Medieval European governments, religions, languages, and culture still influence the modern world.

Geography of Europe

How did geography shape life in Europe after the fall of Rome?

During the 400s, Germanic groups invaded the Western Roman Empire. In A.D. 476, these groups overthrew the last emperor in Rome and brought the Empire to an end. Europe then entered a new era called the Middle Ages, or medieval times. This was a 1,000-year period between ancient and modern times. During the Middle Ages, Western Europe was divided into many kingdoms, and Catholic Christianity strongly influenced society.

Physical geography shaped Europe's development. The continent of Europe is a huge peninsula, with many smaller peninsulas branching out from it. As a result, most land in Europe lies within 300 miles (483 km) of a seacoast. This encouraged trade and helped the European economy to grow.

Rivers and Seas

Rivers also played an important role in Europe's growth. Major rivers, such as the Rhine, Danube, Seine, and Po, flow from inland mountains into the oceans and seas surrounding the continent. These rivers are navigable, or wide and deep enough for ships to use. People and goods can sail easily from inland areas to the open sea and, from there, to other parts of the world.

Europe's seas and rivers provided protection as well as possibilities for trade. The English Channel, for example, separated the islands of Britain and Ireland from the rest of Europe. As a result, these people were far enough away to be largely safe from the many wars fought on Europe's mainland. They were able to develop their own governments and societies. In mainland Europe, wide rivers like the Rhine also kept groups of people separated. Because of this separation and isolation, many different cultures developed.

Europe also has many mountain ranges. In the southwest, the Pyrenees isolated what is now Spain and Portugal from the rest of Europe. In the middle of the continent, the Alps separated Italy from central Europe. The Carpathians cut off what is now Ukraine and Russia from southeast Europe. The mountains, like the rivers, made it difficult for one group to control all of Europe and encouraged the growth of independent territories.

Explaining Why were rivers important to the peoples of Europe?

Kingdoms in Western Europe

How did Germanic groups build kingdoms in Western Europe?

By A.D. 500, Western Europe had divided into many Germanic kingdoms. Germanic people in Italy and Spain adopted many Roman ways. People farther from Rome held on to more of their Germanic traditions.

Roman influence was even weaker in Britain. After Roman armies abandoned the area that is today England, Germanic groups known as Angles and Saxons settled there. In time, they became the Anglo-Saxons.

The Anglo-Saxons pushed aside earlier settlers known as the Celts (KEHLTS). Some Celts fled north and west, while others crossed the sea to Ireland. The Scottish, Welsh, and Irish peoples today are largely descended from the Celts.

The Franks in Europe

The Franks were the strongest Germanic group. They settled what is now France and western Germany. In 481, Clovis (KLOH · vuhs) became king of the Franks. Fifteen years later, he became the first Germanic ruler to accept Catholic Christianity. Before long, nearly all of the Franks became Catholic.

After Clovis died, Frankish kings lost much of their power. By 700, power had passed from kings to government officials known as mayors of the palace.
In 714, Charles Martel (mahr • TEHL), or "Charles the Hammer," became mayor of the palace. The pope, who was the head of the Catholic Church, gave Martel his support. Martel and the pope wanted to restore order and strengthen Catholic Christianity in the lands of the old Western Roman Empire.

Martel's first move was to halt the spread of Islam into Europe. By the early 700s, Muslims from North Africa had conquered Spain and entered France. In 732, Charles Martel defeated the Muslims at the Battle of Tours. This battle stopped the advance of Islam into Western Europe. It also ensured that Christianity would remain Western Europe's major religion.

After Charles Martel died, his son Pepin (PEH • puhn) became mayor of the palace. With the support and blessing of the pope, Pepin became king of the Franks. In return, Pepin was expected to help the pope. In 754, Pepin forced a Germanic group called the Lombards to leave Rome. He then gave the pope a large strip of Lombard land in Italy. These lands became known as the Papal States.

The Emperor Charlemagne

After Pepin died in 768, his son Charles became king of the Franks. In the years that followed, Charles sent his armies into neighboring lands. He nearly doubled the size of his kingdom to include what is today Germany, France, northern Spain, and most of Italy.

By 800, Charles's kingdom had grown into an empire. For the first time since the fall of Rome, most Western Europeans were ruled by one government. His conquests won Charles the name of Charlemagne (SHAHR • luh • MAYN), or Charles the Great. A monk named Einhard described Charlemagne this way:

"Charles was large and strong, and of lofty stature [height] . . . [his] nose a little long, hair fair, and face laughing and merry. . . . He used to wear the . . . Frankish dress—next [to] his skin a linen shirt and linen breeches [pants], and above these a tunic fringed with silk. . . . Over all he flung a blue cloak, and he always had a sword girt [fastened] about him."

— from The Life of Charlemagne, by Einhard

In 800, Charlemagne came to Rome and defended the pope against unruly Roman nobles. On Christmas day, Charlemagne was worshipping at the church of St. Peter in Rome. After the service, the pope placed a crown on Charlemagne's head and declared him the new Roman emperor. Charlemagne was pleased but also concerned. He did not want people to think the pope had the power to choose who was emperor.

Despite this concern, Charlemagne accepted his duties as emperor and worked to strengthen the empire. The central government, located in the capital of Aachen (AH • kuhn), was small. As a result, Charlemagne relied on local officials called counts to help him govern. The counts ran local affairs and raised armies for Charlemagne. Royal messengers went on inspections and told the emperor how the counts were doing.

Charlemagne wanted to advance learning in his kingdom. He had tried late in life to learn to write and wanted his people to be educated too. He established a school for the children of government officials. Students at the school studied religion, Latin, music, literature, and arithmetic.

Waves of Invaders

More than anything else, Charlemagne's forceful personality held the empire together. After Charlemagne died in 814, his empire did not last long. It was soon divided into three kingdoms.

