

Family Chronicle

Family Names Onomatology and Heraldry

Immoos Family Name

Meaning of Family Names

The last name Immoos is composed of two syllables, namely on the one side of the preposition „im“, on the other side of the noun „Moos“. The literal last name developed from the surname „Moos“. The item „Moos“, in the past also in plural „Möser“, has – in etymological sense – following denotations:

- (1) The term „Moos“, developed from the (ahd./mhd.¹) Old and Middle German word **mos**, what means „moss“, „moor“, „swamp“, „marsh“, „morass“, „moist“, „swampy land“, also „reed land“.
- (2) **Moos** also names a simply composed, sparsely structured rootless cryptogam with change of generations.
- (3) **Moos** is also named an aggregation of a vegetation's cover at mainly moist and shady places, consisting of moss plants, covering soil or tree trunks or similar things, often growing as a pillow².

The coexistence of these three meanings of the old German word „Moos“ shows, that humid forest localities and marshy grounds often are overgrown by moss plants.

The word **Moos** originally arises in the old Indo-European root of the word group „**Moder**“. Moder means „matter faded to rot“, „decay compound“, „mud“, „soil“. This Indo-European root was ***(s)meu-**, what means „moist“, „moldy“, „lubricious“, „dirty“ or – as a noun – „dampness“, „mould“, „mud“, „dirt“. To the same word group belong „schmausen“ (to eat or drink uncleanly) and „schmiegen“ (to glide, to creep, to slide). It exists an old common German root, deduced from this Indo-European root, that can still be found in many European languages in the word for „**Moos**, **Sumpf**, **Moor**, **Moder** and **Morast** (moss, swamp, moor, mildew and marsh and that is indigenously relative to the Indo-European root³.

For example Old Slavic „Muchu“ = moss, bog, marsh“, New Slavic „meh“, „mech“, Czech „mech“, Dutch „mos“ = moss, or „moeras“ = swamp, marsh, English „moss“ = moss, peat, marsh, Swedish „moss(a)“ = moss, and „mosse“ = moor, Danish and Norwegian „mos“ = moss, swamp, Latin „muscus“ and „palus“ = moss, Spanish „musco“, Italian „muschio“ or palude“, French „mousse“, Portuguese and Spanisch „musgo“.

¹ ahd. = althochdeutsch (Old High German (c. 750 to 1050); mhd. = mittelhochdeutsch (Middle High German), c. 1050 to 1350.

² Duden, Universalwörterbuch (i.e. Universal Dictionary), Duden Press, Mannheim 2001.

³ Duden, Etymologisches Wörterbuch (i.e. Etymologic Dictionary), Duden Press, Mannheim 2000; Duden, Familiennamen (Family Names, Last Names); Deutsches Wörterbuch (i.e. Dictionary of German Language) by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 1885.

The word **Moos** (with long vowel) appears in many variations as a field name. It can also be found as **Mosi**, partially accentuated as „moss“ with short vowel, in the mountains, in Ursern Valley it even exists as **Muss**. As second element in compounds –moos/-moss is reduced from -mis to -mes (Feldmoos [i.e. field moss] – Felmis), as a diminutive you can also find „**Müsli**, **Müssli**, **Mussli** and **Müesli**, all these spelled with a stretched -ü-.

As the meaning today still is the same as at the time, when in Middle Ages last names were formed, they might not evoke unclear associations. The giving of the last⁴ name **Moos** (or relative forms) refers to the persons domicile, either as a property or site denomination, field or place name and means moor, swampy areas or sites. Normally the first name bearers were living there for generations, where this surname occurred as site denomination. This constancy to a site caused the consolidation of the surname and becoming family name (last name), which was transferred to the children, even when they did not live any more at the name giving locality. The proposed words „von“ (of, from) , „im“ (in), also „ze“ (at, on) did have the meaning of a pronominal adverb and – as part of a name – effectively did mean „wherefrom“ and made clear, that it concerns a clear designation of origin. These prepositions do not concern nobility titles.

