

Family Names with the Root *-meijer* in the Dutch-speaking Area

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The geography of family names in the Netherlands

The Brenninkmeijer family comes from Mettingen in Germany, but in the nineteenth century brothers Clemens and August Brenninkmeijer travelled around the Netherlands as itinerant traders, before founding the company C&A Brenninkmeijer in Sneek in 1841. Their family name was not unusual in their new home: in the Dutch-speaking area, there are numerous family names that go back to the appellative *meier*. With the aid of maps showing the distribution of present-day Dutch and Flemish surnames, in this essay I will look at the orthographic and morphosyntactic variation of *Meijer* names, and illustrate the lexical variation in *-meijer* compounds in the east of the Netherlands.

The geography of family names is a linguistic discipline whose key aim is to record variations of family names, both in their geographical distribution and with regard to structures that have evolved over time. The variable maps compiled by myself show contrasting types of family names in the Dutch-speaking area and are based on a complete list of family names from the Belgian and Dutch population registers of 2007.¹ These are the same data used for the websites on which users can map the geographical distribution of individual family names in Belgium and the Netherlands.² With the aid of the software for mapping name variants, both a relative and an absolute distribution can be visually represented by means of circle symbols of varying size and colour, following the format used in the *Deutscher Familiennamenatlas* (Atlas of German Surnames).³ A representation showing relative frequencies, which allow the pronounced regional differences to become visible, was chosen for all the maps in this essay. The lower limit for the data query was five name bearers per municipality.

Geographical variation in the case of family names containing the root *-meijer*

The geographical variation of family names characterising the Dutch-speaking area is illustrated in the example of names ending in *-meijer*.

Orthographic variation

While the national border between Belgium and the Netherlands does not, generally speaking, mark a geographical boundary for names, it forms a clear barrier when it comes to the spelling of family names.

Map 1 brings together all the simplexes of the family names containing the lexeme *meier*: *De Meijer*, *Meijer*, *Meijers*, *Smeijers* and *Meire*.

The Middle Dutch word *meier* was borrowed from the Latin *māiōr* (= the greater, the higher-ranking), whereby the diphthong *ai* was adopted into Middle Dutch as *ei*.⁴

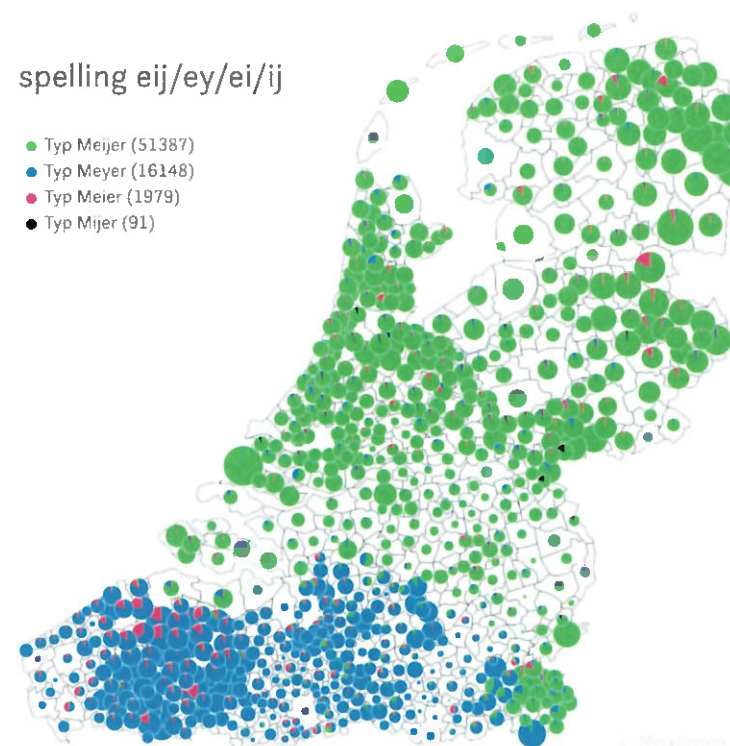
In terms of spelling, we can identify four types, which are represented by the following tokens (specific names):

