Dictionary of German Names. By Hans Bahlow. Translated by Edda Gentry. Madison, Wisconsin: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, University of Wisconsin, 1993. Pp. xxxix - 641.

Henry Geitz, editor of several translations of the Max Kade Institute, states that the intent of Gentry's translation of Hans Bahlow's German Names (hereafter referred to as GN) is to aid American-Germans in their ". . . new and widespread interest in genealogy. . . . Now those who cannot read German can inform themselves as to the meanings and origins of their own family names and those of friends and neighbors" (v).

Any American-Germans familiar with the Encyclopedia of German-American Genealogical Research will notice GN listed as one of five ". . . [important] lists which may contain a surname of interest to the genealogical researcher" (Smith & Smith 1976, 92). Within that context GN will most likely be of aid to its intended audience. Smith and Smith, however, do not give GN the same strong endorsement that they do three of the other five German language texts, saying only: "This handy book [GN] can also be obtained as a paperback . . . ." (93).

As a list of names, GN does indeed supplement existing English language lists. In the entries for names that begin with Haa-, for example, GN shares eight entries with German names found in Hanks and Hodges' A Dictionary of Surnames (HH), while adding twenty-six new entries. (HH has three entries that GN does not.)

Leaving the evaluation of GN's contributions, however, to American-German genealogists, onomastics scholars will discover that

the English translation of GN displays excellent translation skills. The content, moreover, validates existing scholarship already available in English.

Two different scholars participate in the translation. Eddy Gentry translates the dictionary itself. Her name appears on the book cover. Her deft handling of the cumbersome prose of Bahlow makes the reading easier, without destroying any of Bahlow's tight scholarship.

Bahlow's entry for **Hitler**, for example, uses old German script for -ss-, but reads:

> **Hiss,** *Hiess s. Heiss! –* **Hitler** *(Ö) s. Hiedler (mit*
>
> *Vorbehalt)! Vgl. Hüttler (wie Hüttner:Hittner).*

Gentry keeps the old German script for the -ss-, but separates this entry into two entries and allows the English to flow:

> **Hiss,** *Hiess see Heiss.*
>
> **Hitler** *(Aust.) see Hiedler (questionable). CF. Hüttler*
>
> *(like Hüttner: Hittner).*

Peter Erspamer translates the Bahlow's Forward and Author's Introduction. The translation deserves more than one reading. The English is hard to read, but the ideas worth considering.

Unlike Gentry, Erspamer has chosen to be strictly faithful to Bahlow's German syntax and pedantic vocabulary. Few sentences have less than five or six clauses and they include rather obscure English words such as *predominated*, instead of *dominated*; *burgher class* instead of *urban class* or *bourgeois*; and *immanent* instead of *inherent*.

Bahlow believes that the German language has, in addition to

the expected High German and Low German split, a third dialect, Middle German. That Middle German argument makes the close reading potentially rewarding to scholars. In addition, Bahlow mixes the usual onomastic explanations of surname origins (expanded personal names, places of residence, occupation, and personal attributes) with a fine-tuned synopsis of ways in which these origins differed in specific High German, Middle German, and Low German localities. That's the good news.

The bad news is that the mixture of origin types and geography defies any coherence or order. True, he divides the Introduction into a title-less opening three pages; a nine-page Geographical Portrait of Family Names; two one-page sections on Occupational (Sur)Names; and a three-page Names of Origin. But the divisions make no sense. He discusses occupational names, for example, in the Geographical Portrait section. The real stumbling block, however, lies in Bahlow's inconsistent use of dialect terms and geographic terms. That inconsistency causes the need for close concentration. Sometimes East German means language and sometimes geography, not only on the same page but within the same paragraph (xxiv). Sometimes geography receives the term South (or North or Middle) Germany, at other times the South (or North or Middle) German "area." Then, at times, terms like Lower Rhine (xxiv) defiantly remain ambiguous. Most frustrating of all is Bahlow's use of Central German, at times, for his favorite contribution: Middle German.

To their credit, the editors of GN tried to make the most of

a difficult situation. They added three maps: one of Germany,
Austria and Switzerland 1918-1933, one of 1930s German dialects,
and one of Bahlow's unique Middle High German Literary Dialects.
The editors also completed Bahlow's extensive bibliography entries;
Bahlow often lists only a scholar's name, GN includes all names,
titles, publishers, and dates. Onomastic scholars interested in
pursuing the Middle German argument have plenty of sources. GN also
has added 16 entries to the "Other Sources" bibliography.

As mentioned earlier, Gentry's translation elicits a
translator's (see Brannen and Baird 1973) admiration . She has added
over 60 abbreviations (while eliminating a half dozen of Bahlow's.)
 The additions certainly make the reading flow, while eliminating
much ambiguity. As the Hitler example above shows, she liberally
separates many of Bahlow's truncated entries. She also indicates,
with an asterisk (*), where German-specific puns or literary
references have been omitted and, with square brackets, where she
has added translations of references deemed unnecessary by Bahlow
in the German edition. She also adds, to this reviewer's needs at
least, excellent notes of clarification, such as in the entry **Menge**
". . . Schar [meaning 'group of people', which is also one meaning
of Menge]."

