



The Greek Empire of Marseille: Discoverer of Britain, Saviour of Rome.

Christopher Gunstone

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Where does the name Britain come from and who gave it? The astronomer Pytheas of Massalia (Marseille) exploring the North Atlantic in the 320s B.C. discovered, measured, circumnavigated and named Britain 265 years before the Romans. He took measurements at five points on his journey, which have been verified. He corrected the position of the North Pole and developed the theory that the earth was a sphere. Marseille (Massalia) in France was founded by Greeks in 600 B.C. en route to get silver from Spain. Due to the Persian invasion in 546 B.C. Greek refugees from Ionia swelled their western colonies and settlements. Marseille now led and founded several cities of its own in France, Spain, Monaco and Corsica still existing today as Nice, Monaco, Antibes, Le Brusca, Agde, Roses, Sant Marti d'Empuries and Aleria. Marseille saved Rome from extinction when besieged by the Celts in 390 B.C. and played a crucial part in stopping supplies from Spain reaching Hannibal fighting the Romans in Italy. Hannibal and his elephants went over the Alps to avoid a well-fortified Marseille blocking the fabled coastal road used by mythical Hercules. Aristotle, Strabo and Cicero praised Marseille's government as the 'best ordered' of all the aristocracies. Marseille (Massalia) the city founded by merchants could be described, given another definition of an empire, as 'an extensive enterprise under a unified authority'. Marseille lasted as an independent Greek city-state over 700 years: continuing as a Greek city under the Romans: and for a period under the Franks from the sixth century A.D. After a long siege Marseille suffered its first defeat by Julius Caesar in the civil war with Pompey losing most of its empire. With Caesar dead attempts to regain its lost territories were blocked by Mark Antony while the city itself was allowed to stay independent. Marseille continued as a Greek university city of famous schools where 'notable' Romans and the consul Agricola, Governor of Britain, were educated. Quotes from primary sources give you the words of the time together with archaeological evidence on a remarkable and little known part of our history.

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