**German Placename Etymology**

**From GenWiki**

Meanings of common elements in Germanic place names.

German placenames are very commonly a compound of a determinant word (Bestimmungswort) and a common root (Grundwort), usually in that order. Karlstadt, for example, derives from the root Stadt, meaning city, and a personal name, Karl.

Caution should always be taken when interpreting placenames. The current form of a placename is often a corruption or hypercorrection of the archaic form, and thus may not carry the original meaning. The root is often difficult for modern German speakers to interpret correctly. Therefore, one must always find all extant historical attestations of a placename before interpreting a placename.

**Determinant Words**

The determinant words have many variants but can be categorized:

* Personal names of individuals, groups, or deities.
* Town descriptive terms, of the form, location, characteristic, or age of the town.
* Jurisdictional terms of seats of government, justice, or punishment
* Words from nature whether mineral, water, plants, animals, or mixed forms.

**Root Words**

-ANGE

see -INGEN

-AU

Meaning: meadow (?)

Examples: Lindau, Haguenau, Hanau

Explanation: Towns with such names indicate that the settlement grew in a low-lying meadow with water flowing through it.

-BACH

Meaning: stream or brook

Examples: Reichenbach

Explanation: Towns with such names indicate that the settlement grew near a stream or brook.

-BAD, BADEN

Meaning: baths

Examples: Baden-Baden, Marienbad, Bad Ischl, Bad Mergentheim

Explanation: A natural springs site where Roman baths and their imitators were established.

-BERG, -BERGE, -BERGEN

Meaning: mountain

Examples: Bamberg, Königsberg, Nürnberg

Explanation: Always relatively speaking! In flat areas, refers to a rise or a hill.

-BEUREN, -BAUERN, -BAUER, -BUR, -BÜREN, -BAU, -BY

Meaning: farmer

Examples: Kaufbeuren, Ottobeuren,

Explanation: Derives from the word gabûron, meaning a peasant farmer who owed annual payments or services to his lord, but was not a slave.

-BRUCK

Meaning: bridge

Examples: Innsbruck

Explanation: Located at an important bridge.

-BÜTTEL, -BOTL, -BOTEL

Meaning: property, land

Examples: Wolfenbüttel

Explanation: Originally used often for settlements of the minor nobility with no regular marketplace.

-BURG, -BOURG, -BORG

Meaning: fortress

Examples: Hamburg, Augsburg, Strasbourg, Burgundy

Explanation: Such names indicate that the settlement grew around a fortress. Many of these date from Roman times or before, for example, Teutoburgium.

-DORF, -RUP, -TROP, -TRUP, -TERP

Meaning: village

Examples: Düsseldorf, Franzdorf, Ostendorf

Explanation: Originally this root meant just the residence of a single family, but this meaning shifted later.

-FURT, -FORD, -FAEHR, -FER(N), -WEDEL

Meaning: ford

Examples: Frankfurt, Schweinfurt

Explanation: Town founded at a ford, where a river could be crossed by wading.

-GADEN

see -STUBEN

-GEMÜND

see -MUND

-HAFEN, -HAVEN

Meaning: harbor

Examples: Friedrichshafen, Bremerhaven

Explanation: A port city.

-HALL Meaning: salt place

Examples: Hall, Schwäbisch Hall

Explanation: Many of these names derive in fact from Celtic times and reflect the importance of salt in prehistoric times.

-HAUS, -HAUSEN, -SEN Meaning: house or houses

Examples: Nordhausen, Wolfershausen

Explanation: Often used for early, 6th century Frankish trading settlements founded at crossroads, though also appearing in towns founded later.

-HEIM, -HEM, -HAM, -UM Meaning: home

Examples: Mannheim, Rosenheim

Explanation: Large settlements founded by Franks around the 6th century and later. There are also "false" "-heim" towns, such as Bornheim, Dammheim, Queichheim, etc. which do not date from this period, but were named in imitation of these.

-HOFEN, -HOOP, -HOP, -EF, -GAARD, -COURT, -INGHOFEN Meaning: court, manor

Examples: Hof, Mayerhof

Explanation: Originally used for 8th-century manorial residences, but later applied also to groups of farms, or to villages that had grown together.

-INGEN, -ING, -INGHEIM, -ANGE, -INGHOFEN, -INGKON, -IKON, -IKEN Meaning: settlement (?)

Examples: Unterhaching, Sigmaringen, Dudelange, Wetzikon, Etziken

Explanation: Such names refer to settlements named after a prominent person, less often after a geographical entity like a body of water. Sigmaringen, for example, means that the settlement was founded by a Teuton called Sigmar and his kin. The "-ing" suffix tends to be found in Bavaria, "-ange" in Lorraine, "-ingen" in Swabia while "-ingkon", "-ikon", "-iken" -- 13th century shortenings of "-inghofen" -- are found further east and south in Switzerland.

-KAM(M)ER, -KEMNAT see -STUBEN -KASTEL Meaning: fortress

Examples: Bernkastel

Explanation: From Latin castellum (fortified camp or fortress)

-KIRCH, -KIRCHEN, -KAPELLE Meaning: church or chapel

Examples: Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Explanation: Often appears with the local lord's name, probably indicating the church's founder.

-KLOSTER see -MÖNCH -KREUT see -REUTH -MÖNCH, -MÜNSTER,-KLOSTER Meaning: monastery

Examples: Klosterreichenbach, München

Explanation: Denotes an abbey, convent or monastery.

