

The *Etymologies*
of Isidore of Seville

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101. The Franks (*Franci*) are thought to have been named after a certain chieftain of theirs. Others reckon that they were named for the brutality (*feritas*) of their behavior, for their behavior is wild, with a natural ferocity of spirit. 102. Some suspect that the Britons were so named in Latin because they are brutes (*brutus*). Their nation is situated within the Ocean, with the sea flowing between us and them, as if they were outside our orbit. Concerning them, Vergil (*Ecl.* 1.66):

The Britons, separated from the whole world.

103. The Scotti (*Scottus*, i.e. the Irish) in their own language receive their name from their painted (*pictus*; cf. the Picts) bodies, because they are marked by tattoos of various figures made with iron pricks and black pigment. 104. The Gauls (*Galli*) are named for the whiteness of their bodies, for in Greek milk is called γάλα. Whence the Sibyl speaks of them thus, when she says of them (Vergil, *Aen.* 8.660):

Then their milk-white necks are circled with gold.

105. People's faces and coloring, the size of their bodies, and their various temperaments correspond to various climates. Hence we find that the Romans are serious, the Greeks easy-going, the Africans changeable, and the Gauls fierce in nature and rather sharp in wit, because the character of the climate makes them so. 106. The Gauls were also called the Senones, and in ancient times the Xenones, because they offered hospitality to Liber (cf. ξένος, "guest"); afterwards the letter *x* was changed to *s*. 107. Vacca was a town near the Pyrenees, and the Vacceans were named after it. The poet is believed to have spoken about them (cf. Vergil, *Aen.* 4.42):

And the Vacceans ranging far.

They occupied the vast emptiness of the heights of the Pyrenees. They are the same people as the Vascones (i.e. the Basques), as if the word were *Vaccones*, with the letter *c* changed to *s*. 108. After he subdued Spain, Gnaeus Pompey, in his rush to come to his triumphal celebration, drove them down from the heights of the Pyrenees and gathered them into one city. Hence the city took the name of 'Assembled Refugees' (*Convenae*, i.e. Saint-Bertrand de Comminges).

109. The Spanish were first named Iberians, after the river Iberus (i.e. the Ebro), but afterwards they were named Spaniards (*Hispanus*) after Hispalus (i.e. the

legendary founder of *Hispalis*, Seville). 110. The Galicians (*Gallecus*) were named for their whiteness (cf. γάλα, "milk") – and hence also the Gauls (*Gallus*) were named – for they are of whiter complexion than the other people of Spain. They claim a Greek origin for themselves, and hence are wise with a native wit. 111. They say that, after the Trojan War, Teucer was despised by his father Telamon because of the death of his brother Ajax. When he was not received into his kingdom, Teucer retired to Cyprus and there founded the city of Salamis after the name of his ancient homeland. From there he emigrated to Galicia, and when he had settled there he gave the name of the place to the nation. 112. The Astures are a nation of Spain, so called because they live along the river Astura, hedged in by mountains and thick forests. 113. The Cantabrians (*Cantaber*) are a nation of Spain named after the name of a city and the river Iberus (i.e. the Ebro) where they reside. They have a gritty spirit and are always as ready for brigandage and warfare as for enduring blows. 114. The Celtiberians descended from the Celtic Gauls, and from these names their district, Celtiberia, was named – for they were named Celtiberians after the river Iberus of Spain, where they are settled, and after the Gauls, who were called Celtic, with the two terms combined.

115. The Africans were named for one of the descendants of Abraham, who was called Afer. He is said to have led an army against Libya and to have settled there after he had conquered the enemy, and his descendants were named Africans, and the place named Africa, after their ancestor. 116. The Punic people are the Carthaginians, named after the Phoenicians who emigrated with Dido. 117. The Tyrians were named after Tyre, the city of the Phoenicians, whence they emigrated and came to the African coast. 118. The Getulians are said to have been Getae who, setting out from their homeland with a huge force on ships, occupied the region of the Syrtes in Libya and were named by derivation Getulians, because they came from the Getae. Hence also the idea among the Goths is to speak of the Moors as close blood-relatives of themselves from their ancient affinity. 119. Thus Africa was held initially by the Libyans, then the Africans, and after this the Getulians, and finally the Moors and Numidians.

