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### **Abstract**

The Swedish town Arboga with its town court record book is a valuable source for the onomastic researcher. During 1450-1500 it contains slightly more than 400 bynames, some of them with a to us pejorative name-semantic content for example *Horkarl* 'whoremonger', *Drukkin* 'drunk' and *Gatunasker* 'street-loafer'. How were these bynames interpreted by those using them? Was the content of these names reason enough to go to court in order to restore the person's reputation or was there another category that occurred in court? In my paper I will examine and discuss the names that had legal consequences in Arboga 1450-1500.

The men called by the apparently innocent looking bynames *Sokkofot* 'foot with a sock' and *Panka* 'small bream or similar fish' both appeared in court, though as defendant, they were by their names accused of stealing and had to prove being innocent in court.

The men called *Kwnta* 'vagina' and *Hynda* 'bitch' were both offended by the same man and he had to stand to trial.

What was actually offensive? Was it the content in the insulting bynames or the deed of which the bearer was accused? Accusations concerning a man's honour were severe and had to be contradicted, to save one's honour was of extreme importance in an oral society. If your honour was attacked you had to meet the accusation, if not, the accusation could seem true.

It was not the bynames implying drunkenness, being a street-loafer, whoremonger or a man whose wife had been unfaithful which were dishonourable, as the names discussed in the beginning, but instead accusations of unmanliness and theft, accusations which threaten one person's honour. Accusations of this kind had to be refuted, if not they could cause severe problems to the bearer of the name.

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A fascinating source for the researcher interested in medieval life from different aspects has been preserved from several Swedish towns. The source is the town court record book which includes legal records and particulars of economic transactions such as transfers of real estate, donations and inheritances. There are also registers of people who held offices or enjoyed franchise. In most cases, the names of those involved are included which make those records a most valuable source of information for an onomastic researcher. My research deals with medieval bynames which I have studied in the town court record book of Arboga, a town situated some 100 kilometers west of Stockholm in Sweden, nowadays a relatively small town, but in the Middle Ages a town of importance, both in economical and political matters.

Between 1450-1500 the town court record book contains slightly more than 400 bynames, some of them with, to us, pejorative namesemantic contents, for example *Horkarl* 'whoremonger', *Drukkin* 'drunk', *Kukuvalder* 'cuckold, a man whose wife has been unfaithful' and *Gatunasker* 'street-loafer', 'person who walks the streets aimlessly, sponging on people', or 'name of a person who lays pavement or is involved in similar work' (Ljunggren, 1943, 6). For a long time, onomasticians have discussed how these names were interpreted by those using them and by the bearer of the name. Were the contents of these names reason enough to go to court in order to restore one's reputation or is there another

category that occurs in court? In my paper I will examine and discuss the names with legal consequences in Arboga between 1450-1500.<sup>1</sup>

In May 1460 Martin Olafsson in Vretberga, a village not far from Arboga, is accused of stealing rough home spun in the raid into the south of Sweden nearly ten years ago. Here the person called Mattis in Bo confesses that he earlier has called Martin *Sokkofoter* ‘foot of a sock’ (ATb 1, 121). At this occasion, the person who has been called by a byname was held responsible in court and together with five men he had to take an oath to clear himself of suspicion regarding the accusation that is implicit in the byname (ATb 1, 130). Martin is seven years later once again called *Marten Sokkofot* (ATb 1, 260). Also this time, it is the same person Mattis in Bo who is using the byname. Which meaning is to be found in the name? Maybe it is connected to OSw. *sokker* ‘sock’ (Sdw 2, 452) and could refer to someone who is creeping, sneaking in his stocking feet in dishonest actions. You could also compare to OWScand. *Sokkr* which has been connected to the verb *sokka* ‘sneak’, ‘go in one’s stocking feet’ (Lind, 1920-21, 347) and to the name \**Sokki* ‘the sneaking (one)’, ‘the one with a shuffling gait’, and *Sokkr* from OWScand. *sokkr* ‘sock’ (Janzén, 1947, 51). The byname surely contains qualities fitting a thief!

In the same year, a few months later, in September 1460, Olof Mikelsson is accused of designating Ingevald Smid *Ingeual Panka* (ATb 1, 129). *Panka* means ‘small bream or similar fish’ (Sdw. suppl., 606; Alvered, 1996, 28). A couple of days later, the case has taken a new turn: Ingevald has to swear to clear himself and his household of suspicion and from the accusation of stealing fish beside those he had paid for (ATb 1, 131). Maybe using the word *panka* in the abusing byname could be associated with the later well-known idea of the stupidity of fish. For example cod and flatfish are said to have this quality (Hjelmqvist, 1900, 183). Some other expression referring to theft could also be implied in the byname. Maybe it was the message of both stupidity and the specific fish which Ingevald was accused of having dishonestly laid hands upon which settled the use of this specific byname. But probably the byname is mainly alluding to the prior event where *pankor* ‘small breams or similar fish’ were involved.

