

Europe and Europa

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DURING A LONG PERIOD speculation has been rife about the origin of the name *Europe*. One must write "speculation" rather than "scholarship" because dearth of material has made a scholarly approach extremely difficult. As a result, only one article on the subject can be cited, and we are otherwise dependent upon paragraphs in encyclopedias and statements in general works. To collect and to review all these opinions would demand some pages of text, and would in the end prove to be little more than a compilation of guesses. The writer therefore begs the acceptance of his statement that he has consulted a large number of these brief notices and considers nearly all of them to be of no value, and those which may contain some possible value to be lacking in scholarly demonstration.¹

The writer intends here an approach which is to some extent new, though in the end he will support one of the old theories.

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Before the demonstration can begin, there must be some presentation of the early history of the name. This can well work backward from a passage in Herodotus (iv, 42—45, partly quoted below)

¹ The article is that by Hans Phillip, "Die Namen der Erdteile Europa, Asien und Afrika" (*Petermanns Mitteilungen*, v. 82, 109—110). This I consider to be of no value, and in its suppression of pertinent evidence to be positively misleading. It tries to establish by a strained interpretation of Herodotus, viii, 8, that he believed Europe to refer to Thrace only, but does not cite Herodotus, iv, 42—45, which makes clear that Europe includes the whole continent. Doubtless this article, which is cited, accounts for Adolf Bach's positive statement (*Deutsche Namenkunde*, 2, 497) that *Europe* was originally the name of the Thracian coastland. *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (Glasgow, 1905, v. 1, pp. 246—247), originally published in 1613, shows that theories about the name were already current. As a selected list of brief notes and passing comments, I cite: M. Braun, "Namen der Erdteile," *Muttersprache*, 1952; August Fick, *Vorgriechische Ortsnamen*, 21; Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, Art. "Europa"; Heinrich Lewy, *Die semitischen Fremdwörter im Griechischen*, p. 139; *Enciclopedia Italiana*; *Enciclopedia Universal Illustrada*; *Encyclopedia Britannica*; J. J. Egli, *Nomina Geographica* (2nd. ed., Leipzig, 1893).

which shows that the Greeks of his time (450 B. C.) accepted as commonplace the idea of a continent named *Europe*, though there was disagreement as to whether its boundary, to the north or east of the Black Sea, was the Don or the Phasis.

That even a generation before 450 B. C. the Greeks already had the conception of Europe as a continent, so named, having the same approximate boundaries as those mentioned by Herodotus, is shown by the references in the plays of Aeschylus, the earliest of these being in *The Persians* (472 B. C.).

Earlier than this, the record is scanty and vague. In the *Homeric Hymn To Pythian Apollo*, the same passage occurs twice: "both those who live in rich Peloponnesus and those of Europe, and all the wave-washed isles." (ll., 250—1, 290—1). Unfortunately, everything is here very vague. The date of the poem is uncertain, and can only be placed with some surety before 600 B. C. The language, which seems to distinguish Europe from the Peloponnesus, has been taken to indicate that at this time *Europe* was merely a name referring to central Greece. Considering that we are here dealing with a poet and not with a geographer, I do not think that we can be so certain. We can just as well argue that *Europe* is here distinguished from the islands, and therefore refers to the mainland generally. As to its being distinguished from the Peloponnesus, aside from the fact that the poet had to fill up a line in some way, we can point out that by the Greeks *Peloponnesus* itself was taken to mean Pelop's Island, and that Peloponnesus in its last two syllables is the Latinized form of the Greek word meaning "island." It might therefore, either literally or poetically, be considered an island and distinguished from the mainland. About all that I would be sure of from this passage is that some time before 600 B. C. *Europe* was a somewhat general name, referring to a region which was, say, larger than Boeotia, and which may have meant central Greece, but which may just as likely have referred in general to the mainland of the region, even though the conception of a continent was not yet grasped.

An even vaguer reference occurs in Hesiod's *Theogony*² (l. 357), which is generally regarded as of about 750 B. C. The name here occurs in a long list of nymphs. One might therefore maintain that

² See *Hesiod, Loeb Edition* (p. 171). The quotation is from the scholiast on Homer, who cites these poets as having told the story of Europa.

it is of no geographical significance at all. On the other hand, in the same list occur *Asia* and *Doris*, which certainly have geographical significance, and also *Ianeira*, which probably refers to Ionia. It seems likely, therefore, that these nymphs represent personifications of certain countries or regions. If so, we can say that *Europe* in the time of Hesiod had a geographical significance, and probably referred to an at least fairly large area. As to where this area lay and to what were its boundaries, nothing can be argued from the passage.

