Summary

Old English *meresteall and Old Swedish *marstall

A North-West Germanic compound?

By Staffan Fridell

In the Swedish province of Uppland there is a hamlet called Marstalla, written in marstaldum, in marstal (1312). The first element has been interpreted as either mar ‘marsh, lake’ or *mar ‘horse’. In the latter case, the second element is explained as *stadhul ‘enclosure’ or ‘dwelling place’, the whole thus representing a compound *marstadhul ‘enclosure or pasture for horses’. In the same province there is a large meadow area called Marstallen, a name that has been interpreted in the same way.

OE meresteall means ‘pool of stagnant water’. It has been argued that the etymological meaning of meresteall is ‘a place where a pool is liable to form in wet seasons’. The sense ‘standing water’ is well documented for words that have evolved from OGmc *mari-.

The two localities Marstalla and Marstallen correspond remarkably well to the meaning of OE meresteall. In both places there are rivers that flood seasonally, creating large areas of standing water. I therefore conclude that the names are formed from an OSw. *marstall, formally and semantically identical to OE meresteall. Most probably it is actually the same word, originating from a North-West Germanic *marstallaz.