

Britain's Invasions: an Outline of British History

Lecture One: the Earliest Settlers of Britain (The Iberians: before the 7th c BC-The Celts; 700 BC - 43 A. D) - the Romans (43 A. D - 409 AD)

Introduction

20000 years before Christ, the prehistoric people of Britain (pre-Celtic) were the dark Iberians who lived during the Bronze Age and Iron Age. In fact, many inhabitants lived in Britain about **750,000** years ago. In order to survive, they gathered food like berries, nuts, leaves, fruit, etc in addition to hunting.

Continental Britain: Britain was part of the European Continent until the end of the last ice age. In fact, big regions of Britain were covered in ice with freezing weather followed by a warmer season. Nearly **10,000** years ago, this last of Ice Age came to its ends. As a result, sea levels increased and thus Britain became separated from the Continent of Europe right before **6000 BC**.

1. Iberians: the first inhabitants arrived from the Mediterranean via the Atlantic coast of Portugal, Spain and France (**around 2,500 - 2000 BC**), and expanded all along the west coast of Britain and Ireland. Those inhabitants named "the Iberians" constructed impressive monuments in stone or megaliths (Stonehenge) in Salisbury Plain.

Stonehenge: It is believed that it was a place of worship or an astronomical observatory. It was constructed between (**3050 in 2300 BC**) and regarded as one of the most well-known and mysterious archaeological sites in the world. It is still not known how it was built nor for what purposes. The Druids (the priests of the early Celtic religion) used Stonehenge to mark the passing of seasons. Today, Stonehenge is not only a site for tourists but also a place of gathering for some minority groups like hippies (Bohemians or naturalists) and New Age Travellers. Recently, archaeologists have assumed the stones were shipped from Wales via the sea.

The Iberians came to Britain from Iberia, I. e, Portugal and Spain before the 7th Century BC and subsisted on berries, nuts and hunting in addition to farming

the land. It is believed their blood is probably in the Scots, the Welsh and the Irish.

2. The Celts : (700 BC - 43 AD)

After the invasion of the Iberians, the Celts arrived from Central Europe and penetrated the island especially from the East and the South. As it usually happens, the Celts killed and enslaved the Iberians what pushed the Iberians to escape to Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The Iberians' lands thus became ready for the taking and the Celts took advantage of the most fertile lands situated in the south-east of England.

The Celts were advanced in artisanship (skilled in working iron but the opposite in agriculture). The most influential Celts were The Druids who administered religion, the education of young people and justice. They worshipped natural elements like the Moon, the Sun, the trees and rivers Etc. Water was sacred for them as a source of life and was the door to the life after death. They were warriors and did not like to be governed, they were tied by the same culture and language and they relied on oral transmission using bards and Poets (old tales and poems - orally handed down for generations before being written down). It is worth mentioning that there was no literary production only some art crafts.

3. The Roman invasion: the Romans invaded Britain in 55 BC by Julius Caesar who crossed the Channel, arrived at the Thames river and won the allegiance of the inhabitants to Rome but the area was invaded in the Years (43 - 47 AD), under Emperor Claudius. The Romans introduced their language and culture too. They constructed roads, cities and castles. All cities ending with the suffix "cester" like Gloucester, Chester and so on were established by the Romans. Despite their long occupation of Britain, the Romans did not leave many things behind. They left a language, which would become the modern Romance family of languages. Nevertheless, they built Villas, roads, cities, baths and temples but almost all of which fell into disrepair. The only reminder of their presence is place-names like Chester, Lancaster and Gloucester, which include variants of the word 'Castra' that means "military camp" The Romans in the 2nd C built **the Hadrian Wall** across the northern border of their province of Britannia in order to protect their territory from attacks by the Scots and the Picts.

Source:

O'DRISCOLL, J., Britain; Oxford University Press, 2009