- 1) *Meijer* type (in total 51,387 name bearers)
 Tokens: *Meijer* (38,723), *Meijers* (4,998), *Meijerink* (3,536),
Meijering (1,534), *de Meijer* (1,104), *Smeijers* (335),
Meijerman (335), *Meijeringh* (198), *Demeijer* (124),
de Meijere (115), *Meijrink* (86), *Smeijer* (66), *De Meijer* (53),
Meijer van Putten (47), *Meijer zu Schlochtern* (25),
Meijerse (24), *Meijer Drees* (18), *Meijring* (16),
Demeijere (16), *Meijer Timmerman Thijssen* (15),
Meijer Swantee (11), *Meijer Cluwen* (8)
- 2) *Meyer* type (in total 16,148 name bearers)
 Tokens: *De Meyer* (6,273), *Meyer* (2,142), *Meyers* (1,836),
Demeyere (1,747), *Demeyer* (1,660), *Smeyers* (1,487),
De Meyere (700), *de Meyer* (165), *Meyermans* (42), *de Meyere* (22),
Meyerink (22), *Meyering* (18), *De meyer* (11), *Meyer Horn* (8),
Demeyere Dekeyser (5), *Demeyre* (5), *Meyer Viol* (5)
- 3) *Meier* type (in total 1,979 name bearers)
 Tokens: *Meier* (977), *Meire* (803), *Demeire* (112), *Smeier* (46),
Meiers (20), *Meier Mattern* (14), *Meier Nolte* (7)
- 4) *Mijer* type (in total 91 name bearers)
 Tokens: *Mijer* (48), *Smijers* (36), *Mijers* (7)

Map 1 reveals a marked divide between the spelling with *ey* in Flanders and that with *eij* in the Netherlands. Although Matthijs Siegenbeek, the author of the first officially recognized set of spelling rules for Dutch, recommended distinguishing the spelling of the diphthong *ei* from the spelling of the diphthongised *ij* (from the West Germanic *i*),⁵ the root *-meier* in family names in the Netherlands is almost always written with *eij*. The variant with *ei* in West Flanders concerns the syncopated variant *Meire*. The rare *Mijer* type is

documented a few times in Twente.

The reason for the pronounced orthographic difference between Flanders and the Netherlands lies with administrative measures implemented in their respective past. In Flanders, the way in which surnames were written was fixed in as early as 1795, but never adapted to orthography. As a result, Flemish family names have preserved many regionalisms, as witnessed by the typically Flemish forms *De Backer*, *Cuypers*, *Claes*, *Vandenbergh*e and *Vandenbossche*. In the Netherlands, family names were only officially laid down in 1811, in other words after the publication of the Siegenbeek spelling (1804) and taking this latter as their basis. Most variants in the Netherlands consequently conform in their writing to orthography, for example *Bakker*, *Kuiper*, *Klaas*, *Van den Berg* and *Van den Bos*.⁶



MAP 1 Spelling of the diphthong in family names with *-meier*.

Morphosyntactic variation

The morphosyntactic structure of the family names also exhibits structural geographical variations, which are found in all categories of family name.

The Dutch language offers three ways of creating family names out of appellative professional designations:

- 1) By juxtaposition: in other words, the professional designation is placed in coordinating fashion directly after the forename, for example *Jan Dekker, Piet Meijer*.
- 2) By preceding the professional designation with the definite article *de* (nominative), for example *Jan De Dekker, Piet De Meyer*, or the accusative *den*, for example *Jan Den Dekker*.
- 3) By genitivising the professional designation either with the ending *-s* (strong declension) or *-en* (weak declension), for example *Jan Deckers, Peter Winnen*, or with an initial and final genitive morpheme, for example *Piet Smeijers*.

Map 2, showing the distribution of the morphosyntactic types of the professional designation *meier*, reveals that the Dutch-speaking area is broadly divided into three.