In many regions field and site names with **Moos** are abnormally common. Especially in Almanac region (remaining German speaking Switzerland, also Swabia and Bavaria) you frequently can find this field and site name. In Schwyz basin we in vain are looking for this field name. In Ingenbohl you indeed can find a farm Mosi im Schipf, above the monastery hill and near the Mosi tunnel, named after this farm. But this farm name did not conduct to a surname moss, as showed researches. In Morschach there does exist no Moos family, neither as a site name nor as a field name. There exist only the field names and farm names “Ried” and “Rieten”; that could indicate moist land, but also a forest clearance. In the surroundings there is a Feldmoos (field moss) in Sattel region, further a **Moosberg** (moss mountain) in Illgau, another **Feldmoos** in Bisis Valley, a **Moos** (moss), a **Tubenmoos** (pigeon moss) and **Mooseggen** (moss corners) in Oberiberg, the **Trachslauer Moos** in Einsiedeln, a **Moos** near Seilegg, in direction to Steinerberg, and a **Müsli** (little moss) im Sattel, a **Müsliweid** (little moss pasture) above Rickenbach, the **Müsliegg** (moss corner) near Rothenfluh, a **Müsigricht** (moss court of justice?) in Steinen, a Moos, a **Moosrüti** (moss clearing) and a **Mooshag** (moss hedge) near Haltikon near Küssnacht, and a **Felmis** (field moss) at Gersauerstock Mountain. Researches indicated, that none of the families there living got the surname Moos or im Moos. In whole Canton of Uri – according to the name book – are established about 30 to 40 field names **Moos**, **Moss**, **Muss**, **Müsli**, **Feldmoos**, **Felmis**, and compounds of it.

In the Helvetisches Lexikon (Helvetic Lexicon) by Hans Jacob Leu from 1750 are listed among **Moos** all farms, which the author could discover. Among others also „an old castle on a big meadow near Wassen in Uri County, the parent house of the Nobles of this family (von Moos). He also placed to it the item **Maas** as a synonym. Furthermore he numerates several names with **von Moos**. For example a family, which hailed from Uri and also was domestic in Lucerne, Zug, and Zurich and in March region in the canton of Schwyz? All these are hailed from the Nobles of Wassen. A member of this family is to have owned properties in Uri county and Schwyz (Merischachen? Merlischachen).

In Canton Zug – for example on Zugerberg (Zug Mountain), in the Grüt region near Allenwinden – can be found several field names Moos. About the year 1350 there is known a surname formation for

⁴ Speaking of surnames means that the name is not stabilized enough to be transferred to persons, for whom the real denomination of the surname is not true anymore, e.g. a person called Müller (i.e. Miller) in fact is a butcher.

one person. He is name as **the one von Moos**. From that indigenously evolved in Zug Canton the family name **Moos**, this family still exists as a burgher family in Zug⁵.

A big area in Goms (Wallis) is named **Moosmatten**; it stretches to the whole length at the left down-hill side between Geschinen and Ulrichen. According to abstracts for an Upper Wallis name book by Stefan Würth we count in whole Obergoms over 80 field names with the item Moos. Therefore in Wallis canton persons with the surname **Moos** are already known in the 13th century at different places⁶.

All this notes indicate, that in wide parts of German speaking, but also of European areas, **Moos** was used as a field and site name for swamps and wetlands. The occurring of this item in many places already in Middle Ages is documented in German speaking abroad. In Bavaria there are surnames and family names, originating from field names, especially **Moser, Mooser, Mösl, Mösler, im Mös, Mösli**. Documents for that are e.g. 1242, Ulrich, named **Moser**, Kyburghian ministerial (clerk, civil servant); 1269, Rudolf **in dem mose** near Ravensburg in Wurttemberg; 1336, Fridebolt **von dem Mose** in Schaffhausen; 1363, Hainrich **Mösli** in Isny; 1379, Hainrich **in dem Mos** in Tyrol (all of them are documented according to Brechenmacher und Bahlow⁷).

Thus, **Moos** is

- (1) a field and domicile name. It means „swampy, moist land“. In certain regions **Moos** also can be
- (2) an extraction name to homonymic site names with **Moos**.

Formation of Family Names, Generally, and of Immoos Name, Especially

The name is our only personal holding and identification, which indicates to other people who we are. Names are like casts or traces in history, which help us to identify our ancestors. To know the practice of name giving in our region and in our country can be very helpful in researching of our ancestors. Occasionally the name researching leads us back to the origin of family and indicates a trifle about looking (Lang, Klein, Gross [Long, Little, Tall]), character (Klotz, Faust, Schlaginhauf [Brick, Fist, Hit-the-pile] , and others), professional activities (Schmied, Müller, Metzger [Smith, Miller, Butcher], and others), the domicile (Bühler, Moos, Bachmann [Hill, Moss, Creek] , and others) or social status (König, Graf, Herzog, Schultheiss [King, Count, Duke, Mayor], and others).