In December 1488, Jønis Laureson was accused of calling Knut Gulsmidh *Knwt Kwnta* (ATb 2, 342), the byname meaning ‘vagina’ (Sdw suppl., 429). There are no legal consequences, but one can imagine that Knut was severely abused by this insult. Using such a word was an act of doubting a man’s manliness (Svahn, 1999, 80). Why did not the legal process end in a verdict? I will return to this question later. Choosing the word *kunta* for this insult was maybe due to the alliteration in the man’s first name Knut and *kunta*.

Two years later, in August 1490, the same Jønis Laureson is once again accused of abusing a citizen in Arboga. Two witnesses claim that they heard Jønis call Per Olsson *vpa bron Pedher Hynda oc sidhan andra oqwædhins ordh* (ATb 2, 374) ‘Pedher Hynda and other words of abuse’. The word *hynda* has not only the meaning ‘bitch, female dog’ but was also used as an insulting word of abuse to or of a woman, earlier also about men’ (SAOB 12, 1644). For a man, it is extremely insulting to be designated by a word generally used about a female animal (Svahn 1999, 43), but also to be equaled with an animal was degrading. Animals were considered part of nature which man was not able to control (Ney, 1998, 105). This time Jønis Laureson is actually condemned for *wlofflight ordh* ‘prohibited word’ (ATb 2, 388) and was fined 12 mark. Abusing was punishable during the Middle Ages according to king Magnus Ericsson’s town law code. The fine was precisely 12 mark, to be divided between the prosecutor (injured party), the king and the town (Schlyter, 1865, 283 f.).

What was actually offensive? Was it the content in the insulting bynames or the deed of which the bearer was accused? Was it insulting in general to be called *Panka* ‘small bream or similar fish’

<sup>1</sup> I have in another context touched upon parts of this subject, see Sundström 2006.

or *Sokkofoter* ‘foot of a sock’? In my material it was obviously dishonouring to use bynames including sexual allusions such as *Kunta*, *Hynda*. In these cases the penalty, if the person was sentenced, was a fine. In other cases such as *Panka*, *Sokkofoter*, it is not the semantic meaning and the name in such which causes legal proceedings but the namesemantic reason of the byname: the designated person has to prove innocent. From this you can deduce that if you were named with a byname which contained an accusation of theft, you had to prove that you were innocent by presenting ten men who could guarantee your innocence, though they only testified to the reputation of the accused, they had no knowledge of the special matter (Andersson, 1999, 55). To be accused of stealing did question a man’s honour and to be accused of unmanliness was a heavy blow to a man’s reputation. All bynames mentioned above designated men in the upper classes, they were included in the city council or soon-to-be (Ingevald Smidh and Peter Olafsson) or they had another commission of trust in Arboga (Martin Olafsson in Vretberga and Knut Gulsmidh). Accusations and questioning of their honour would have been severe if not contradicted and that was probably one reason of why they had to go to court to settle the question. These people from the upper classes had means to find the men who could guarantee their innocence which probably was more difficult for inhabitants from the lower classes of society.

To guard one’s honour was of extreme importance in an oral society. Man’s honour was dependent on oral knowledge and the spoken word was used both when confirming agreements and to express doubts concerning the person’s honour. The spoken word was very much an instrument for everybody to use, to get or exercise power (Andersson, 1999, 56). But accusations concerning for example dishonesty was not a personal question restricted to the accused person. If a man was abused, it affected his whole household (Andersson, 1999, 61; this is the case with the *Panka* lawsuit mentioned above, where Ingevald has to take an oath for both himself and his household). To be part of a larger group, such as a household or a craft, was important, if not you were considered an outcast rejected from society (Lindström, 1994, 550). If your honour was questioned you had to meet the accusation, if not the accusation could seem true (Andersson, 1999, 62 f.). But this kind of legal proceedings were not only important to maintain personal honour. One of the most important functions of the court was to solve conflicts among the citizens for example concerning honour and glory. By this procedure, it was possible to maintain personal honour without using violence, and the guilty person was admitted once again in the community of the town (Lindström, 1994, 533).