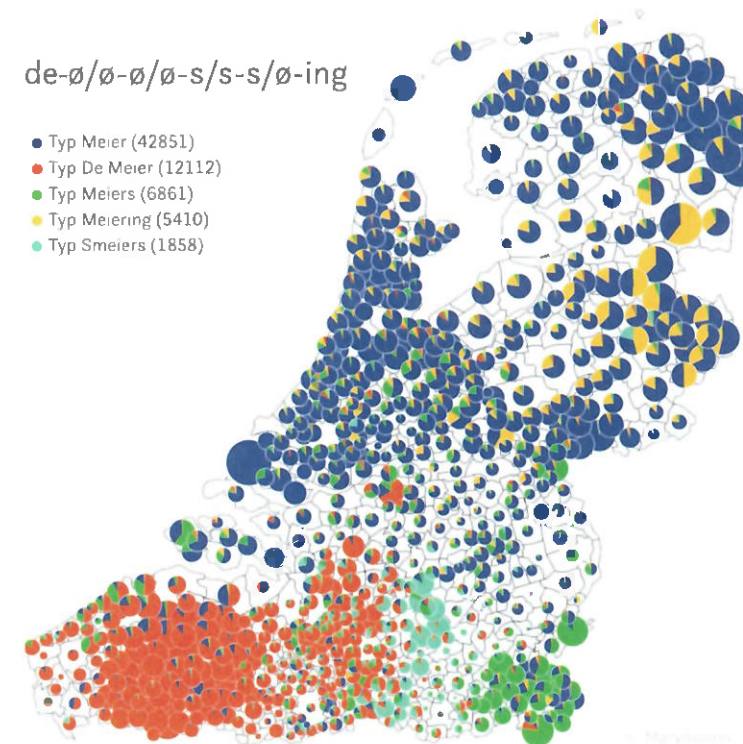
The *Meier* type, i. e. the nominative type without an article, dominates the northern half. The *De Meier* type, with the preceding definite article, is clustered in the southwest. In the southeast of the language region, this professional designation is generally in the genitive: the *Meiers* type and *Smeijers* type. Forming a striking subcategory within this genitive type are names with both affixed and suffixed genitive morphemes, such as *Smeijers* (= of the steward), *Smulders* (= of the miller), *Spaepen* (= of the priest/parson). The initial *s*, retained up to today in front of *m, p, w, l* and *g* and in front of vowels, is a remainder of the genitive article, as also preserved in the Dutch phrases *'s avonds* (in the evening) and *'s ochtends* (in the morning), used when telling the time.⁸ In the nominative area preceded by the definite article, the area with both prefixed and suffixed genitive can be demarcated from the area with the suffixed genitive.

Map 2 also shows a fifth morphosyntactic type, namely the derivation with the suffix *-ing* or *-ink*: the *Meiring* type. Formations with *-ing* are concentrated in the northeast provinces of Groningen, Drenthe and Overijssel. The *-ing* forms increase in number the closer we get to the border with Germany. The suffix *-ing* expresses belonging to a person (for example in the professional designations *Meijering* and *Bekkering* and in the patronyms *Wesseling* and *Hidding*), or to a place of residence (for example *Bekink, Bruggink, Brugging, Dijkink, Heuvelink, Schurink, Velding* and *Veldink*). Such *-ing* names were already in common use in the Middle Ages

as the names of farms. Over the course of time, the name of the manor was transferred to its inhabitant and thus evolved into a family name.⁹

Map 3 documents the phonological variation of the suffix in the types *Meiring/Meierink* and represents the distribution of the type with the suffix *-man(s)*.

A geographical difference is apparent between the voiced variant *Meijering*, which is found above all in Groningen and Drenthe, and the unvoiced variant *Meijerink*, which is located chiefly in Overijssel and East Gelderland. The *-ink* suffix in the Netherlands was adopted from Westphalia. The formation of farmstead names with *-ing/-inge* was common both in the east of the Netherlands and in Westphalia. The apocopation of *-inge* to *-ing* reached Drenthe later than Overijssel and Gelderland. In Westphalia the suffix *-inge* was replaced even before 1300 by the apocopated unvoiced *-ink* form. This Westphalian innovation migrated around that date to the

