

SYNOPSIS: *A HISTORY OF THE NAMES OF COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES*

The names of the countries and peoples of Europe, Africa, and Asia did not fall out of the sky, but are products of our history. They were “invented” thousands of years ago by the pre-Indo-European inhabitants of the Old World; not savages, but civilized human beings to whom our historiography has traditionally paid all too little attention. These names had a specific meaning in the “substrate languages” of old, such as Old Egyptian and Etruscan, and it is indeed often, though certainly not always, possible to unlock their etymological secrets. Here are a handful of examples: “Europe” and “Italy” both mean “land of the setting sun”; “Asia” is nothing other than “land of the rising sun”; and “Iberia,” “Britain,” and “Brittany” signify “land surrounded by water.”

In the course of the second millennium BC, the speakers of Indo-European languages appeared on the scene, a group to which the Greeks and Romans belonged. They gradually displaced or assimilated the indigenous population, yet they frequently adopted the existing names of lands, settlements, rivers, mountains, and other features of the landscape, even though they usually had no idea of their meanings. (In this case the Greco-Romans typically conjured up tales of eponymous or “name-giving” heroes, such as Byzas and Romulus, mythical founders of Byzantium and Rome.) Of course the Indo-Europeans also invented names of their own, for example within the context of international trade, colonisations, and wars of conquest waged by the likes of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. After the fall of the Roman Empire, new names continued to be disseminated generously, this time by Germanic Barbarians, Arabs, and Vikings.

In conventional historical, geographic and linguistic studies, the origins of names have generally been ignored. To be sure, a handful of “onomastic” dictionaries have been published in some languages, but there is at present not a single study like this one, in which not only the etymology but also the history of the origins of the names of countries and peoples – and of cities, mountains, and rivers – are expounded clearly and systematically. In addition, this study takes into account some recent historiographic developments, such as the fascinating “Sahara Hypothesis,” as well as the revolutionary palaeo-linguistic research, of Giovanni Semerano, the great Italian expert in Akkadian and other ancient languages. *The result is a book that not only unveils the secrets of the*

names of countries and peoples, but also offers an entirely new view of pre- and proto-history and Antiquity. It was written for the benefit of the general public, but will undoubtedly also arouse the interest of specialists in history, geography and linguistics.