Eva Österberg (1987) has examined crime and punishment in Arboga during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and she found that lawsuits concerning slander and abusing were 4 % of all cases. In fact, those are a marginal phenomenon compared to those dealing with maltreatment, severe blows to the body etc. which is 68 % (Österberg, 1987, 486 f.). Why then were minor crimes such as bodily harm and insults put to trial at all? As I have mentioned, it was in everybody’s interest that the conflict was not made worse and in court the quarrel was put to an end: both the plaintiff and the defendant had in this way maintained their honour (Österberg, 1987, 494). When someone’s honour is questioned, it is often due to accusations of theft. You had to meet this kind of accusation in court, if not you could have a reputation of being without honour (Österberg, 1987, 498). The above mentioned cases concerning *Panka* and *Sokkofoter* are obvious examples. In cases of slander and defamation the sentence is not presented or fails to appear (Österberg, 1987, 500). In that case the absence of the sentence concerning *Kunta* is explained. Here the court takes the opportunity of solving the conflict alone.

Several researchers have examined the use of abusing in different periods. I have to point out that these studies do not include abuse which is reflected as bynames, but nevertheless it could be of interest to compare this material with the material of Arboga to examine in which semantic field the insults were found. Gudrun Andersson (1999) has studied the use of

invectives during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in court records from the districts of Nora and Asker in Västmanland and Närke. She has found that *tjuv* ‘thief’ is the most common word of abuse of men, but male sexuality is also attacked, for example by the word *hynda* ‘bitch’, which is also used in Arboga. Women are also in most cases assaulted by *tjuv* ‘thief’ but *hora* ‘whore’ is also commonly used. Andersson shows that in this way people deprecate unacceptable behaviour. Invectives against women were to a great extent linked to her sexual behavior, against men however, invectives had to do with his public activities (Andersson, 1999, 57-60). Unfortunately there is no material concerning words of abuse against women as reflected in the bynames in my material. I believe it must have existed but those female namebearers maybe did not have the opportunity or interest to go to court and consequently there is no evidence of such names. The words of abuse, which can be found in those bynames that go to court, are however in the same categories as those during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in the districts of Nora and Asker: they concern accusations of theft and male sexuality.

Erik Falk (2006) has examined verbal insults in 17<sup>th</sup> century academic Uppsala. In his study, he shows that the most common invective had to do with unmanliness and cowardice: *hundsvott* ‘genitals of a bitch’. You find *fitta* ‘female genitals’ (a.a. p. 23) in the same semantic field which can be compared with *Kunta* in my Arboga-material. Among the invectives concerning lechery and lewdness, you find *Hynda* (a a. p. 20), which therefore is represented both in Arboga and Uppsala. The word *panka* is not found in his material, but *fisk* ‘fish’ is and at that opportunity designating a stupid person (a.a. p. 26).

A comparison between the abuse which have been associated with bynames during the Middle Ages in Arboga and abuse in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century in other surroundings shows that some insults neither are time-bound or conditioned to a particular surrounding. For example the word *hynda* was used both in medieval Arboga and in 17<sup>th</sup> century academic Uppsala. Attacking manliness and accusations of theft has been an effective instrument in insults.

Among the bynames in the town court record book that have legal consequences only the byname *Panka* which, as recorded in SMPs, is distributed outside Arboga and then as *Panke*. The bynames *Hynda*, *Kunta* and *Sokkofoter* are all designating one person alone and they occur, with the exception of *Sokkofoter* as mentioned before, at only one occasion.

The low number of lawsuits regarding abusive names, perhaps indicate an entirely different idea of what was abusing (Lidén, 1910, 17) but also that the cause of the namegiving is to be found long ago and therefore the name is not any longer expressing the original signals. In my opinion however, the crucial question is that the person’s honour was threatened, either by a threat against the person’s manliness, as in the names *Kunta* and *Hynda*, or by an accusation of theft as presented in *Panka* and *Sokkofoter*. It was not dishonourable to have a byname that indicates that you have been drunk or a street-loafer, a whoremonger or a man whose wife had been unfaithful, which is expressed in the bynames mentioned in the beginning of my paper. It was not the names with its negative connotations which stained the namebearer, but instead accusations of unmanliness and theft, accusations that threaten the person’s honour. If not refuted, they could cause severe problem to the bearer. But it was also of mayor interest to solve the conflict that had developed and in that way restore order. It is fascinating that onomastic studies can tell us not only of the formal structure and semantic contents of names, but also give information concerning the values of the period in question.

## Abbreviations

OSw. = old Swedish

OWScand. = old West Scandinavian

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