Great Britain, also known as Britain /ˈbrɪ.tən/, is an island in the North Atlantic off the north-west coast of continental Europe. With an area of 229,848 km2 (88,745 sq mi), it is the largest island of the British Isles, thelargest island in Europe and the ninth-largest in the world.[5][6] In 2011 the island had a population of about 61 million people, making it the third-most populous island in the world, after Java in Indonesia and Honshū in Japan.[7][8] It is surrounded by over 1,000 smaller islands.[9] The island of Ireland lies to its west.

The island is part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, constituting most of its territory:[10] most of England, Scotland, and Wales are on the island, with their respective capital cities, London,Edinburgh, and Cardiff. Politically, the term Great Britain usually extends to include surrounding islands that form part of England, Scotland, and Wales.[11]

The Kingdom of Great Britain resulted from the Union of Scotland and England (which already comprised the present-day England and Wales) in 1707. More than a hundred years before, in 1603, King James VI, King of Scots, had inherited the throne of England, but it was not until 1707 that the Parliaments of the two countries agreed to form a

single kingdom. Subsequently, in 1801, Great Britain united with the neighbouring Kingdom of Ireland, forming the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The state was renamed the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland when five-sixths of Ireland seceded from the United Kingdom in 1922.

The archipelago has been referred to by a single name for over 2000 years: the term British Isles derives from terms used by classical geographers to describe this island group. By 50 BC Greek geographers were using equivalents of Prettanikē as a collective name for the British Isles.[12] However, with the Roman conquest of Britain the Latin term Britannia was used for the island of Great Britain, and later Roman occupied Britain south of Caledonia.[13][14][15]

The earliest known name for Great Britain is Albion (Greek: Ἀλβίων) or insula Albionum, from either the Latin albus meaning white (referring to the white cliffs of Dover, the first view of Britain from the continent) or the "island of the Albiones", first mentioned in the Massaliote Periplus in the 6th century BC, and by Pytheas.[16]

The oldest mention of terms related to Great Britain was by Aristotle (c. 384–322 BC), or possibly by Pseudo-Aristotle, in his text On the Universe, Vol. III. To quote his works, "There are two very large islands in it, called the British Isles, Albion and Ierne".[17]

Pliny the Elder (c. AD 23–79) in his Natural History records of Great Britain: "Its former name was Albion; but at a later period, all the islands, of which we shall just now briefly make mention, were included under the name of 'Britanniæ.'"[18]

The name Britain descends from the Latin name for Britain, Britannia or Brittānia, the land of the Britons. Old French Bretaigne (whence also Modern French Bretagne) and Middle English Bretayne, Breteyne. The French form replaced the Old English Breoton, Breoten, Bryten, Breten (also Breoton-lond, Breten-lond). Britannia was used by the Romans from the 1st century BC for the British Isles taken together. It is derived from the travel writings of the ancient Greek Pytheas around 320 BC, which described various islands in the North Atlantic as far north as Thule (probably Norway).

island group as αἱ Πρεττανικαὶ νῆσοι (the Prettanic Isles).[19]

The peoples of these islands of Prettanike were called the Πρεττανοί, Priteni or Pretani.[16] Priteni is the source of the Welsh language term Prydain, Britain, which has the same source as the Goidelic term Cruithne used to refer to the early Brythonic speaking inhabitants of Ireland.[20] The latter were later called Picts or Caledonians by the Romans.