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There was also *Europa*, the woman. In English it is possible, and it is here convenient, to distinguish between *Europe* and *Europa*. In Greek there was no such possibility, since the two names were identical (Εὐρώπη). Europa is one of the well-established figures of mythology. She is mentioned in *The Iliad* (xiv, 321), by Hesiod and Bacchylides², and in *The Battle of the Frogs and Mice*. Her story was a frequent subject for artists³, and was told by later classical writers. Naturally, variations occur, but on the whole the tale is fairly consistent.

To retell it here is unnecessary. I shall merely tabulate certain points which may have some bearing upon the name:

1. Europa was a Tyrian princess.
2. Zeus, in the form of a bull, carried her off from Tyre to Crete.
3. Afterwards, her brother Cadmus, seeking her, passed from Tyre to Greece.

In spite of the identity in Greek of the name for the woman and the continent, scholars have given the matter little consideration. There are, it would seem, four, and only four, possible ways in which the identity can be explained. These are:

1. The identity is the result of coincidence.
2. The name of the continent is derived from that of the woman.
3. The name of the woman is derived from that of the continent.
4. The names are both derived from the same source (word or name).

³ For references to two early representations of Europa, see T. J. Dunbabin, *The Greeks and their Eastern Neighbors*, (1957), p. 86. A famous representation is that on one of the metopes from Temple C at Selinus, ca. 550 B.C.

1. *Coincidence.* To establish that the name of the woman and the name of the continent have identical form by coincidence, one would have to be able to trace both names back to earlier and differing forms. One would have to show that these forms came from different languages, or, if from the same language, had quite different meanings. Since no earlier forms of either name exist, this demonstration is impossible.

Nevertheless, modern scholars by failing to attempt to show any connection, seem to have assumed that the identity has arisen by coincidence. Not only is this undemonstrable, but also there seems to be a considerable probability against it. To consider the written form of the name (since our knowledge of early Greek pronunciation is unreliable) we see that it was of sufficient complexity to require for its representation in classical Greek no fewer than eight characters (six letters and two diacritical marks). To represent the woman and to represent the continent these symbols are identical, and have exactly the same arrangement. While such coincidence is not impossible, it is not to be lightly assumed.

Finally, one may say, explanation by coincidence should be only the scholar's last resort. If he is unable actually to prove coincidence, he should not assume it until he has tried everything else.

2. *The continent from the woman.* Since the ancient Greeks had a strong tendency to derive the names of places from those of people, the theory that the name of the continent was derived from that of the woman was apparently a current one with them. The evidence for this conclusion is based on its refutation by Herodotus:

"As for Europe, no one can say whether it is surrounded by the sea or not, nor is it known whence the name of Europe was derived, nor who gave it the name, unless we say that Europe was so called after the Tyrian Europa, and before her time was nameless, like the other continents. But Europa was certainly an Asiatic, and never even set foot on the land that the Greeks now call Europe, only sailing from Phoenicia to Crete, and from Crete to Lycia" (iv, 45).

All I would like to say further in this connection is that Herodotus seems to me to make very good sense. I do not care to revive the theory that Europa was an eponymous heroine.

3. *The woman from the continent.* Although people are not uncommonly named from places, as with our *Kenesaw Mountain*

Landis and Tennessee Williams, I can present no evidence to support the possibility that the woman was named from the continent. The argument presented by Herodotus is also potent when taken in reverse. Moreover, there is a further difficulty of time. *Europe* as a place name is not mentioned in the Homeric poems, and does not seem to have been well established much before 600 B.C. The story of Europa, the woman, even if we consider the reference in *The Iliad* to be doubtful, is connected with the Minoan kingdom, and we may therefore think that her name goes back well into the second millennium.

4. *Both names from a single source.* The advantage of this hypothesis is that it permits a new approach. Previous study has been directed toward the derivation of the name of the continent, no one having had much interest in the derivation of the name for the woman. If we seek a single source for both, however, we study the origin of the name of the continent by studying that for the name of the woman.

In any problem of name origin, the first question must be from what language the name is derived. In the case of *Europa*, the possibilities are: Greek, "pre-Greek," and Semitic.

A. *Greek.* A Greek origin is *a priori* unlikely. As is now generally agreed, the stories of mythology arose in the pre-Greek period, and the names of the heroes and heroines are generally not Greek. In particular, Europa, who is associated with the reign of Minos, would be likely to have a name associated with that pre-Greek period.