At every time names were identification tags of human beings. But these distinguishing features in today's perfected form with first and last name have not aroused at one fell swoop. Rather, it lasted centuries, until they have developed und become part of our social and lingual life. Therefore there traces often have been blurred and cannot be found out in any case. Until High Middle Ages in German speaking area it was sufficient to have only a Christian name (also first name, forename). There were used Old High German names like (Uodalrîch (Ulrich), Hruodolf (Rudolf), Rúnahilt (Runhild) und

⁵ Fähndrich, Joseph Thomas: Zuger Familiennamenbuch (Book of Zug's Family Names), Kalt Zehnder AG Press, Zug, 2000, p. 29, 266; and Gruber, Eugen, Familienchronik der Moos von Zug (Family Chronicle of Zug's Moos Family); Zürcher AG Press, Zug, 1974.

⁶ See Imesch, Dionys, in: Blätter aus der Walliser Geschichte (Folios from History of Canton of Wallis), vol. IV, 1897, Geschichte von Naters (History of Naters), p. 94ff.

⁷ See Brechenmacher, Josef Karlmann: Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Familiennamen (Etymologic Dictionary of German Family Names, Starke Press, Limburg-upon-Lahn, 1957, two volumes; also: Bahlow, Hans: German Namenlexikon (German Name Lexicon), Suhrkamp Press, pocket book, 1985.

Raginlinda (Reglinde), Hadumar, Richwin, Wigberth, Wolfhart and so on. Till deep Middle Ages, it was usual to have only one name. Life passed in little and clear domains. Apparently the Christian name was reclusively sufficient to protect persons from mistaken identity. Still nowadays the first name is sufficient for Nobles and high clergymen (King Juan Carlos or Pope Benedict, and so on).

With the boom of Central European cities in 13th and 14th century also the population increased, which made it more difficult to identify people only by means of only one name. Therefore it became necessary to give all humans an adequate surname to differ them from their fellow citizens with the same first name (namesakes). For more and more humans there were less and less names. The formation of last names removed this defect; but it was not formed from one day to the other, but in a process over generations.

Today's practice of hereditary last names comes from Upper Italian cities. In Venetian aristocracy six family names are established since 8th or 9th century. The Crusaders adopted this custom and effused it in whole Europe. The item „Nachname“ (last name, family name) appears in documents for the first time about the year 1370 and gets great dynastic importance by heritage over male descendants.

In our region last names appear only in 13th century. The evolution began at Nobility and in the cities, a little later in rural regions. At that time, denominations of persons with surnames still could change. According documents and sources researches, you can assume that about the year 1450 many persons in Central Europe already had a surname or last name. In our region firm conditions on last names came over since 16th century. In Schwyz are known many last names, which till 17th century, partially till 18th century were used doubly (Schmidig, also Zorn; Bürgler, also Hettisser; Fässler, also Köppli; Blum, also Mock; Nölly, also Hecker; auf der Maur, also Murer, and partially just our Moos, also Mooser/Mosser/Moser). Family trees are constructed patrilineal (paternal, from the father's side). The name became a matter of family's pride, and it was absolutely necessary to have a son to transmit the name.

In rural regions creating surnames can be observed until our days. Nonlocal in Morschach asking for an Immoos, one immediately denominated him to a farm or other personal circumstances to differ him from other homonymous Immoos. Also in Muota Valley the many Betscharts, Suters, Gwerders are differed by surnames. These surnames were patronyms⁸ (more rarely metronyms⁹), the farm name, surnames or job titles. In Morschach village, my grandfather was only named „Dägebälmeler“ or „Dägebälmelers-Wisel, my father „Dägebälmelers-Wisels-Wältel“, because he descended from Degenbalm Farm (Wisel is the surname of Christian name Alois, Wältel the surname of Christian name Walter, Wisels-Wälter means Walter, son of Alois).

Family names can be classified in five main categories of creation: settlement names, personal names, activity names, provenience names and surnames. The name Immoos (old spellings and variants in our region: Zmoos, Zmoos, ze Moos, mos, Mos, moos, Moos, Moss, im Moos, Im Moos, von Moser, or also Mooser, Mosser, Moser) can be assigned to settlement names. Therefore I will explain more detailed only this group. In chapter 1.3 you get know more about spelling of the name during centuries.

