Massalia was founded in southern France, hereafter Gaul, at modern-day Marseilles in around 600 BCE (Hodge, 67) by Phocaea, an Ionian polis on the eastern coast of Anatolia (Hodge, 7). It was a prominent, successful trading state (Hodge 116-121, Freeman 243-244) which was independent until it was conquered by Caesar in 49 BCE (Freeman, 251-255). Massalia was founded further away than any other colony was from its mother state in the Greek colonization period (Mullen, 139), making it integral in determining how great distances affected relations and culture for the Greeks. And despite this great distance, Massalia kept up political and economic connections with Greece and Phocaea well into the late antiquity, and was predominately Greek in its culture for this same period.

<Paragraph about Phocaea?>

A good amount of textual evidence shows that Massalia acted in line with our expectation of Greek culture. They celebrated the religious festivals Anthesteria, Apaturia (Mullen, 142) and Thargelia, worshipped the Greek Pantheon and wore the Ionian style of dress (Freeman, 244). Massalia also kept up the Greek practices of seafaring (Freeman, 243), colonizing (Freeman, 242), and wine-cultivating (Hodge, 118) for much of their time prior to their subjugation. Colonizing fell out of favor first, as less and less places could be colonized and the pressure to colonize due to limited agricultural space was reduced, but both other practices defined Massalian foreign interactions for centuries.

Archaeological data can inform us as to how Greek culture was prominent in other parts of Gaul as well. For example, a document has been recovered from Pech-Maho, a trading post established around 470 BCE in southern Gaul, which contains both a reference to Massalia and a good amount of Ionian Greek writing (Shefton, 70). Shefton extrapolates on this saying that the text appears to be a treaty and that the natives of the region who acted as witnesses to the treaty had apparently learned enough of Greek to understand the content of the treaty, “in other words [the natives] have been highly [H]ellenized”. That the natives of Gaul had been so Hellenized would imply that the Greek colonies in the region, of which Massalia was dominant, had a profound Greek influence on their culture. This assertion that Massalia converted the natives of Gaul into adopting a Greek lifestyle is not new, and was made by Pompeius Trogus in the first century (Mullen, 147), but the sum of the archaeological evidence alike to this treaty that we have, these being those which contain traces of the Greek language, does not support this idea. The evidence we do have suggests that whatever cultural exchange did happen did not leave any notable trace behind in the tribes of Gaul of the Greek language (Mullen, 177).

But this same evidence does tell us that the Greek language remained dominant in the Gallic Greek settlements for centuries. This is expounded further by the continued use of distinctive Ionic and Phocaean names through the Roman period, which “suggests continuing affinity with [Phocaea]” in Massalia and the other Gallic colonies (Mullen, 139). This use of names has been argued to be insignificant in terms of Massalian culture (Mullen, 143), but the language which the archaeological remains show Massalia did use in this period, Koine Greek (Mullen, 143), was known to be prevalent around the whole Mediterranean in Greek settlements (Mullen, 11). Our judgment of cultural similarity should not rely on Massalian culture staying stagnant, as it is perfectly normal for cultures to change, but rather we should rely on Massalian culture staying aligned with that of mainland Greece. This language conversion shows that Massalia did just that in following mainland Greece’s adoption of Koine.

We can see in all of these elements that Massaliots acted Greek for centuries after their city’s foundation—while certainly it may have adapted itself to the culture of the natives in Gaul, Massalia kept its heritage intact and seemed to do more to influence the natives into adopting their traits than the natives did to them, particularly in the establishment of Greek as a language of trade (Mullen, 177). In fact, it was not until the sixth century AD when the Franks conquered Massalia that the city was considered to lose its connection to Greek culture. This is shown in the writings of Agathias, a Byzantine, who wrote of Massalia at this time, “Now the city that was Greek has become barbarian.” (Freeman, 256). But what of Massalia’s contact with mainland Greece? While we can consider that Massalia stayed attached to Greek culture, did their mutual distance with Greece disable their way of trading or otherwise meeting?

Some of the more prominent reasons that tell us that Massalia was, in fact, in contact with Greece are from the archaeological record. The Vix Krater, a massive wine-mixing bowl that was likely created in Sparta, was passed through Massalia on its way inland around 530 BCE to its eventual resting place in Vix (Cartledge, 66). There are also remains of Attic pottery found in Massalia from the late 5th century and onward (Shefton, 69). These pieces of evidence tell us that Massalia was certainly trading along routes which saw their source in Attica and perhaps Sparta as well, even if they were not themselves necessarily directly trading with them. Texts from around the sixth century also mention Massaliots being hired to trade between Greek states to the east. Their being hired to trade between Syracuse and Athens is particularly of interest, as it reinforces this idea the archaeology gives us that Massalia could well have kept up economic ties with Athens (Freeman, 243).

Another connection is in the Massalian treasury at Delphi in which they stored religious offerings to Apollo (Freeman, 244). We know that the treasury was in use from at least 540 to 396 BCE; in 540 the Massaliots defeated the Carthaginians in battle twice and delivered a statue of Apollo to Delphi as thanks (Freeman, 242), and in 396 the Romans sent a gold mixing-bowl to Delphi which the treasury also held. That Massalia kept a treasury implies regular contact between Massalia and the mainland.

We also know that Massalia specifically maintained contact with their mother city. In 545 BCE, the Persians besieged Phocaea, and a migration happened where the Phocaeans abandoned their city and largely resettled in Massalia (Cartledge, 68). In 130 BCE too, Massalia convinced the Romans to spare Phocaea from destruction after Phocaea had joined in revolt against them (Freeman, 250).

These records, along with the record of the Massaliots having participated at events in Olympia (Cartledge, 69), show that Massalia kept a sizable amount of contact with mainland Greece for, just as their cultural connection, centuries after their foundation. This contact started to fade away when Greece’s political presence was replaced by the influence of the Romans, and as a trading state, Massalia’s priorities shifted to the closer power with more wealth. But it has importantly been established that despite the distance between Massalia and Greece, Massalia retained its economic, religious, and political connections to its fellow Greek states around the Aegean.