Certain attempts have been made to derive Europa from Greek, connecting it with εὐρυ- "broad," and ὤψ "face," which is also to be connected with ὀπ- "to see." The name might thus be taken properly to mean "broad-faced," (perhaps a compliment in 1500 B.C.) or "widely-seeing." But such a result can only be reached by severe phonetic man-handling. The element εὐρυ- does not lose its final vowel easily, and in combination with ὀπ- we get εὐρύοπα, a common epithet of Zeus in the Homeric poems. We have also, probably, *Euryope*, supposedly an ancient goddess. But neither of these is Europa.⁴ Adding the fact that *Europa* is a mythological name, and

⁴ The form εὐρωπός occurs in poetry. Pindar (*Frag.* 249) uses a common noun πῦρῳα, apparently meaning "broad surface."

therefore not likely to be Greek, we may well drop the theory altogether.⁵

B. "*Pre-Greek*." Scholars are agreed that in times before the Greek language occupied the regions which it held in the beginning of recorded history, there were one or more un-Greek languages in that area. The general belief is that almost all the names of Greek mythology are from this language or languages. Obviously, *Europa* might be among these. Certain studies, largely tentative and theoretical as yet, have been published recently on the structure and vocabulary of the pre-Greek language.⁶ As far as I know, no attempt has been made to show that *Europa* is thus derived, and in view of the scanty and doubtful vocabulary available, one may doubt whether such an attempt will be made. In this state of ignorance, we can therefore do no more than grant the possibility and pass on.

C. *Semitic*. In contrast to the possibility of a Greek origin, for which the argument is negative, and to that of a pre-Greek origin, for which the argument is neutral, the argument for a Semitic origin is strong. The details of the evidence may be presented:

1. In the stories *Europa* is consistently Tyrian, i.e., Phoenician. The Phoenicians spoke a Semitic language closely allied to ancient Hebrew. If *Europa*, then, is Phoenician, her name also is likely to be.

The objection may be raised that the *story* may have been Greek and that a Greek story-teller might have made his heroine Tyrian, without knowing enough about the language to give her a Semitic name. Such a possibility is rendered less likely by the arguments that follow.

2. The fact that Zeus in the *Europa* story is taumorph is strong evidence that the story itself is Semitic. The bull was a sacrificial animal in Greece, and in Crete bull-fighting seems to have been the

⁵ Some have held the opinion that *Europe*, the continent, is to be directly derived from εὐρῦ- and ὄπρ-. This not only has the phonetic difficulties mentioned above, but also adds semantic and onomastic problems. The meaning has to be strained into "broadly seen," or "broad-appearing." Onomastically, such a meaning, with its textbook descriptive quality, seems to demand that the continent should have been named in full recognition of its greatness. Actually the coast of mainland Greece would not have appeared, to an ancient seafarer, any broader than the coast of, say, Crete.

⁶ See, e.g., A. J. van Windekens, *Le Pélasgique* (1952).

national sport. But neither the Greeks, nor (so far as we know) the Cretans, had gods who took the form of bulls. On the other hand, Semitic religions constantly represented the god as a bull — as the Biblical story of the golden calf gives some indication.

3. Europa had a brother named Cadmus. Since he too is represented as originally of Phoenicia, he would naturally have a Phoenician name. And, indeed, scholars have recognized in *Cadmus* the Hebrew trigraph *k-d-m*, meaning “east.” If his name is Semitic, so also his sister’s is likely to be.

On the basis of these arguments, we are justified in postulating a high probability that the name *Europa* is Phoenician.⁷ And at this point we can return to an old theory.

Throughout a century recurrent suggestions have been made that *Europe* was derived from a Semitic word, represented by the Hebrew, *ereb* עֶרֶב meaning “west.” Returning to Europa, we would see immediately that a derivation of her name from this word meaning “west” would be an exceptionally happy one. If the brother was named East, the sister might well be named West.⁸

Counterpart naming is a common folk-practice. On the California coast, *Little River* debouches only a few miles from *Big River*. In the Sierra Nevada, *Black Kaweah* stands over against *Red Kaweah*. So it is also with the names of people. In my own experience I remember *Big Bill* and *Little Bill*, and twins named *DeWitt* and *DeWight*. We might consider that, taken alone, Europa resembles the Hebrew word for west by nothing more than coincidence. Taken together with Cadmus, each mutually reinforcing the other, the probability of the East-West meaning is augmented to the square or the cube, until it becomes very strong.⁹

⁷ For a special study of Phoenician see Z. S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (1936).

⁸ Since this is an onomastic and not a mythological treatise, I add only a few more suggestions about Europa. The symbolical significance of the brother East and the sister West are certainly obvious. Both, moreover, journey from East to West, across the sea, the sister West going first, the brother East following after, thus going with the motion of the sun.