The mark of a family is the family name, inherited by the male line. But there are cases, as is generally known, in which families of different descent anyhow bear the same name (namesake). Such

⁸ Patronym (gr.) = name forms with fathers Christian name.

⁹ Metronym (gr.) = following mother's name.

family names do in no way imply blood relationship of all name bearers each. By the many accumulative last names like Müller, Weber, Schmi(e)d (Miller, Weaver, Smith/Forger) this evidently can be refuted. When in a family a profession has been practiced for generations, finally the profession determined naming. Such names have become last names in different localities and independently from each other. Scientists call that a polygenetic naming. Therefore it's wrong to think, that all namesakes in some way must always be relative or hailing from the same region and you only have to find somewhere the earliest registration. For instance nowadays, there are Immoos families all over the world belonging to different lines. From where specifically today's Immoos families are coming and how her relationship exists you will read below in this book.

Probably the largest category is names circumscribing more precisely the topographic position of the name bearer's domicile. Many historians presume that family names deduced from denominations of domiciles or farms have been the first merited names. At the first place are the families living on cultivated and in earlier times cleared forest ground. The big number of families named Schwander, Gschwend, Reuteler, Rüttimann, Bracher, Brändli, Grütter, Haueter, Nyffeler and many others are signs of this.

Many names indicate a stay at waters: Werder (= island, peninsula), Weyermann, Wuhrmann (Wuhr = weir, dam, groins), Bachmann, Schüpbach, Bachschmied, Bachmeier (activity and settlement name), Amstad (Stad = shore, bank) and so on. Other names show, that their first bearers have lived on hills: Bühler/Büeler (Bühl = hill), Abbühl, Bühlmann, Berger, Zberg, Borter, Abplanalp etc. But also Gasser (at the alley), Strasser (at the street) and many other names are belonging to that category¹⁰.

A large group of topographic settlement names are formed by exact denominations to the places with prepositions (pronominal adverbs) im (= in), in (= in), an (= at, on), am (= at, on), auf (= on), ab (= off, away), zu (= at, to, towards, into), zem (= at, to, towards), ze (= at, to towards), z' (= at, to towards) and von (= of, by). The „von“, proposed to the name, is used as a nobility title since 16th century. Middle Ages nobility didn't need this special denomination. In Switzerland, the different prepositions were used varying. The names **Inderbitzin**, **Amgwerd**, **Amstutz**, **Aufdermaur**, **Abyberg**, **Abegg**, **Anderrüthi**, **Andermatt** and so on are later written in one word of locality denominations with prepositions. Many family names formerly were beginning with the little word **im** (= in). The following last names with **im** have been found in our region in old documents, some others are still existing today, others are extinct long ago: Im Hof (Imhof), im Ling (Imlig), im Boden (Imboden), im Holz (Imholz), im Feld (Imfeld), im Lützli, im Wyl, im Herolds, im Ried, im Rickis, im Oberstocki, im Stigstudi, im Werdt and just **im Moos** (Immoos). Thus, names with **im** formerly have not been rare and always indicate a settlement name.

But the surname Moos on the face of it seems to be absurd. Who on earth would build his farm house or his domicile in an everglade, a swamp or a marsh, where normally was neither earnings nor living and the access was a problem? That surnames, which originally were deduced from an irreclaimable and uncultivable wasteland, in Middle Ages were not as rare. Just names of some important families of that time did have such settlement names, as for example: „zum Stein, Winkelried, Ödis-ried, von der Aa, von der Au, Retschrieden, Stauffacher“, and just „von Moos“. All these families belonged to higher social status; and the denomination of their domicile was in effect not convenient to that. On closer inspection, it turned out, that in Middle Ages – with its feudal army organization – such localities were preferred domiciles. To build his own domicile, his own compact stone house, his