These Frankish kingdoms were prey to outside attacks. In the 800s and 900s, waves of invaders swept across Europe. Muslims from North Africa raided France and Italy. Fierce nomads called Magyars from Hungary invaded eastern parts of France and Italy. Vikings launched raids from their homeland in Scandinavia (SKAN • duh • NAY • vee • uh).

Scandinavia is in northern Europe. Norway, Sweden, and Denmark are all part of modern Scandinavia. Much of Scandinavia has a long, jagged coastline. It has many fjords (fee • AWRDS), or narrow inlets of the sea. The fjords, surrounded by steep cliffs or slopes, were carved by glaciers long ago. The Viking people, known as Norsemen or "north men," lived in villages near the fjords.

Scandinavia has little farmland, so the Vikings had to depend on the sea for food and trade. They became skilled sailors and traveled in sturdy longboats. These boats could survive the rough Atlantic and also navigate shallow rivers.

In the 700s and 800s, the Vikings left their crowded homeland and carried out raids along Europe's coasts. The word viking comes from their word for raiding. The Vikings attacked villages and churches, seizing grain, animals, and other valuable items. They burned whatever they could not steal.
The Vikings were more than just raiders. They were also explorers and settlers. They sailed across the Atlantic, settled the islands of Greenland and Iceland, and even landed in North America. For a short time, Viking groups also lived in England. They founded the territory of Normandy in northwestern France and settled in parts of what are now Russia and Ukraine.

**Formation of the Holy Roman Empire**

Muslim, Magyar, and Viking invaders brought much suffering to Europe’s people. Their attacks also weakened the Frankish kingdoms. By the 900s, the eastern Frankish kingdom, known as Germany, became a collection of small territories ruled by nobles. In 911, a group of these nobles sought to unite Germany by electing a king.

In 936, Duke Otto of Saxony was elected king of Germany. Otto became a powerful ruler. Germanic forces defeated the Magyars and freed the pope from the control of Roman nobles. To reward Otto, the pope crowned him emperor of the Romans in 962. Otto’s territory became known as the Holy Roman Empire. It included most of present-day Germany and northern Italy.

After Otto, two important emperors, Frederick I and Frederick II, tried to bring Germany and Italy under a strong central government during the 1100s and 1200s. The popes did not want the emperor to control them. They joined with Italy’s cities to resist the emperors, forces. Ongoing conflict kept Germany and Italy from becoming united countries until the 1800s.

**Explaining** What impact did the Battle of Tours have on European history?

**The Church and Its Influence**

**How did the Catholic Church influence life in early medieval Europe?**

The Roman Catholic Church played an important role in the growth of a new civilization in medieval Western Europe.

**Christianity in Europe**

At the time of Rome’s fall, large areas of northwestern Europe practiced a variety of non-Christian religions. Ireland was different. In the 400s, a Christian priest named Patrick traveled to Ireland. There, Patrick spread Christianity and founded churches and monasteries, or religious houses.

Patrick inspired Pope Gregory I, or Gregory the Great, to spread Christianity. Gregory asked monks to become missionaries (MIH • shuh • NEHR • eez)—people who are sent out to teach their religion. In 597, Gregory sent 40 monks to Britain to teach Christianity. Other monks spread Christianity, so that by 1050, most Western Europeans had become Catholic Christians.

**The Contributions of Monks and Nuns**

Monks and monasteries provided schools and hospitals. They taught carpentry and weaving, and they developed improvements in farming. Many monks copied Christian writings as well as Roman and Greek works. They also made illuminations, which are manuscripts decorated with beautiful lettering and miniature religious paintings. These monks helped preserve knowledge of the classical and early Christian worlds.

Monks lived in communities headed by abbots (A • buhtz). Women called nuns lived in their own monasteries called convents. Convents were headed by abbesses (A • buhs • ihz).

**Church Authority**

Many monasteries became wealthy. As their influence increased, abbots became active in political affairs. This caused disagreements. Kings wanted Church leaders to obey them. Popes, however, believed kings should obey the Church.

Elected pope in 1073, Gregory VII declared that only the pope had the power to appoint high-ranking Church officials. Pope Gregory’s order angered Henry IV, the Holy Roman emperor. For many years, the Holy Roman emperor had chosen bishops in Germany. Henry insisted on naming his own bishops. Gregory then declared that Henry was no longer emperor and excommunicated him. This meant that he no longer had the rights of church membership and could not go to heaven.

When the German nobles supported the pope, Henry changed his mind. He traveled to Italy and begged the pope for forgiveness. Gregory forgave Henry, but the German nobles chose a new emperor. When Gregory accepted the new emperor, Henry seized Rome and named a new pope.

The struggle continued until 1122, when a new German king and a new pope agreed that only the pope could choose bishops, but
only the king or emperor could give them government posts. This agreement, called the *Concordat of Worms*, was signed in the German city of Worms. A concordat (kuhn • KAWR • DAT) is an agreement between the pope and the ruler of a country.

**Describing** What major issue did kings and popes disagree on?

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**LESSON 1 REVIEW**

**Review Vocabulary**

1. What is a missionary meant to do?
2. What natural process created the fjords?

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**Answer the Guiding Questions**

3. **Summarizing** How did mountains and rivers make it difficult for one group to control all of Europe?
4. **Explaining** What happened in Britain after Roman armies abandoned the area during the 400s?
5. **Identifying** In what modern countries did the Franks settle?
6. **Analyzing** What did Charlemagne do to advance education?
7. **Analyzing** What role did monasteries play in medieval Europe?
8. **INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY** Henry IV begged for the pope’s forgiveness. If you were going to interview King Henry about this incident, what three questions would you ask him? Write your answer in a paragraph.