

Name Change as a Consequence of Monastic Ownership

Jan Agertz
Sweden

Abstract

The normal assumption is that old Swedish habitation names are original, and the first recorded for a farm or hamlet. There are however other examples – even medieval. The most common reason for a name change was when a farm or hamlet was changed into a mansion, and its original name was considered to be too ignoble. In those cases, one could create a completely new name (e.g., *Cathrineholm* for *Horsarp*) but equally common was to simply add the word *säteri* ‘mansion’ to an existing name (e.g., *Hulta säteri* for *Hulta*).

But there is another reason for name change that I want to present in my paper. From the mid 12th century, Christianity began to spread and monasteries were established in southern Sweden. Monasteries gradually became owners of large numbers of farms, some of which got new names beginning in *Munk-* ‘monk’ or *Kloster-* ‘monastery’. For most of these, we cannot trace the older and original names, but there are some interesting examples of the opposite, based on careful examination of medieval documents. This is what my paper will present.

Toponyms are coined, live and die, and innumerable numbers can never be retrieved. A general assumption among Swedish onomasticians is however that a medieval or prehistoric habitation name is the original one, either transferred from an existing field name or being coined soon after a habitation was established. There are however examples of name change – even medieval ones.

Name Change

One reason for name change is purely linguistic – as words due to transformation through centuries eventually could become homonyms or homographs, of which some could have rather negative connotations. In such cases a completely new name could be created – e.g., *Cathrineholm* for *Horsarp* – as the first element, the four initial letters *hors* ‘horse’, could be interpreted as a homograph with *hor* ‘adultery’ and a genitive inflexion *s*.

Another reason for name change is however more common – i.e., when a habitation gets a higher status, for example as a mansion. One common way to change an original name in that respect is to add the word *säteri* ‘mansion’ to the original name – *Hulta säteri* is an example of this type of fairly moderate change; another way is to add a new “higher status” generic like *-holm*, *-berg*, *-lund*, as in *Bjådesjöholm*, *Hylteberg* or *Möbylund*.

Christianity

From the mid 12th century, Christianity was gradually introduced in the region and monasteries were established. These monasteries soon became owners of large numbers of farms, of which some were referred to by names in *Munk-* ‘monk’ or *Kloster-* ‘monastery’. Some of these habitations were new ones, established by monasteries and parish churches, and thus the names are their original ones.

There are however some interesting examples of the opposite, disclosed through examination of medieval documents. These are shown through examples from Jönköping County in southern Sweden.

The revelation of these medieval examples is a result of my project to create a data base of those medieval documents that concern Jönköping County. This will soon be accessible on the Internet at Jönköping County Museum's website.

Munkebo

The earliest recorded example of a name change in my material is retrieved from an undated attestation (SRAp odat. 15) – probably from the 1330s. The document contains a confirmation from the 1260s by King Valdemar and Birger jarl of a donation deed to Alvastra monastery of a farm called *Gudstenstorp* issued by the vicar Tingulf and his brother Nils.

On the back side of the vidimation is written “guthstenstorp dictum munkebo in parrochia lekerÿth”, and by this note the identification and localisation of the habitation becomes certain – it is Munkebo in Lekeryd parish, some 20 km east of Jönköping City.



Munkagård

Another example concerns a farm now called *Kristineberg* in Bredestad parish. It is situated close to Bredestad parish church and its earlier name was *Munkagård* ‘the Monks’ farm’ (owned by Alvastra monastery). The generic *gård* ‘farm’ indicates that this farm is a former part of the church hamlet Bredestad. Another indication concerning the farm name is found in the document with the oldest written proof of the habitation name *Bredestad*. This is a donation deed, issued in 1307 to Alvastra monastery of a mansion (*curia*) in the very hamlet of Bredestad.

“Ego Holgerus Wlf son [...] condens testamentum meum in hunc modum In primis ecclesie Sancte marie in aluastrum [...] curiam meam bredhæstadher in vidbo situatam [...] Datum anno domini m ccc vii (a t) .de bredystadher testamentum holmgerj vlfsonz.”

In the cadastral registers from the 1540s, Alvastra monastery owns no farm in Bredestad church hamlet except Munkagård.



Munkaskog

What is probably a third example – *Munkaskog*, a farm in Habo parish on the western shore of Lake Vättern – was recently discovered. In a deed from 1289, a forest called *Watorskoger* was donated to Varnhem Nunnery by King Magnus.

“spacium silue que dicitur Wætorskoger quod spacium situm est iuxta byæar seluarydh inter duos rivos videlicet fiskibeck & Wxnabec protensum ab ipso lacu qui dicitur Wætor ad locum silue predicte qui vocatur moenh [...] Datum Eteghi Anno domini m° cc° lxxx° ix° jn crastino beate Katerine virginis”.