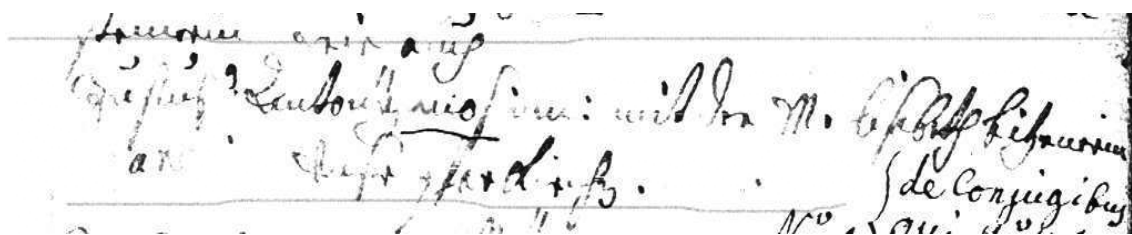
¹⁰ Duden, Familiennamen (Family Names, Last Names), Duden Press, Mannheim, 2000, p. 27 to 31.

own property at a place having strategic importance and being military favorable, was an advantage for his owner. Rocks, hills, islands, river bends, swamps, mosses, reed land were suitable or build a protected house area, where nature took oneself a part of the protection. These families did not practice agriculture as main purchase, but were clerks, ministerials (civil servants) of big landowners, and additionally they undertook military and juridical tasks. This also explains why in earliest times such higher ranked families named themselves after a moss or else a forbidding region¹¹.

Looking into family names, you discover, that these names not always are written in the same way. Time and again it occurred that in the past someone of the family did modify his name. The modifying of spelling or the whole name was to observe till 18th, partially even till 19th century. As recently as the introduction of Swiss civil code (Zivilgesetzbuch, ZGB) in the year 1876, spelling of family names had to be constituted definitely. Without a legal act (request for name modifying or changing via civil status bureau of native commune at Canton's administration), since then, names cannot be modified anymore.

One only common German language, joining all German speaking people and written down after orthographic rules, developed by and by not until since about 450 years (Luther's bible translation). For a long time yet dialects and the rural special languages, based on these dialects, were dominating. Although diminishing slowly, until 19th century, there was a considerable polymorph of oral and written German language. Modifications in the language, writers carelessness, partially also ne-science, but also the absence of binding orthographic rules in early times (you did write, how you did understand or spell the words), contributed to pass on surnames/family names often in a modified spelling.

Sometimes there could be found different spellings in the same document. Least people were able to write and to read. You made to write, and authorities as commissioners of oaths were sealing documents (real securities and contracts). Therefore only a few written credentials of our farmer families have existed or survived in many places, parish priests were the only persons to have notes on birth, baptism, marriage and death of parish's inhabitants¹². Not all parish priests made efforts on correct doing the book-keeping, as shows the illustration below¹³.



*Detail of the Rorschach's parish marriages's books of 1670-1726. The main note above reads as follows (translated): "Justus Antony **mos**, married to M. (Mary) Elizabeth bitzenerin (Inderbitzin) from Morschach., – All this illustrations are impressively showing, which are the malice genealogists have to struggle against in deciphering old documents.*

¹¹ See Gloggner, Arthur: Die Mitwirkung des Adels bei der Gründung und Festigung der Eidgenossenschaft (The Participation of Nobility on the Founding and Stabilization of the Confederation), Hans Feuz Press, Bern 1941.

¹² In 1563, introduced by decree of Tridentine Council, 1563. It still lasted many decades, until this decree could get through all over the parishes.

¹³ Illustrations from books of Rorschach's parish archives, around 1700 (STASZ „ Archives of the canton of Schwyz”).

Immoos name, written in one word, appears continuously not before end of 19th century (1876). Before the members of our family in Morschach, at the beginning of their appearing, were registered as **Zmoß, Moß**, then mainly as **Moos** and **im Moos**, sometimes also **Mooser** or **Mosser**. In doing so, it attracts attention, that the spelling is changing, without revealing exact rules, but in Morschach going more and more to the spelling **Moos** and **im Moos**. As Moos in some regions being a common field name, you can find in old documents all over German speaking area many different surnames/family names with the item **Moos**. You can find the surname all alone, or there were prefixed changing prepositions to them. Moos is written with one -o-, or, at the beginning of their appearing also with German sharp-s (ß). Capitalization and using of small letters are changing arbitrarily. For example: Josephus mos; 1632: Adam Zmoß, halberdier under land banner; Melchior in dem Moos; 1532: Rudy im Moß, land man in Schwyz, Morschach settling, Wilgis, but also 1469: Georg Moß, pleban in Kaiserstuhl (Aargau canton). Especially in Upper Zurich Land, in South Germany region and around Lake of Constance, also in Grison canton, you can find often the surname (de palud = von Moos [from moss]).