This new list of names, however, still must relate to other
English language lists. I arbitrarily, parochially, and
capriciously chose ten prominent Texas German names for comparison.
 I somewhat more responsibly chose Smith's 1956 New Dictionary of

American Family Names (S), HH (1988), and Jones's 1990

German-American Names (J),for comparison texts.

      In summary the comparison adds credence to the argument that GN supplements available research; GN certainly does not replace available research nor overshadow it. (See Figure 1: Comparison of Ten Texas German Names in Four Dictionaries)

Name	GN	HH	J	S
Herff	M1	0	0	0
Durst	M1	0	M1	M1
Nye	M1	M1	M1	0
Menger	M1	M1	M1	M1
Fuchs	M1	M1	M1, M2	M1, M2, M3
Walbeck	M1, M2	M1, M2, M3	M1	M1, M2
Gebhardt	M1	M1, M2, M3	M1	M1, M2
Kleberg	0	0	M1	0
Boos	0	0	M1	M1
Nimitz	0	M1	0	M1

Figure 1: Comparison of Ten Texas German Names in Four Dictionaries

             GN   Dictionary of German Names
             HH   Hanks and Hodges
             J   Jones

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S       Smith
0       No Entry
M1      Meaning #1
M2      Meaning #2
M3      Meaning #3
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As mentioned above in the discussion of Haa- entries, the GN list of 15,000 names does add to the English-language inventory of available German surnames. My Texas Ten list isolates another surname available only in the GN: **Herff**. Bahlow mentions that Herff means "swamp water"; Gentry adds some geographic explanation for those American-Germans unfamiliar with German topography.

Two Texas German names, **Durst** and **Nye**, GN shares with two of the three other English language lists. GN, S and J agree that Durst = a daredevil, or bold and daring man; GN, S and HH agree that Nye = the new person, the stranger. HH does not include Durst; J does not include Nye.

Three names GN shares with all of the other lists; **Menger**, **Fuchs**, **Walbeck**, and **Gebhardt**. All four lists claim that **Menger** refers to merchants or dealers in a number of various goods.

HH agrees with GN that **Fuchs** means *fox*. J agrees, but adds that it also means a person who dealt in furs, a *furrier*. S accepts fox and furrier and adds that the fox in question may be the sign of a fox over a tavern.

J says that **Walbeck** is a place name in Germany; the other two scholars, HH and S, agree with GN that Walbeck not only comes from a place name in Germany but that place name meant *swampy stretch of water*. HH adds that several geographic locations in Germany used

this place name.

GN finds agreement with the other lists that **Gebhardt**, a military term, refers to a strong and brave person. S also claims that Gebhardt may refer to a kind and generous person; HH claim that a saint of the name Gebhardt popularized the combination of strong/brave and kind/generous.

GN, however, would disappoint any scholars researching three of our famous Texas Germans; Missing in GN are **Kleberg**, **Boos**, and **Nimitz**. Admittedly, the names do present problems to the other scholars, but among the other three list answers have been found that GN misses.

Only J recognizes Kleberg. J claims that Kleberg refers to *Clover Mountain*, a city name.

HH joins GN in overlooking Boos; J and S, however, both claim that Boos, an attributive name, refers to a wicked, evil, and angry man.

GN appears most vulnerable, however, with the name Nimitz. Neither Bahlow nor GN mention the name. Nor does J. S and HH, however, convincingly argue that Nimitz, originating in Russian, refers to all foreigners--especially Germans--as Nemchin (German NIMITZ), meaning "the one who cannot speak; the mute."

As for an overview of the book, small stylistic conventions require getting used to, such as the use of American spelling but the use of British single quotes (') and placing periods and commas outside, not inside, the quotes. The editors' introduction,

however, does put the book into their perspective and does give easy explanations on how to use Gentry's translation.

My only uneasiness with the translation lies in the omission of Bahlow's dedication. So I pass the information on: He dedicated the book to his beloved wife Ursula Stahl Bahlow.

Every summer my East Texas State colleague Fred Tarpley and I sponsor a Family Names Heritage Booth at the four-day Texas Folklife Festival. I have already requested our university library to purchase a copy of GN, because I anticipate a heavy dependence upon it at the Festival. Our booth's thirty workers will enjoy being able to read Bahlow themselves, not wait for me or other (novice) German readers. The numerous Texas-Germans visitors to the Festival will appreciate reading, in English, that, yes indeed, their friend **Kuharsch's** name does mean *cow's ass* and, yes, **Zumpf** does indeed mean *penis*. Their name, **Hildebrand**, however, originated in a German saga. Even after all this scholarship a bit of mystery remains.

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