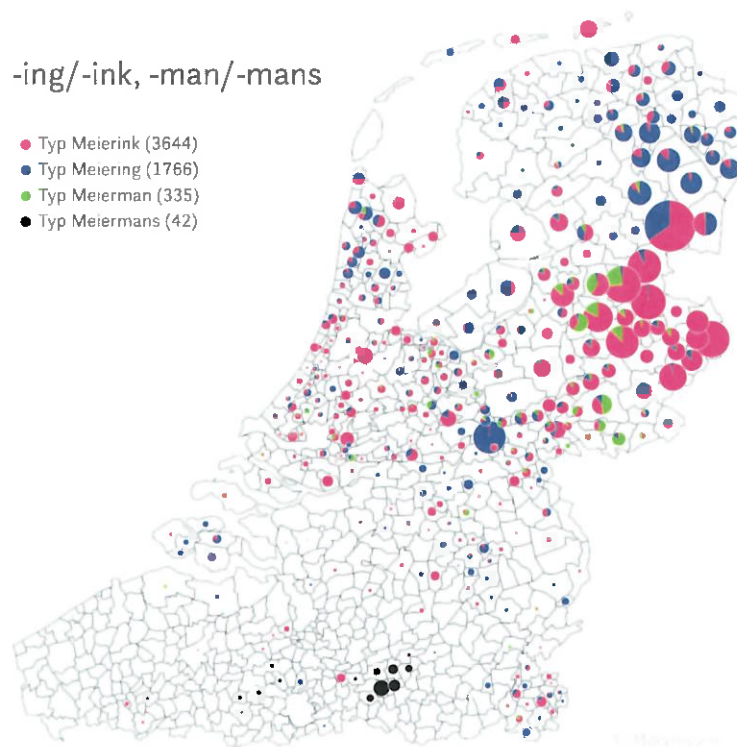


MAP 2 Morphosyntactic variation in the professional designation *Meier*.

eastern parts of Gelderland and Overijssel.¹⁰

The *Meierman* type with the *-man* suffix makes its appearance on the western edge of the *-ink* area. The less common variant with the *-s* genitivation, i.e. the *Meermans* type, is found sporadically in the south-eastern genitive area.

In summary: the distribution of the morphosyntactic types of the professional name *Meier* is characterised both by a west–east divide (nominative versus genitive) and by a north–south divide (juxtaposed family names versus family names with article). Moreover, the type suffixed with *-ing/-ink* is found in the northeast of the Netherlands, in particular in the area bordering Westphalia and Lower Saxony. We are looking here at historical dividing lines within the Dutch linguistic landscape.



MAP 3 Suffix variation:
-ing/-ink, -man/-mans.

Compounds with *-meijer*: a north-eastern phenomenon

While the root *-meijer* as a simplex in family names is widespread across the whole Dutch language area and indeed represents one of the most frequent professional designations of them all (maps 2 and 3), compounds with *-meijer* as family names are an emphatically north-eastern phenomenon. In the material I have evaluated, there are more than 400 composite family names with the *-meijer* form as their second component. This spelling is characteristic of the Netherlands (map 1) and is found in fairly common as well as very common surnames such as *Nijmeijer* (2,490 bearers), *Niemeijer* (2,303), *Hofmeijer* (790), *Hagemeijer* (457), *Burgmeijer* (455), *Esmeijer* (409), *Daalmeijer* (298) etc. The highest concentrations of *-meijer* compounds are found in the northeast of the Netherlands, in particular in Overijssel and Gelderland, although in many cases migration to the Randstad Holland can also be observed.

The *Niemeijer/Nijmeijer* types

The most frequent form of *-meijer* compounds are family names with the adjective *nieuw* (= ‘new’) as their first element. The standard Dutch adjective *nieuw* appears in the Low Saxon dialects either as *nie* (with a long vowel) or as *nij* (with diphthongised vowel). The *Niemeijer* surname type is found above all in the provinces of Groningen and North Drenthe, but cedes its place in South Drenthe and Overijssel to the *Nijmeijer* type (map 4).

In Germany, the Low German *Niemeier* type in Lower Saxony (greatest density in Osnabrück) and in northeast Westphalia (greatest density in Herford) contrasts with the *Neumeier* type in the south of Germany.¹¹ The German and the Dutch *Niemeier* vowel types thus only partly lie geographically side by side.

