

Origin of the Morkel Name

I found three versions for the origin of the Morkel name. Of the different explanations for the origin of the Morkel name, I find the third one the more convincing.

St Mauritius

According to the historians who assisted P.W. Morkel with the history and family tree for the family, the origin of the Morkel name can be traced back to a medieval Saint named Mauritius. This was shortened to St. Maurus, while the German version Moritz was also varied to Maritz. Maurus developed a nickname Moro, and this in turn evolved a diminutive in old German Morico which became Mörike. Another version of the diminutive was Morilo, which became Morkel and in German Mörkel. (*P.W. Morkel 1961. Frontispiece to The Morkels. Family History*).

Mushrooms

Carsten Morkel of Pohlgöns in Germany (see *Searching for Philip Morkel in 17th Century Germany*) felt that the name came from the Morel mushroom (in German: Morchel, and in Danish: Morkel). Thus the family were mushroom gatherers (Pilzsammler). The Morel is a gourmet mushroom with its head a characteristic brain coral like appearance. Family members have been amused to find photos of Morel mushrooms which were more phallic in shape than brains.



Morel Mushrooms (*Morchella Esculenta*)
Source: Jordan and Wheeler 1995, p84.

Markwart

In my search for the German Morkels I came across an article (*Melchior 1982. Butzbacher Familien: Marckel*) about the family in Butzbach going back to 1383, based on taxation records. The name apparently started out as Markwart or Markholt. This could be translated as keeper or warden of the market although the German for market is markt, not mark. It then changed to Markel and Marckel. The article (more in *Searching for Philip Morkel in 17th Century Germany*) shows a family tree where in 1535 the name is spelled 'Morkel' for the first time – for Emmerich Morkel, the younger (?) mayor (jüngerer burgermeister) of Butzbach. His descendants were either Morckel or Morkel, with the latter used consistently in the Butzbach church books from 1651 on.

Emmerich had a “house-mark” (hausmark) which was used in early European societies as a form of a brand.



House -mark (Hausmark) 1535 of Emmerich Morkel
Source: Melchior 1982.

A Note On House-marks.

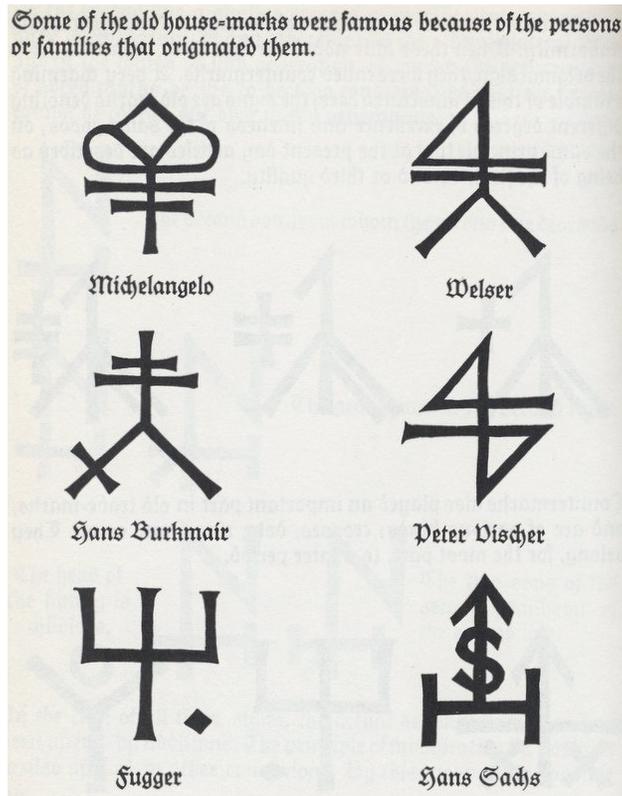
A book by Rudolf Koch (1955) on signs used in medieval times in Germany and Europe has a section on house-marks. They were at first, private signs of peasant proprietors, and their use was originally confined to their holdings, with all movable property distinguished by the holdings-mark.

The holdings-mark was displayed:

- By being punched into floated timber for sorting out at the end of the run;
- By being snipped into the ears of domestic animals and the feet of web footed animals;
- By being clipped into the coats of horses;
- By being painted in sacks and on the fleeces of sheep;
- By being cut into the upper bills of swans;
- By being ploughed into the surface of fields;
- By being carved on trees and on stocks for drawing lots;
- By being embroidered on rugs and cloths;
- By being punched or branded into the iron or wooden parts of agricultural implements;
- By being branded into the hides and horns of domestic animals.

At a later date house-marks came to be used as personal signs, and often underwent modifications at the hands of different members of the family. Later they were used as trade-marks and the marks of craftsmen and artists. The simplest signs were made up of notches and straight lines arranged in crosses of various

shapes. Curves were used much later, and presupposes a different method from that of carving and snipping, more in the nature of painting or printing.



Some famous names with house-marks

Source: Rudolf Koch 1955. p90.

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Sources

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Koch, Rudolf 1955. *The Book of Signs*. New York Dover Publications.

Melchior, Erich 1982 – 1983. “Butzbacher Familien: Marckel (Markel und Morckel)”. *Hessische Familienkunde Band* 16, 1982 – 1983, pp 252 – 256.

Morkel, Philip William 1961. *The Morkels. Family History and Family Tree*. Cape Town. Published Privately.