Dutchland? Germany?
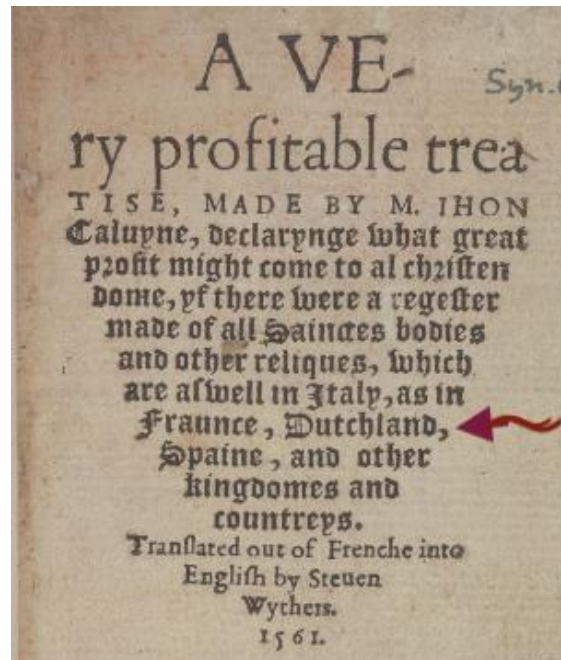
August 5, 2019
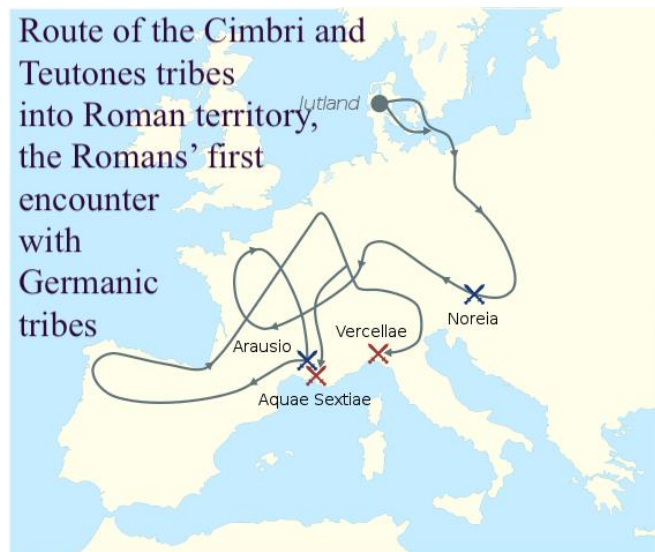*By Stefan Israel*

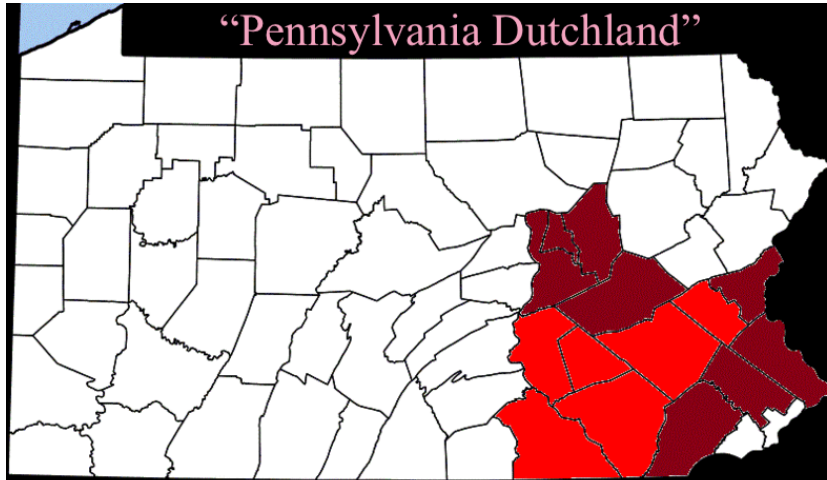
Last posting, we talked a little about why we say Germany and not something like Dutchland-let's dig a little deeper into that.