120. The Moors and Numidians – so the Africans believe – got their origin and name in the following way. After Hercules perished in Spain, his leaderless army,

composed of various nations, sought homes for themselves in various places, and from this mass Medes and Persians and Armenians, having sailed across to Africa by ship, occupied the regions nearest the sea. 121. But the Persians, not finding wood in the fields for building houses, and with communication inhibited by the unknown language, wandered through open fields and diverse deserts. In accordance with their itinerant foraging they called themselves, in their own language, Numidians, that is, wandering and errant and without a city. 122. On the other hand, the Medes mingled with those Libyans who lived closest to Spain. Little by little the Libyans altered the name of these people, in their barbarous tongue calling the Medes ‘Moors’ (*Maurus*), although the Moors are named by the Greeks for their color, for the Greeks call black *μαυρός* (i.e. *ἄμαυρός*, “dark”), and indeed, blasted by blistering heat, they have a countenance of a dark color.

123. Massylia is a city of Africa, not far from Mount Atlas and the gardens of the Hesperides. The Massylians were named after this city, and we now call them, with alteration, Massulians. Concerning them, Vergil (cf. *Aen.* 4.483):

Here a priestess of the Massylian people has been shown to me.

124. The nation of the Gaulalians consists of people wandering from the south up to the western Ocean. The island Gauloe gave them their name; it is next to Ethiopia, and no serpent is born or lives there. 125. Garamantes are a people of Africa living near the Cyrenians and named after the king Garamans, son of Apollo. He founded there the city named Garama after his own name. They are neighbors of the Ethiopian tribes. Concerning them, Vergil (*Ecl.* 8.44):

The farthest Garamantes.

And ‘farthest,’ because they are savage and remote from human fellowship. 126. The Hesperians are those who live alongside Spain, for Hispania is Hesperia (see XIV.iv.19).

127. Ethiopians are so called after a son of Ham named Cush, from whom they have their origin. In Hebrew, *Cush* means “Ethiopian.” 128. This nation, which formerly emigrated from the region of the river Indus, settled next to Egypt between the Nile and the Ocean, in the south very close to the sun. There are three tribes

of Ethiopians: Hesperians, Garamantes, and Indians. Hesperians are of the West, Garamantes of Tripolis, and the Indians of the East. 129. The Trochodites (i.e. Troglodytes) are a tribe of Ethiopians so called because they run with such speed that they chase down wild animals on foot (cf. *τροχάζειν*, “run quickly”; *τρέχειν*, “run”). 130. The Pamphagians are also in Ethiopia. Their food is whatever can be chewed, and anything living that they come upon – whence they are named (cf. *παν-*, “all”; *φαγεῖν*, “eat”). 131. Ichthyophagians (cf. *ἰχθύς*, “fish”), who excel in fishing at sea and survive on fish alone. They occupy the mountainous regions beyond the Indians, and Alexander the Great conquered them and forbade them to eat fish. 132. Anthropophagians are a very rough tribe situated below the land of the Sirices. They feed on human flesh and are therefore named ‘maneaters’ (*anthropophagus*; cf. *ἄνθρωπος*, “man”). As is the case for these nations, so for others the names have changed over the centuries in accordance with their kings, or their locations, or their customs, or for whatever other reasons, so that the primal origin of their names from the passage of time is no longer evident.

133. Now indeed the people called Antipodes (i.e. “opposite-footed”) – because they are thought to be contrary to our footprints, as if from under the earth they make footprints upside-down from ours – are on no account to be believed in, because neither the solidity nor the central space of the earth allows this. Indeed this is not confirmed by any knowledge of history, but poets conjecture it as it were by sheer inference. 134. Moreover, they say that the Titans of Greece were a robust people of preeminent strength who, the fables say, were created by the angry Earth for her revenge against the gods. 135. Hence Titans are so called from the word *τίσις*, that is, ‘revenge,’ for they lived in arms as if for the sake of avenging Mother Earth against the gods. The fables feign that in war the Titans were overwhelmed by Jupiter and made extinct, because they perished from thunderbolts hurled from the sky.

iii. Reigns and terms for military matters (*De regnis militiaeque vocabulis*)

1. A reign (*regnum*) is so named from a king (*rex*, gen. *regis*), for as kings are so called from governing (*regere*), so reigns are called after the word for kings. 2. Every nation has had its own reign in its own times – like the Assyrians, the Medes, the Persians, the Egyptians, the Greeks – and fate has so