

FROM LIDKÖPING TO KÖPENHAMN: GONE SHOPPING?

Charles Lock, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

The trajectory of Arne Zettersten's life, from his birthplace, Lidköping, to his Chair of English Language at Köpenhamns Universitet, holds as an echo an etymological conjecture that seems to have escaped elucidation. The element *Køben-/ -købing/ -köping* is found in nine Danish and ten Swedish place-names; while in Denmark, the element is widely distributed, in Sweden it occurs only within a remarkably concentrated corridor between Gothenburg and Stockholm: in Enköping, Falkköping, Jonköping, Lidköping, Linköping, Malmköping, Norrköping, Nyköping, Söderköping, and even a single plain Köping. There may be an explanation for this remarkable degree of concentration and restriction in Sweden, though it is unknown to me. What is well-known and undisputed is the sense, that such is a place where things are bought and sold, a meeting-point for trade and exchange, what in English would be called a market-town. To any Scandinavian using the verb *køb-* or *köp-* the sense of *-köping* remains transparent to this day.

As a casual observer of toponymics I have been struck by the obviousness of the element's meaning, and by its rarity outside Denmark and the district between Gothenburg and Stockholm in Sweden. The largest city that bears a variant of the element *köbe* is of course Köpenhamn or København: these variants in spelling preserve, in each part of the compound, the forms of both the verb for *buy* and the noun for *port* in Swedish and Danish, respectively. By contrast, the English name Copenhagen is merely a patchwork of phonetic and orthographic

assimilation that quite conceals, from the speaker of any language, the meaning of its first element.

In my ignorance, I have a set of questions. Why is this element *-köping* not, except in Denmark and a swathe of Sweden, more common or more widely distributed? Why, for example, are there no German market-towns with a name based on *-kaufen*? And why are there no English towns obviously meant for shopping, having *-shopping* in their place-name?

Both philologists and toponymists have had great difficulties with the word *shop*. The *Oxford English Dictionary* informs us that the Middle English *schoppe* (c. 1300) derives from Old English *sceoppa*, found only once, and that in an improbable context, in the Old English translation of Luke 21.1, rendered thus in the Authorised Version: "And he looked up, and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury." The contrast, syllabically and semantically, between *sceoppa* and the Vulgate's *gazophylacium*, bears an almost Shakespearian load of lexical wit, and surely deserves further appreciation. The *OED* is not, however, to be distracted, and pursues the word back to OE *scypen* (whence ModE *shippon*, a cow-shed) and Old High German *schopfe*, from which modern German derives *Schopf*, "porch, lean-to building, cart-shed, barn, etc". The *OED* further adduces that "the Teutonic word" *schopfe* was adopted into Old French as *eschoppe*, whence modern French *échoppe*, a lean-to booth, cobbler's stall. The eminent etymologist H.C. Wyld (1932) confirms the *OED*'s account of the derivation of *shop*, adding only that the German *schopfe* is itself of uncertain etymology, though "probably from same base as *shape*". The *probably* seems unduly cautious.

Others may have challenged the received etymology of *shop*, but wherever I have looked for confirmation of my own radical discontent I have found only a passive acceptance. For example, the English Place-Name Society tells us:

sc(e)oppa OE, a shop, a booth, a shed, found in OE only in allusion to the treasury of the Temple (Luke xxi.1). In ME its chief use is of “a building for the manufacture or sale of goods”. Its relation with scypen ... would suggest that its primary meaning was shed. (Smith 1956. Vol. XXVI, Part II: 107)

What overwhelms one here is the unremittingly low valuation of *shop*, as lean-to shed, bare shelter, the most humble sort of protection, better suited for animals than humans. A shop is, so we might confirm H.C. Wyld, the most minimal and primitive kind of *shape*. What these barns, sheds and stalls have to do with the *gazophylacium* in the Temple is not explained. Humility is hardly a common marketing tactic for merchants, and the lexicographers are equally at a loss to explain how *shop* acquired its modern prestige.