⁹ Harris, (*op. cit.*, p. 138) lists a personal Phoenician name derived from the same consonantal triad as *ereb*. Though scholars have thus generally taken the word to mean “west,” the literal meaning is “evening,” from a root “grow dark.” But words meaning “west,” are commonly derived, as in Greek itself, from “evening” or “go down.”

About the phonetics of this, we can only make do as well as we can. What is known about the phonetics of archaic Greek is not very much, and what is known about the phonetics of ancient Phoenician is considerably less. About all anyone can say is that the *k-d-m* seems to be close to *Cadmus*. As for *Ereb-Europe* the shift from *b* to *p* is a common one¹⁰; that leaves *erep-* which has a general structure very much like *Europ-*, and differs only in vowels. But vowels are very shifty in Hebrew, and therefore must have been shifty in Phoenician. There was another factor to be considered. *Europa*, the woman, had probably been naturalized in Greece for centuries, before the Phoenician traders began to talk about the West. During that time, the name had of course been subjected to a shift from pre-Greek to Greek, and then had had to undergo whatever phonetic shifts had occurred in Greek. Quite possibly by this time it had worked away somewhat from the original vowels which it had had when first taken over. Then, when the Greeks heard the Phoenicians saying the new name, they may merely have thought that they were saying the name of *Europa*, the woman, but not saying it very well, as is to be expected with foreigners. When the Greeks adopted this name for the continent they would have pronounced it properly, and thus it would have come to have whatever shifts of sound it had already undergone in Greek.

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So far, we have considered only the meaning of the name for the woman. Obviously, however, the meaning "west" — already often suggested for the name *Europe* — suits the continent remarkably well. Considered from the point of view of the island of Rhodes and the nearby coast of Asia Minor, the mainland of Greece itself is definitely "the West." So it must have seemed to the Phoenician traders.¹¹ Since they were coastwise sailors, their route must have taken them north from Tyre, across to Cyprus, and thence along

¹⁰ An unvoicing of a voiced stop is shown in some Semitic loan-words in Greek, e.g., *κάμηλος* and *ἰῶτα*.

¹¹ The extent to which Phoenicians penetrated the Aegean and the importance of their influence on the Greeks and Greece has been long and hotly argued. Scholarly opinion recently seems to have swung toward a "pro-Phoenician" attitude stronger than was current in the last generation. See Dunbabin, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–43.

the south shore of Asia Minor to the always-important Rhodes, and the neighboring mainland harbors. From there they doubtless reached northward toward the Ionian shore. But they would also have reached westward, across the island-studded southern Aegean, toward the murex of Cythera, the gold of Siphnos, and the slaves that would be supplied by the constant wars of the little mainland states. There would have been no need to coast all the long way around the Aegean, past the barbarous Thracian littoral. Direct across the water, from island to island, never out of sight of a mountain top, the highway of the sea took them on toward "the darkness," "the land of the setting sun," "the west," *Ereb*.

We need not wonder that the Greeks after a while adopted the foreign name. This happens commonly. The Greek would have thought, and spoken, in terms of Attica and Boeotia, and Phocis and Locris, and a dozen others, little tribal territories. Hellas, if the Greek even as yet used the word, was a kind of abstraction, and denoted any place where Greeks lived, including the islands and the coast of Asia Minor. But the Phoenicians, coming from afar, by the very fact that they were strangers, would see the larger aspect and need a name for it. In a single coasting voyage, they might touch at many little Greek districts. A trader could scarcely take time to say, "I expect to visit Laconia, Argolis, Corinthia, and so forth and so forth," but by merely saying *Europe* he could cover them all. Once the name was established, the Greeks also would find it useful.¹²

Like all such vague names, having no natural or political limits, *Europe* would have had a tendency to move on and on until it touched some other pressure, either political or natural. This was what happened with *Italy*, a name which first applied merely to the heel of the peninsula. This was what happened, also, with

¹² As possibly complicating factors may be mentioned the occurrence in central and northern Greece of certain names that resemble *Europa*. *Europos* (Εὐρωπός) occurs several times, but none of its occurrences is such as even faintly to suggest that it might have given rise to the name of the continent. *Euripos* (Εὐριπός) the strait between Euboea and the mainland, and *Oropus* (Ὀρωπός) a port near that strait, may also be mentioned. If Oropus could be established as having once been the chief port for foreign trade, its name can be imagined as having spread inland indefinitely. But such a situation cannot be established historically, and besides the name is not very close to *Europa*.

Florida in the sixteenth century, when it spread north and west until it covered all the southeastern United States.¹³

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The background of *Europe* cannot be fully presented without some reference to *Asia*, since the two have been counterparts since the beginning of their history.