The meaning and distribution of compounds with *-meijer*

The names *Niemeijer* and *Nijmeijer* were given to a new *Meyer*, in other words the new steward or tenant of a farm. The high prevalence of these variants indicates that, just as in Westphalia,¹² the increase in two-part surnames containing *-meijer* in the Netherlands probably went hand in hand with a change in meaning of the Middle Dutch word *meyer*. As the steward of a manor and as tithe collector, the *meyer* originally supervised the management of properties on behalf of the landlord and exercised limited jurisdiction in the latter’s name. From the late Middle Ages onwards, however, the designation *meyer* was also applied to free peasants as tenants of farms.¹³

Although I do not have historical evidence to prove this clearly and unambiguously, the evolution of the meaning of the Middle Dutch *meyer* – from designating an administrative official to describing a person who ran or leased a farm – can be inferred from the nature of the first component of contemporary Dutch compounds with *-meijer*.

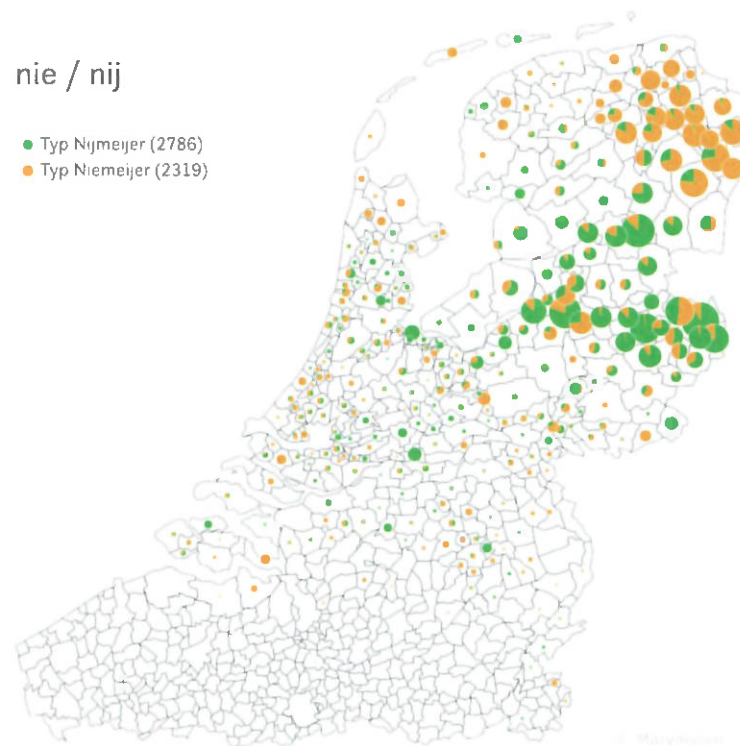
The *meyer* as administrative official appears in *-meijer* compounds such as (*Klein*) *Hofmeijer*, *Amptmeijer*, *Burgmeijer* and *Kerkmeijer* (map 5).

The types (*Klein*) *Hofmeijer* and *Amptmeijer* are found above all in Overijssel. The meaning of the name *Amptmeijer* speaks for itself. The compound *hofmeier* is equated in the Middle Dutch dictionary with *hofmeester*, that is to say the representative of the landlord.¹⁴ The name *Hofmeier* could also be transferred to a farm, however, as evidenced by the family name *Klein Hofmeijer*. As already mentioned, in the northeast of the Netherlands, just as in Westphalia, people were frequently called after the farm on which they lived. One example is the family name *Wassink*. If a farm had to be divided up, the

