Discussion

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As is well acknowledged in onomastics, the lexical meaning of the proper name is not necessarily of importance whilst using the name. The name functions as an identifier whether we know its etymological or lexical meaning or not. In order to use the name we only have to know its referent. We can refer to the capital of Finland with the name *Helsinki* and to the sea near to it with the name *Itämeri*, *East Sea* without paying any attention to their semantics or knowing anything about their etymology.

Nevertheless, we're also aware that place names are descriptive when they're born. They carry a lexical meaning and they describe the referent in some logical way. And thus they are meaningful semantical units of language. But many toponyms may have changed in the course of centuries and their original meaning is not opaque to the current users of language. Or the name may have been born among the speakers of some other language than it is used, and thus the lexical meaning is not familiar to its users.

Names reflect the concepts, values and even world-views of name-givers. In order to interpret them, we should be acquinted with the cultural and historical contexts they've been born. They tell us something but they do not reveal the whole ancient world or the world in which they were given.

Today, we look at the names given hundreds of years ago from different perspective than was the time of name-giving. We give our own ideas, perceptions and associations to names and their referents. This is inevitable, this is natural. There may be associations and perceptions shared by many of us, but there are also individual associations and connotations. It would be interesting to study e.g. the images, perceptions and associations attached to the name *Itämeri, Östersjön, East Sea* among various groups of people. These kind of studies could reveal us how e.g. people in Finland explain the element *itä*, east in the name and how do they feel about it.

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