Asia is now generally believed to be derived from the regional name recorded in Hittite documents and transliterated as *Assuwa*. The original meaning is not known. Though the locality is somewhat vague, it was in northwestern Asia Minor. The reasons for the identification of *Assuwa* with *Asia* need not be presented here.

In connection with the present argument this explanation of *Asia* might be thought to weaken the possibility of the Semitic derivation of *Europe*. It is no longer possible to believe, as many have done, that *Asia* was itself a Semitic word, related to an Assyrian *asu* "east," which has a cognate Hebrew, אֲשׁוּר. Obviously, if *Asia* (i.e., the Aegean coast of Asia Minor) was The East, we would have an argument by counterpart that *Europe* (i.e., the Greek mainland) would be The West.

This argument, however, is not wholly ruined by the presentation here offered. If there was current — when the Phoenician traders

¹³ The strength of the argument for a Phoenician origin of *Europe* would not be particularly diminished if it were to be shown that there were no other Phoenician names in the area. I have attempted to demonstrate the reason why a general name such as this might be of foreign origin. On the other hand, local names would not be expected from the contacts of mere traders, but would come with colonization and occupation. There has actually been much argument for the existence of Phoenician place names in the Aegean area. (See, e.g., Heinrich Lewy, *Die semitischen Fremdwörter im Griechischen*, 1895.) Most of these arguments are not convincing, especially since many of them seem motivated by pro-Semitic bias. Still, there are at least two regions (almost to be called one region) where there seems to me to be some evidence for Phoenician name-clusters. One of these is Megaris, an excellent site for a trading "factory," where *Megara*, *Kar*, and *Minoa* are all susceptible of attractive interpretations, viz., "station, temporary dwelling-place," "town," and "harbor." The almost adjacent area is the southwestern Aegean, where Herodotus asserts a Phoenician settlement in *Cythera* and *Thera*. The names here are *Minoa* (occurring twice), *Seriphos*, *Siphnos*, and *Cythera*; the last three might be respectively Fire, Mine, and Smoke Islands. All of these are likely names. *Siphnos* was famous for gold mines. Possibly there was volcanic activity in those centuries, but even without that supposition 'Fire' and 'Smoke' are moderately common in place-names.

began to enter the Aegean — a name such as *Asia* for the east coast of that sea, they might easily have taken it, by folk-etymology, to be their word for “east,” and might thus have been the more likely to call the other shore The West.

Doubtless the history of the name was highly complicated. The Peloponnesus, being rather large to start with and being a natural (i.e., not a humanly created) area, may not have needed the new name, and may not at first have been so called, as the passage in the *Homeric Hymn* would indicate. Moreover, in a bad century or two when people stayed much at home and did little voyaging and had little sense of geography, there would have been little need for the name, and it may almost have died out.

Two factors, I think, established it firmly, so that it has become one of the great names. Shortly before 500 B.C. the Ionian geographers, especially Hecataeus, took up the study of the earth, and doubtless they were the first to grasp the conception of a continent as an entity. Having been conceived as an entity, it would need a name. And there was, ready at hand, the old, loosely-used term — *Europe*.

Of course, the division between Europe and Asia is not geographically real. Modern geographers have had to coin the term *Eurasia*, and have spoken of Europe as being merely a peninsula of Asia. But this anomaly arises far away, from the point of view of an Ionian geographer, off beyond the Black Sea in hazy regions of Scythia. In fact, for geographical reasons alone, even if all record should be lost, we would have to conclude that the distinction of Europe and Asia could have arisen only at some point along the line following salt water, from Byzantium to the north coast of Crete.

Second, there was the great Persian War. Beginning in 499 with the Ionian revolt, it dragged on, cold and hot, for half a century, until all moderate-thinking men must have been disgusted. In this period, I think, the distinction between Europe and Asia began to have more political significance. Implicit in the first chapters of Herodotus is the idea: “Asia to the Persians; Europe to the Greeks.” He ends his fourth chapter with a statement that this was at least the Persian opinion. In modern terms it is a kind of expression that there should be spheres of influence, set off by the water-boundary. There can be no question but that this war sharpened the line of

distinction between Europe and Asia, politically and therefore geographically. Everyone knew that Xerxes, when he had crossed by his bridge at the Hellespont, had invaded, not merely Thrace, but also Europe. And when he had retreated, it was the same thing in reverse, as Aeschylus wrote in *The Persians*: "Shall the army of barbarians not all leave Europe by Helle's crossing?"

To summarize, the present article attempts to show that *Europe* and *Europa* go back to the same source, a Hebrew-Phoenician word meaning "west."

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