This forest is said to be situated near a hamlet, called Selvaryd, and between the two rivers Fiskebäck and Uxnabäck – most likely the two rivers Fiskebäck and the anonymous rill next to the present Munkaskog; it is further situated close to Lake Vättern and another forest called Moen, probably the present *Sjömon*, north of Munkaskog. On the back side of the deed is noted “Super silua dicta mungkæ skogh”.

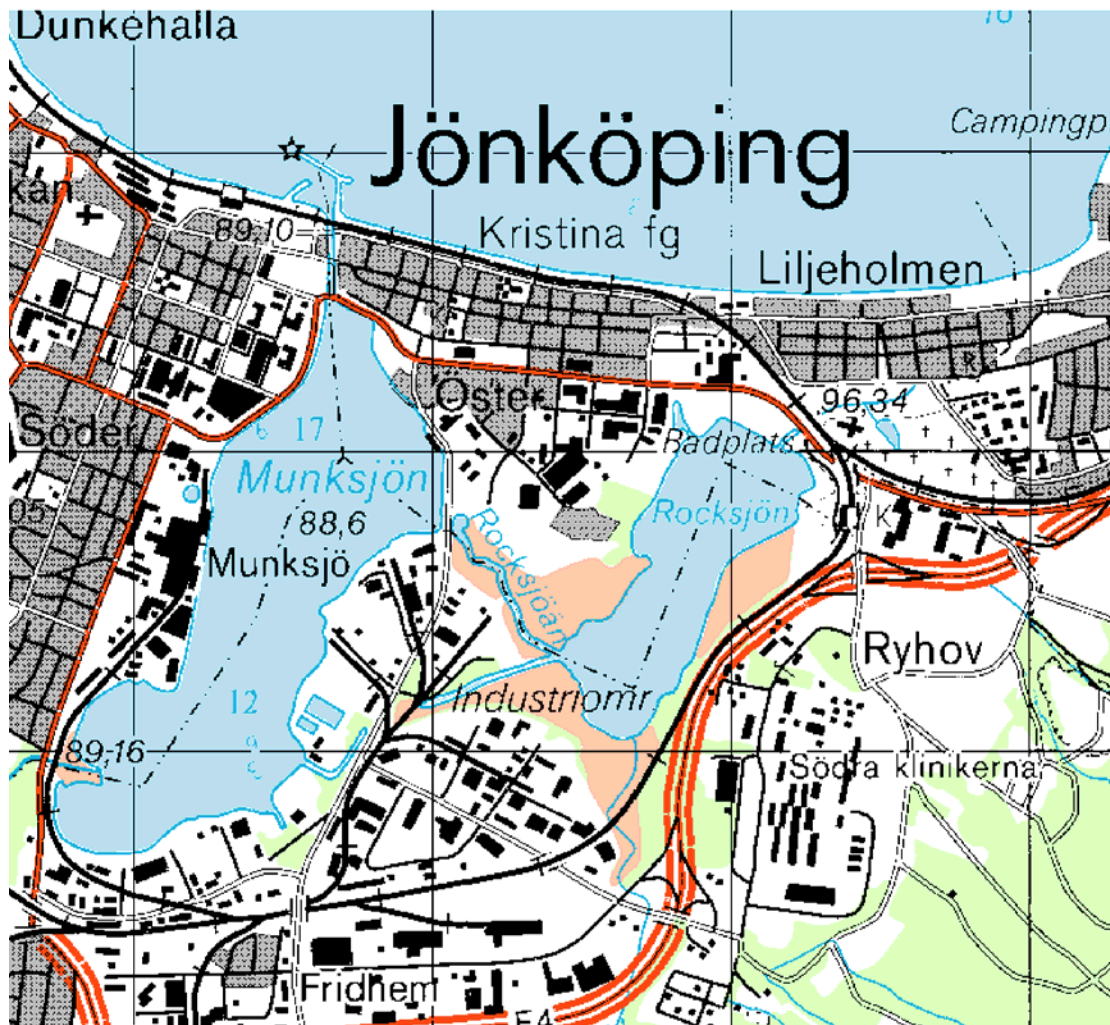
According to cadastral registers from the 1540s the habitation Munkaskog was owned by a monastery; so my hypothesis is that the original name of this hamlet was *Selvaryd* and that this name has been replaced by *Munkaskog*.