Yet the English Place-Name Society gives us rather an important clue; it refers us to a village that sounds almost desperately contemporary: *Shopland*, in Essex. With characteristic thoroughness the EP-NS volume, *The Place-Names of Essex* (Vol. XII: 200) lists about twenty recorded instances of the name *Shopland*, all the way back to the 10th century. The editor comments:

It is clear that this name must be taken in close association with ME *s(c)hoppe* ... This word must be the common English word *shop*, used in some hitherto unrecorded sense. In Old and Middle English the word has hitherto only been noted in the specialised senses of (a) treasury (of the temple), (b) place for sale of goods, and (c) (somewhat later) place for carrying on work. The probability would seem to be that in place-names it is used in the much wider sense of “lean-to building, shed, barn”.

How this latter sense is “much wider” than, say, “place for sale of goods” remains puzzling to me, as does the claim - immediately to be contradicted - that *shop* was a “common English word”. Our editor has then the task of confronting the very earliest form of the name *Shopland*,

attested from c. 1000: *scopingland*. What must be lucid as a revelation to anyone living in Lidköping or København is, alas, merely an inconvenience to the Essex editor:

In OE *scopingland* we seem to have a compound of this word [shop] and land, linked together by the loosely connective *ing*, and the name is probably to be interpreted as “land marked by the presence of such shops or sheds.”

It would no doubt serve the rhetoric of my argument if I could claim at this point to have read Zachrisson (1924), Ståhle (1946), and the relevant pages of rejoinder in Hald (1950). My suspicion, however, is that *-ing* is not the issue, even though we are told by various sources that the particle *-ing* presents many difficult problems in toponymics, as witnessed by the labour represented in the above-mentioned works. To the contrary, *ing* may not be a problem at all, because it is not, here, a particle.

Casting (previous) scholarship aside, therefore, I shall propose that the word *shop* is derived not from a lean-to shed, nor from any indication of shape, but from the activity that characterizes shops whatever their shape or size. In the first recorded version of the name *Shopland* in Essex, *scopingland*, one can hear an echo not only of *köping* but of the Old English *ceapian* or *ceapung*, of which verb and noun, in their diverse OE contexts, modern scholars provide the following glosses: cattle (i.e. chattels), purchase, sale, traffic, bargain, gain, payment, value, price, goods, possession, property, market, high price, to buy cheap, transact business, business, negotiation, barter.

If we turn to the *OED* for help with *cheap*, the word in modern English most obviously derived from OE *ceap-*, we find that the word is, as we would expect, cognate with modern German *kaufen*, Swedish *köpe* and Danish *købe*. Indeed, virtually all the words used by modern scholars to gloss the Old English *ceap-* have been used by the *OED* to explain various

uses of *cheap* over the past thousand years. Our question as to why there are no place-names in English with the element *-shopping* can thus be answered with reference to Cheapside and Eastcheap; further, *cieping* occurs in West Saxon for market, as is evident today in Chipping Campden, Chipping Norton, Chipping Sodbury and Chipping Ongar. These are all granted by EP-NS to derive from *cheaping* as market, though Chippenham is denied this etymology. (See Harmer 1950.)

On the distant relationship between *cheap* and *-köping*, then, there seems to be general agreement. It is the particle *-ing* that still stands in our way. We should search then for head-words that include *ing*. Under the head-word *cheaping* the *OED* gives various Middle English instances of the word's usage, all now obsolete, as bargaining, or market-place, or goods. Our hope that we are onto the Swedish trail that will lead to *-köping* is, however, frustrated when we are told that *cheaping* is formed by "cheap v. + *-ing*". That *-ing* particle again!

It is not disputed that *cheaping* is kin to *köping*. The consequences of this kinship are, however, avoided and suppressed in astonishing ways. To trace the *OED* etymologies of head-words *shop* and *cheap* is to wonder at how closely they approach, and yet how effectively they shun each other. For reasons perhaps unknown to itself, the *OED* is determined that *cheap* and *shop* should be entirely unrelated. The etymology of each word is distorted, indeed rendered worthless, by the fixation on the particle *-ing*. To have made the link visible, the lexicographical head-words ought to have been not *cheap* and *shop*, but *cheaping* and *shopping*.

