

# **THE RIVER-NAMES OF EUROPE**

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The river-names of Europe by Robert Ferguson

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## PREFACE.

The object of the present work is to arrange and explain the names of European Rivers on a more comprehensive principle than has hitherto been attempted in England, or, to the best of my belief, in Germany.

I am conscious that, like every other work of the same sort, it must necessarily, and without thereby impugning its general system, be subject to correction in many points of detail. And in particular, that some of its opinions might be modified or altered by a more exact knowledge of the characteristics of the various rivers than can possibly in all cases come within the scope of individual research.

Among the writers to whom I am most indebted is Ernst Förstemann, who, in the second volume of his *Altdeutsches Namenbuch*, (the first consisting of the names of persons), has collected, explained, and where possible, identified, the ancient names of places in Germany. The dates affixed to most of the German rivers are taken from this work, and refer to the earliest mention of the name in charters or elsewhere.

I also refer here, because I find that I have not, as usual, given the titles elsewhere, to Mr. R. S. Charnock's "Local Etymology," and to the work of Gluck, entitled "Die bei C. Julius Cæsar vorkommende Keltische namen."

ROBERT FERGUSON.

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## CHAPTER I.

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### INTRODUCTION.

The first wave of Asian immigration that swept over Europe gave names to the great features of nature, such as the rivers, long before the wandering tribes that composed it settled down into fixed habitations, and gave names to their dwellings and their lands. The names thus given at the outset may be taken therefore to contain some of the most ancient forms of the Indo-European speech. And once given, they have in many, if not in most cases remained to the present day, for nothing affords such strong resistance to change as the name of a river. The smaller streams, variously called in England and Scotland brooks, becks, or burns, whose course extended but for a few miles, and whose shores were portioned out among but a few settlers, readily yielded up their

ancient names at the bidding of their new masters. But the river that flowed past, coming they knew not whence, and going they knew not whither—upon whose shores might be hundreds of settlers as well as themselves, and all as much entitled to give it a name as they—was naturally, as a matter of common convenience, allowed to retain its original appellation.

Nevertheless, it might happen that a river, such as the Danube, which runs more than a thousand miles as the crow flies—being divided between two great and perfectly distinct races, might, as it passed through the two different countries, be called by two different names. So we find that while in its upper part it was called the Danube, in its lower part it was known as the Ister—the former, says Zeuss (*Die Deutschen*), being its Celtic, and the latter its Thracian name. So the Saone also was anciently known both as the Arar and the Sauconna—the latter, according to Zeuss, being its



Celtic name. And Latham, (*Tacitus, Germania,*) makes a similar suggestion respecting the Rhine—"It is not likely that the Batavians of Holland, and the Helvetians of Switzerland, gave the same name to the very different parts of their common river." It does not follow then as a matter of course—though we must accept it as the general rule—that the name by which a river is known at the present day, when it happens to be different from that recorded in history, is in all cases the less ancient of the two. There might originally have been two names, one of which has been preserved in history, and the other retained in modern use.

It is also to be observed, that in the case of one race coming after another—say Germans or Slaves after Celts—while the newcomers retained the old names, they yet often added a word of their own signifying water or river. The result is that many names are compounded of two words of different languages, and in not a few cases both signifying water.

The names thus given at the outset were of the utmost simplicity, rarely, if ever, containing a compound idea. They were indeed for the most part simple appellatives, being most commonly nothing more than words signifying water. But these words, once established as names, entered into a different category. The words might perish, but the names endured. The words might change, but the names did not follow their changes. Inasmuch as they were both subject to the same influences, they would most probably in the main be similarly affected by them. But inasmuch as the names were independent of the language, they would not be regulated in their changes by it. Moreover, in their case a fresh element came into operation, for, being frequently adopted by races speaking a different language, they became subject to the special phonetic tendencies of the new tongue. The result is that many names, which probably contained originally the same word, appear in a variety of different

forms. The most important phonetic modifications I take to be those of the kind referred to in the next chapter.

There is no branch of philological enquiry which demands a wider range than that of the origin of the names of rivers. All trace of a name may be lost in the language in which it was given—we may have to seek for its likeness through the whole Indo-European family—and perhaps not find it till we come at last to the parent Sanscrit. Thus the name of the Humber is probably of Celtic origin, but the only cognate words that we find are the Latin *imber* and the Gr. ὄμβρος, till we come to the Sansc. *ambu*, water. Celtic also probably are the names of the Hodder and the Otter, but the words most nearly cognate are the Gr. ὕδωρ and the Lith. *audra*, (fluctus), till we come to the Sansc. *ud*, water.

Again, there are others on which we can find nothing whatever to throw light till we come to the Sanscrit. Such are the