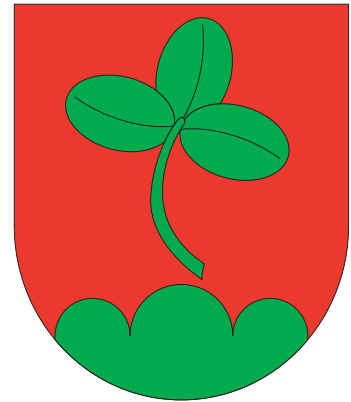


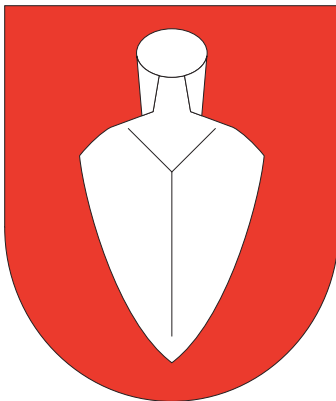
Merz in the northern and southern part of Aargau

by Peter Steiner

The Merz surname developed in a rather unusual way. Presumably it was derived from the name of the month of March (März). Several old Merz coats of arms corroborate this with cloverleaves or mushrooms that evoke memories of the regrowth of vegetation each spring. Why somebody would burden a person with the name of a month is difficult to determine. Nevertheless in this context the month of March is not alone. April became the surname Aprile in Tessin, and we find May in the former noble family May in the Ruedertal (originally Italian as well: Maggi).



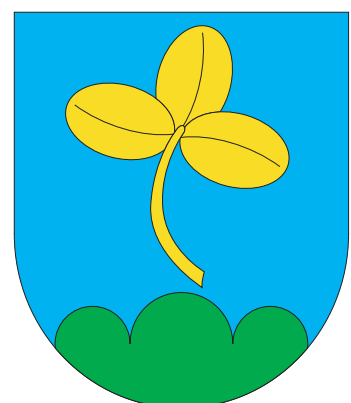
Coat of arms of the Merz from Menziken, variant a



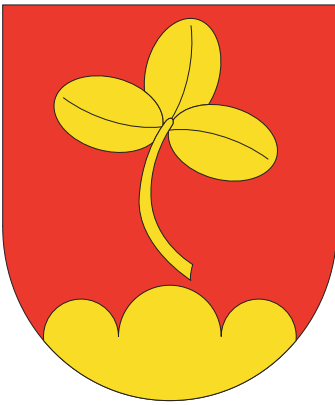
Coat of arms of the Merz from Menziken, variant b

One would assume that such a strange family name would be rare. But the name Merz is so widespread from the earliest times, that a common origin for current bearers of that name is improbable. It is therefore useless to search for the place of origin for all Merz families. Should it exist, one would have to delve deep into the Middle Ages, which would be impossible even for the most diligent genealogist.

The name Merz probably appeared in the 13th century in Zürich. The earliest known person with the springlike (i.e. resembling March) name was a certain Peter Mertz, a priest at Interlaken in 1339. Around the turn of the 14th to the 15th century the family was located in three different regions of Switzerland: in canton Freiburg, and in central and eastern Switzerland.



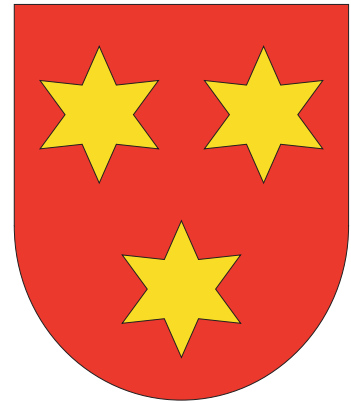
Coat of arms of the Merz from Beinwil



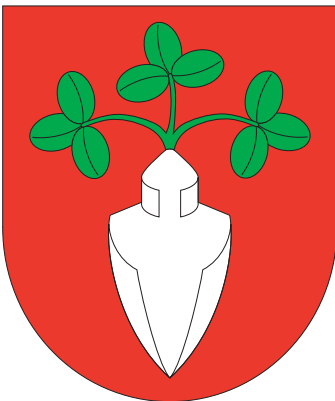
Coat of arms of the Merz from Reinach

Not quite as early, though by the 15th century, the name appears in Aargau. The oldest naming we know of comes from Beinwil am See. A Mertz of unknown given name, from this village appears in the Zinsrodel (tribute register) of the Beromünster Stift (collegiate chapter). He also owed, in addition to other yearly taxes, 16 fish - which shows him to have been a part-time fisherman.

Just three years later, in 1465, we encounter a «Uoli Mertz der fierer» in Reinach, according to the documents of the priesthood. The «Vierer» or «Viertmann» was a village official. It is unclear whether Uoli lived in Reinach or in Menziken, since the villages comprised a single community until 1572. Ultimately the family firmly established itself in Menziken around 1530.



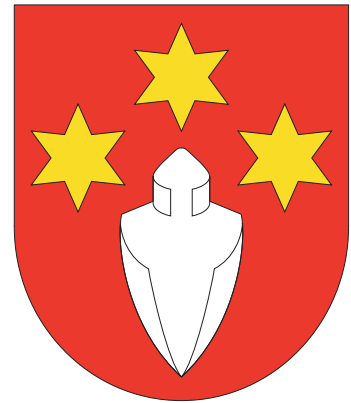
Coat of arms of the Merz from Bözberg



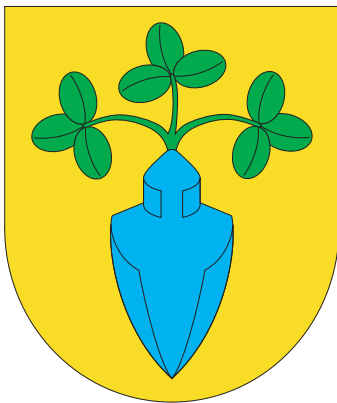
Coat of arms of the Merz from Zeinigen

The Merz families in the Seetal and in the Oberwylental were undoubtedly immigrants. Where they came from, however, can no longer be established. Some people in Menziken believed their origin was in canton Appenzell, but there is no documentation to support the theory.

In the early 16th century, a second «Merz area» was developing in the Aargau in the region around Fricktal-Bözberg. The families there may have come from southern Germany. The Fricktal was still Austrian then, while the Bözberg already belonged to the Swiss Confederation (Bernese Aargau). In the northern part of the current canton various Merz families resided in Rheinfelden, Zeiningen and Bözberg. Whether and how all of the families were related to one another, and particularly whether the Merz in the northern and southern Aargau were related, is not yet known.



Coat of arms of the Merz from Leimbach



Coat of arms of the Merz from Unterbözberg

Additionally, the Merz from Menziken spread out to Reinach, to Burg (disappeared today), and from Beinwil to Leimbach. As ever, the family is most strongly represented in Menziken. In the northern part of the canton, Merz families still reside in Zeiningen. The family no longer resides in the Bözberg; however, there are still family members outside Bözberg, some being citizens of Oberbözberg and some of Unterbözberg.

Bibliography

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