-MUND, -MÜNDE, -GEMÜND Meaning: mouth

Examples: Dortmund, Münden, Gemünd, Gmünd Travemünde, Swinemünde, Wesermünde, Neckargemünd, Emden (from E-mutha)

Explanation: Located at the mouth of a river.

-REUTH, REUT, RODE, -ROD, -RATH, -KREUT, -RAIT, -ROIT, -RIED(T) Meaning: clearing

Examples: Bayreuth, Osterode, Reutlingen, Wernigerode

Explanation: points to a wooded area which had to be cleared of trees (in German this process is called roden) before anything could be built. These were mostly settlements dating from the 12th - 13th centuries.

-RUP see -DORF -SEE Meaning: lake

Examples: Titisee

Explanation: Town at a lake.

-SEN see -HAUS -STADT, -STEDT, -STATT, -STETTEN Meaning: town

Examples: Karlstadt, Hochstedt

Explanation: Signifies a town, but more the place than the buildings. This term has been in use since the earliest times of Germanic settlement.

-STUBEN, -KEMNAT, -GADEN, -KAM(M)ER Meaning: A heated room

Examples: Berchtesgaden

Explanation: This term dates only from the 13th century.

-TAL Meaning: valley

Examples: Wuppertal

Explanation: In a valley.

-TROP, -TRUP, -TERP see -DORF -WEDEL see -FURT -UM see -HEIM -WEILER, -WEIER, -WIHL, -WEIL, -WIL Meaning: country-house, farm

Examples: Appenweier, Rottweil, Oberwil

Explanation: This is the major non-German root used in the names of German settlements of the 7th - 9th centuries; the name comes from the Latin word villa. The form "-wil" is used in Switzerland.

-WIG, -WICH, -WICK, -WICKEDE, -WIECK, -WYK Meaning: house, also bay or trading place

Examples: Braunschweig, Greenwich, Osterwieck

Explanation: 9-11th century. Braunschweig means "Bruno's house".

**Sources**

* Bahlow, Dr. Hans, Deutschlands geographische Namenwelt (Baden-Baden: Suhrkamp, 1985)
* Helbok, Prof. Dr. Adolf, Die Ortsnamen im Deutschen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1944)

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**Namensgeschichte**, nicht Namensdeutung ist die Forderung an jeden seriösen Forscher. Hundertprozentige Sicherheit in der Erklärung jedes einzelnen Familiennamens ist das Ziel der Namensgeschichte. Das bedeutet, daß bei jedem Familiennamen zurückzustossen ist, bis man urkundliche Aufklärung über Herkunft, Bedeutung und die näheren Umstände der Familientaufe findet. Die **Urform** muß gefunden werden, nicht geraten!

Was die Zeit betrifft, so wird immer wieder übersehen, daß die große Masse unserer Familiennamen erst im 14. bis 16. Jahrhundert entstanden ist, in einer Zeit also, als vom altdeutschen Namensschatz, dessen Verfall sich im 10. bis 13. Jahrhundert vollzog, nur noch Reste im Gebrauch waren. Trotzdem werden die altdeutschen Namen immer wieder zur Erklärung der Familiennamen herangezogen. Doch nicht altdeutsche Namen aus heidnischen Zeiten, sondern die Heiligennamen der Kirche, damals hauptsächlich als Taufnamen benutzt, bilden in den verschiedensten, von den einzelnen Volkssprachen gemodelten Formen der Heiligenverehrung und Namensgebung, den überwiegenden Grundstock der Familiennamen.

Die Namensgebung nahm in den Städten ihren Anfang, der ländliche Raum folgte erst später nach. Der Anteil der Namen (der hebräischen, griechischen, römischen), die auf kirchliche Taufnamen und häufig auf eingedeutschte, mundartlich beeinflusste oder von fremdsprachiger Zunge geprägte Formen zurückgehen, wird als recht hoch anzunehmen sein. Mundartlich gesetzmässige Lautübergänge und Verballhornungen wieder wettzumachen, also eine schriftsprachliche Form herzustellen, war häufig das Bemühen der **Matrikenführer**, der **Herrschaftsbeamten** und **Schreiber**, das freilich mit meist untauglichen Mitteln, so daß falsche Verhochdeutschungen entstanden.

Als zur Zeit des Humanismus das Lateinische die Sprache der Gebildeten wurde, wurden die zweiten Fälle lateinischer Rufnamen zum Familiennamen, z.B. Jacobi, Nicolai.

Die Herkunftsnamen, Ortsnamen, Haus- und Hofnamen, manchmal unter Bildung der Nachsilbe "-er", sind auch recht häufig anzutreffen: der aus Wiesbaden abstammt, der Wiesbadener. Besonders deutlich: aus Eger, der Egerer.

**Literaturhinweis**

"Sudetendeutsche Familienforschung" der Vorkriegs- und Kriegsjahre. Als weiterführende Literatur, mit vielen hier nicht genannten Beispielen, sehr empfehlenswert. Die Zeitschrift "Sudetendeutsche Familienforschung" wurde von der Zentralstelle für Sudetendeutsche Familienforschung 1928-1939 in Aussig herausgegeben und ist über Fernleihe entlehnbar.

**Einzelne Familiennamen**

Eine Übersicht zu Artikeln zu einzelnen Familiennamen findet sich auf der [Kategorienseite Familiennamen](http://wiki-en.genealogy.net/w/index.php?title=Kategorie:Familienname&action=edit&redlink=1)

**Weblinks**

* Artikel zu Familiennamen in der "Welt": <http://wiki-de.genealogy.net/wiki/GenWiki-Aktionen/Artikel_über_Familiennamen_in_der_Zeitung_Welt>

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