Also the Ursern ministerials (civil servants, clerks) von Moos appear in documents in different spellings: von Mose, von Moß, Mooser, Mozza, Mosa, and Zmoss. In old documents in our region you can find the same name Moos in followings spellings: **Zmoß, Zmoos, Mos, Moos, von Moos, Mooß, im Moos, im Moß**, with changing capitalization and written in words with small initial letter, and, of course, from 19th century, today's common spelling **Immoos**. In old registers¹⁴ you can see in majority of cases with affiliation suffix (-ig, -er), but also the denominations **Mooßig, Moosige**, all written with only one „o“. Close to this denominations stay the denominations **Moserig, Mooser, Moßer** or **Moser**¹⁵. The names **von Moos** or **von Mose** appears rarely in old documents from Morschach, Schwyz and Ingenbohl (family list in a land people's register of the different quarters: Moos von, s. illustration p. XX).

Von Moos you today meet specially in Lucerne, Zurich and Obwalden. Sergeant (Wachtmeister, Wm) Johann Rudolph von Moos, a man from Zurich definitely descending from Uri and Lucerne von Moos, in the moment of admission as domiciliate in Schwyz, in the domiciliate's register, is simply listed as **Wm Rudolf Im Moos**. This also indicates again, that the Moss families from Nidwässerviertel (i.e. Low Water Quarter) is associated with von Moos family, and that „von“ (from) and „im“ (in) have been used alternately. The name anyway sometimes can give a hint to relationships. Members of Schwyz Moser family (descendants of Moser-Klostener family) in Brunnen name themselves simply Im Moos (gents'line), apparently because there existed relational connections, which nowadays can't be verified by documents. All this spellings show us, that the homonymic written form of family names in earlier times apparently could quickly change. The Christian name still stayed for a long time the more important part of the name, which was written at first position. Modifications can be associated with social status, the spreading of family, with the evolution of German language and with the tendency to translate dialect words in High German words and to write prefixes and noun in one word.

In 20th century some families tried to go back to the original first versions of their names. In Immoos family such tendencies can be registered at no time return to former spelling **im Moos** or even **Moos, von Moos** or **Zmoss**. Other families successfully plead at administration (e.g. Aufdermaur/Auf der Maur, Zeberg/Ceberg, Flecklin/Fläcklin, Horat/Horath, Kreienbühl/Kryenbühl, Betschart/Bettschart).

¹⁴ Land people's registers of Old Land of Schwyz, 1761, 1767, 1791 (STASZ = Archives of the canton of Schwyz).

¹⁵ Explicitly not meant is the specially marked Appenzell Moser family (called Präster).

According to onomatology¹⁶ surnames and family names (last names) developed in historic evolution from field names, farm names and domicile localities after following rules:

- Firstly like localities' denominations with preposition and article, e.g. Melchior in dem Moos, and not clearly to identify in any case as a surname;
- Then only with prepositions, e.g. von Moos, zu Moos, ze Moos, zem Moos, im Moos, Z'Moos, or, shortened, just Moos;
- Written in one word, e.g. Zmoos, Immoos;
- At the same time appear deductions and compounds with -er, -mann and other elements, e.g. Moser, Moosig, Moosmann, Mosimann and so on.

In German speaking, Alemanic area formations of family names with locality denomination „**Moos**“are very common and appear often in compounds. For example: Moos, von Moos, Immoos, Zmoos, Mooser, Moosacker, Moosauer, Moosbach, Moosberger, Moosbrugger, Mossburger, Moosdorf, Mooseder, Mooshammer, Mooshauer, Mooshengst, Moosheimer, Moosherr, Mooshut, Mooslehner, Mooslechner, Moosmann, Mosimann, Moosmüller, Moosreuter¹⁷. In earlier times names with the element „Moos“always indicates higher status families (nobles, ministerials [civil servants, clerks], commissionaires and so on).

¹⁶ See Bach, Adolf: Deutsche Namenkunde (German Onomatology), 2 vol., Carl Winter University Press, Heidelberg, 1978.

¹⁷ See Brechenmacher, Josef Karlmann: Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Familiennamen (Etymologic Dictionary of German Family Names, Starke Press, Limburg-upon-Lahn, 1957, two volumes.