Shortly before Caesar's birth, the Germanic tribes the Cimbri and the Teutones, tried migrating toward the Mediterranean, the Romans' first encounter with them. We first hear the word Germania from the adult Julius Caesar - no one can say where he took the name from. Actually, anyone can say, but they all say different things, no one knows the actual origin. There's no obvious origin in Germanic, Latin, Celtic or anything else.

The tribes that coalesced into Germans spoke 'the people's/ popular language' as opposed to Latin (French and Italian were still thought of as degenerate Latin, not new languages yet), and in the 700's, the word for 'the people' was Thiuda, directly related to Teutones, Teutonic and the Diet of Worms (in that case, it means 'the people's assembly at Wormes'). It shows up in Theodoric the Great and in King Theodan of Tolkien). The adjective was Thiudisk.

By Charlemagne's time/800 AD, that became Dhiudisk, and soon Diudisch, pronounced Düüdish. English still uses the word as Dutch, which eventually comes to mean Dutch as opposed to German… but we still call the Pennsylvania Germans the Pennsylvania Dutch (as opposed to the Hudson Valley Dutch who really did come from the Netherlands).

In the late Middle Ages, Diudisch becomes <u>Deutsch, "doytch"</u>, the form the Germans use today, likewise <u>Deutschland</u>. You'll come across variants, like Plattdüütsch/North German dialect which still uses the old form Düütsch, and some Mennonites speak Plautdietsch, and in colloquial German you often hear Deitsch 'Dye-ch'.

Other Europeans have their own words for Germans, sometimes drawn from the nearest German tribe of the early Middle Ages:

The French, Spanish, Portuguese and Arabs use one form or another of Alleman ('the tribe of All the Men' in southwest Germany/Switzerland), though Italy uses Tedeschi ('Teutons') and Allamagne and Germania, depending on context.

The Finns call them Saksalaiset, '(North) Saxons'; the Sorbian population called them all Bavarians. The Swiss and Poles sometimes call Germans Schwab/Szwab, Swabian, whether the German is from Swabia or not.

Name for Germany in European languages

The Slavs use Nyemyetsi… which means 'don't know how to talk'. Well, if Greeks called anyone who didn't speak Greek barbarians, people who could only say bar-bar-bar, why not. At least they didn't call them the Duh-duh-duhians.

The Arabs also called all Europeans Ifranji, the Franks/French, and that word has sort of found its way into the Star Trek Ferengi, via Persian.

But back to the English- before 1500, Dutch and older Dutchland referred to all the Germanic populations of central Europe, what's now the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and much of Switzerland. In the mid-1500's, the English started using German and Germany, based on Latin. The Netherlands broke from the Holy Roman Empire by 1581, and so never did adopt High German the way the regions that became Germany and Austria did. With all that, Dutch increasingly came to mean just the Netherlands. By the early 1700's, German and Dutch had largely taken their modern meanings

"Pennsylvania Dutchland"

In recent centuries, Dutch (mostly) refers only to the Netherlands. Still, to this day, Dutch still means 'German' in a few cases, primarily the Pennsylvania Dutch, who speak/spoke a Rhine dialect of German, and settled in the Pennsylvania Dutch country. The Hudson Valley Dutch on the other hand really did come from the Netherlands and spoke Dutch, not German.

P.S. I avoid saying Holland, since that's only the Dutch province where Amsterdam is; Dutch from the other provinces feel a little miffed. They are all Netherlands from the Netherlands.

You'll also hear the term The Low Countries (Netherlands), but that is the whole Netherlands-Belgium-sometimes Luxemburg region, the Benelux area, not one country.

Do you have any German, Danish, Dutch, Swedish or Norwegian documents you can't read? We can help. Find out more here.

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