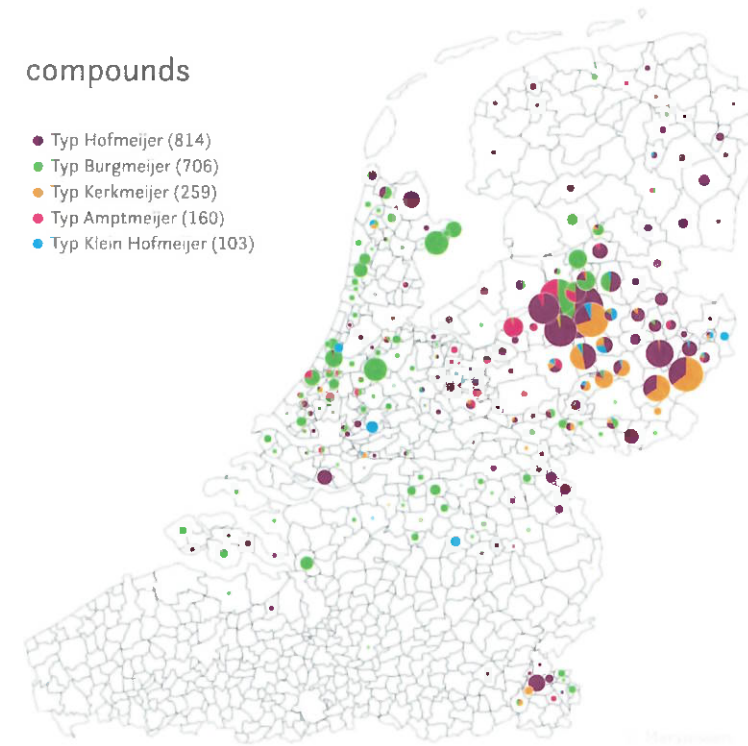
two eponymous halves could subsequently be distinguished from one another by the addition of the quantifying adjectives Little and Great, as in the case of *Klein Wassink* and *Groot Wassink*, for example. Farm names with *Klein* and *Groot* as family names – for example *Groot Jebbink*, *Groot Koerkamp/Klein(e) Koerkamp*, *Groot Kormelink*, *Groot Obbink/Klein Obbink* etc. – are found above all in the regions of Twente and Achterhoek bordering Westphalia. The Dutch type with *Groot/Klein* + farm name ending in *-ink* continues directly in Westphalia, for example *Große-Onnebrink/Kleine-Onnebrink*.¹⁵ Klaas Hanzen Heeroma explains it as a “Westphalian expansion”.¹⁶

The types *Burgmeijer* and *Kerkmeijer* designate the managers of the properties belonging to a castle or a church respectively. The name *Kerkmeijer* is concentrated in Twente, while the Overijssel name *Burgmeijer* has also migrated to North and South Holland.

The inventory I have compiled of names with *-meijer* compounds also contains many types that hark back to *meijer* as farmers. A few examples



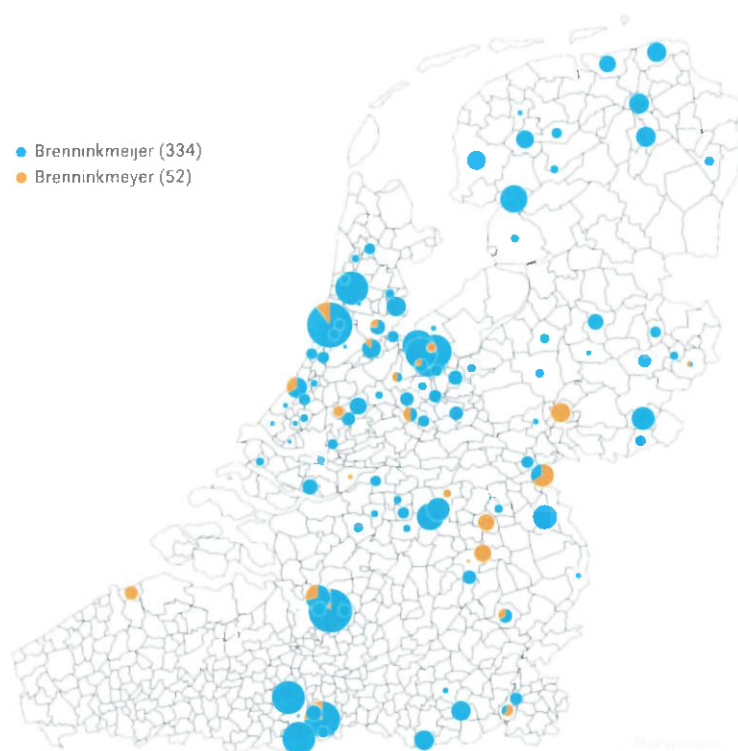
MAP 4 The Niemeijer / Nijmeijer types.