Munksjön

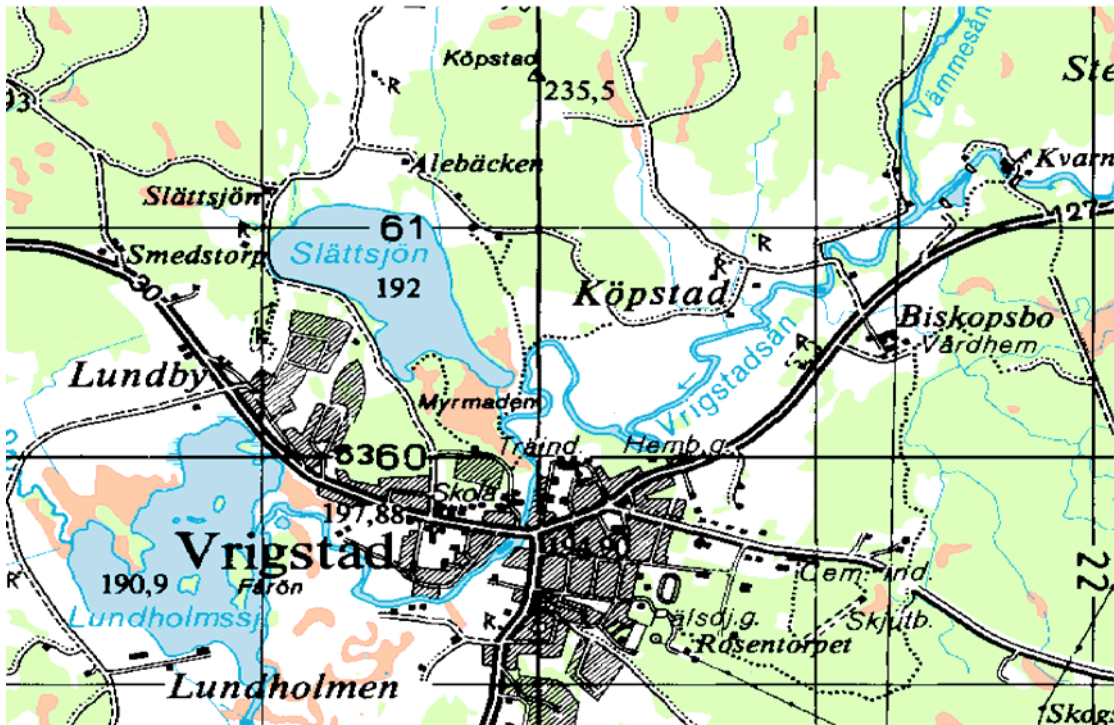
A fourth name is that of a lake in the very centre of Jönköping City – *Munksjön* [Monks' Lake], whose present name can be traced to 1611 (*Munckesiön*); however, in medieval documents this lake is called *Lillsjön* (litlasio 1431) [Little Lake], a name given in comparison to the adjacent

vast Lake Vättern, into which Munksjön has a short outlet. In medieval Jönköping, Lake Vättern is called *Sjön* (sion 1430) [The Lake] or *Stora sjön* (stora sion 1494) [Big Lake]. On the west side of Lillsjön, just south of the outlet, a Franciscan convent was established in the 1280s, which is the reason behind the present name *Munksjön*.



Biskopsbo

Another man of power who owned farms was the bishop, and one name, *Biskopsbo* (curia Biskopsboo ca 1510) [Bishop's farm] in Vrigstad parish, is in a way a parallel case to the above mentioned Munkagård in Bredestad parish. In a deed concerning protection of farms owned by the bishop, issued in 1178 by Pope Alexander III, part of Köpstad hamlet is mentioned as one of these mansions (mansio). In cadastral registers from the 1540s, there is only one farm in Köpstad that is owned by the bishop, besides one in adjacent Biskopsbo. According to historian Herman Schück, Biskopsbo most certainly is a former part of Köpstad hamlet, and the proof of this is the one mentioned in the Bishop's land register from ca1510.



Further on...

These examples raise however another important question: which other previous names have been replaced by names beginning with *munk* or *biskop* – or *präst* ‘priest’ and *kyrka* ‘church’?

There are other examples of a medieval name change, but the main reason behind some of these is probably that an older name had become obsolete or that one habitation gradually was absorbed by an adjacent one – or became desolate.

Through this investigation I have been able to establish the original names of three habitations where old names were replaced by new ones already during the Middle Ages.

Abbreviations

odat. = undated

SRAp = parchment deed in the National Archives of Sweden, Stockholm (studied from photocopy).

Jan Agertz
 Jönköpings läns museum / Jönköping County Museum
 Box 2133
 S-550 02 Jönköping
 SWEDEN
 jan.agertz@jkpglm.se; jan.agertz@gmail.com