We can now propose the conjecture that *shop*, as both noun and verb, is a back-formation from *shopping* and *cheaping*. Indeed, the continuing idiomatic ease of shopping - gone shopping, let's do the shopping - suggests that people have been doing it for a great deal longer than the *OED* is prepared to admit: it records no instance under head-word *shopping* earlier than the late 18th century, in the diary of Frances Burney.

If, however, the word *shopping* were linked to *cheaping*, it would be possible to construct a continuous history which would trace *shop* back to *shopping* / *cheaping* as a place, and an activity. It is the particle *-ing* in English (which is not treated as a particle in Swedish) that has been misleading, and has provoked the popular assumption that the noun *shop(p)ing* is actually a gerund or a present participle: and so the illusion has arisen, even among philologists, that there has always been “the common English word” in the shape of *shop*. The acceptance of this conjecture would have the merit of rendering the stubborn particle *ing* a little less problematic, and would generally alert us to the process of back-formation motivated by a syllable of an element in one language being mistaken for a particle in another.

The most obvious weakness in this conjecture is the sheer weight of scholarly authority that it has to overturn. This is itself occasion for some perplexity. The great philologists and lexicographers who established the *OED* and other monuments of the English language were determined above all to trace its Germanic and Nordic roots, to insist, by etymological demonstration, that English is a Germanic language, not, as had been hopefully supposed in the 18th century, a Romance language. The British scholars were familiar with the Scandinavian languages and many of the greatest figures in English philological scholarship were themselves German, Swedish or Danish. How is it possible that none of them could hear an echo of *köping* in *shopping*? My only suggestion is that these scholars had such an ideological investment in the Anglo-Saxon monosyllable - tough, lean, sturdy, so different from (and superior to) the effeminate decadence of polysyllabic latinity - that there was a proliferation of particles in etymological analysis. Few bisyllabic words “of Teutonic origin” could resist reduction to a monosyllabic root in the *OED*, especially if one of the syllables resembled a common particle in Modern English.

As for what the *OED* judges to be the single occurrence of *shop* in Old English, one can only assert that Old English *sceoppa* has nothing to do with the shape of a shed, but everything to do with a *gazophylacium*, a place of treasures and negotiations, of money-lenders and word-loaners: a *köping*, a place such as Copenhagen.

It is not only the salient toponyms of our honorand's biography that make a fit occasion for the present conjecture. I was first troubled by this matter while living in Sweden, and teaching at Höghskolan i Karlstad, from 1980 to 1982. After an interval of some fourteen years I returned to Scandinavia as Professor of English Literature at the University of Shoppinghaven. The committee responsible for that professorial appointment was chaired by the Professor of English Language, to whom I remain not less than gazophylacially indebted.

Works cited

- Hald, K. 1950. *Vore Stednavne*. København: Folkeoplysningens fremme.
- Harmer, F.E. 1950. Chipping and Market: A Lexicographical Investigation. In: Fox, C. & B. Dickins (eds.). *The Early Cultures of North-West Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 335-360.
- Reaney, P. H. (ed). 1935. *The Place-Names of Essex*. (Vol. XII). Cambridge: English Place-Name Society.
- Smith, A. H. 1956. *English Place-Name Elements*. (Vol. XXVI). Cambridge: English Place-Name Society.
- Ståhle, C. I. 1946. *Studier över de svenska ortnamnen på -inge*. Lund: Kungl. Gustav Adolfs Akademien 16.
- Wyld, H. C. 1932. *Universal English Dictionary*. London: Routledge.
- Zachrisson, R. E. 1924. *English Place-Names in -ing of Scandinavian Origin*. Uppsala: Uppsala Univesitets Årsskrift.