MAP 5 Compounds with *-meijer*.

of *-meijer* surnames containing, as their first component, terms describing farmland and its properties are *Hagemeijer* (= “hedge”), *Veltmeijer* (= “field”), *Daalmeijer* (= “valley”), *Broekmeijer* (= “fen”), *Rietmeijer* (= “reed”). Leopold Schütte’s classification of the first components of East Westphalian compounds with *-meier*¹⁷ is also applicable to family names in the northeast of the Netherlands, as the following examples show:¹⁸

- 1) Orienting first components: *Oostmeijer*, *Mittelmeijer*, *Oostermeijer*, *Mittmeijer*, *Westmeijer*, *Homeijer*, *Nedermeijer*
- 2) Quantifying first components: *Langemeijer*, *Grootmeijer*, *Kleinmeijer*, *Bredemeijer*
- 3) First components describing functions: *Borgmeijer*, *Amptmeijer*, *Kerkmeijer*, *Scholtmeijer*



MAP 6 Distribution of the family names *Brenninkmeijer* and *Brenninkmeyer*.

- 4) High and late medieval personal names: *Theijsmeijer*, *Dirksmeier*, *Leidelmeijer*
- 5) Descriptions of farmland, location and features: *Steenmeijer*, *Dijkmeijer*, *Bergmeijer*, *Plasmeijer*, *Koelemijer*, *Kampmeijer*, *Hoekemeijer*, *Brinkmeijer*, *Stegmeijer*, *Straatmeier*

According to Jan M. Spindel, many first components of *-meijer* names may be considered ambiguous: he cites numerous competing meanings with personal names. These latter nevertheless make up the less common category as first components in Dutch. As in the Tecklenburger Land,¹⁹ the fifth category is most strongly represented in the east of the Netherlands: the majority of the first components of Dutch *-meijer* compounds refer to landscape features and point to the origin of the name’s bearer from a specific farm, whose name was transferred to its inhabitant.

This is also the case with the *Brenninkmeijer* family, which originally came from the *Brenninkhof* farm in Wiehe, not far from Mettingen, but which is now dispersed around the world owing to generations of successful trading activity. Map 6 shows the distribution of the family names *Brenninkmeijer* and *Brenninkmeyer* in the Netherlands and Flanders. The highest concentrations are found in the economic centres of the Dutch language area: in Randstad Holland and around Antwerp and Brussels in Flanders. The documentary evidence of *Brenninkmeijer* in Flanders points to migration, however, since the *-meijer* spelling does not originate from Flanders. The key to the explanation of the *Brenninkmeijer* family name lies not least in Mettingen, the German home of this family of traders and retailers.

1 My thanks go to Leendert Brouwer at the Centraal Bureau voor Genealogie, The Hague, and Dr Gerrit Bloothoofd at the Meertens-Instituut, Amsterdam, and the University of Utrecht, for placing the Dutch material at my disposal.
2 Here <https://familienaam.be> and <https://cbgfamilienamen.nl/nfb/> (accessed 4 May 2019).
3 Kunze/Nübling 2009.
4 Lemma *meier* in *Middelnederlandsch*

Woordenboek, here gtb.inl.nl (accessed 2 May 2019).
5 Siegenbeek 1804, pp. 137–38.
6 Marynissen/Nübling 2010, p. 317.
7 *Ibid.*, pp. 328ff.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 331.
9 Ebeling 1993, p. 130.
10 Heeroma 1968, pp. 14f.
11 Kunze/Nübling 2009, vol. 1, map 163: *Neumeier/Niemeier*.
12 See the essay by Christof Spannhoff in this volume, pp. 71–92.
13 Kroiss/Drenda n. d.

14 Lemma *hofmeier* in: *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek*, here gtb.inl.nl (accessed 2 May 2019).
15 Marynissen/Nübling 2010, pp. 341ff.
16 Heeroma 1968, pp. 14f.
17 Schütte 1995a, p. 211.
18 The meaning of the *-meijer* compounds listed here was adopted from Spindel 2001.
19 See the essay by Christof Spannhoff in this volume, pp. 71–92.

BRENNINKMEYER,
LANGEMEYER, TASSEMEIER

Estate and Family Names Ending in
-meier in the Tecklenburger Land

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