Europe’s Early Middle Ages

*The Mediterranean World*

Civilizations develop in response to a variety of factors, but common to all are

*moderate climates, rich soils, and food crops* to sustain large numbers of people.

The Mediterranean region offered such advantages as well as excellent *transportation routes* for the *exchange of ideas and goods.*

The two most important early civilizations were those of *Greece* and *Rome*.

*The Greeks*

* eagerly studied *philosophy (pursuit of ideas, knowledge, wisdom)*
* made advances in *art, architecture, drama, literature, medicine, science*
* in 4th century BCE *Alexander the Great* conquered many lands and spread Greek culture as far as India
* the Greek empire weakened and *fell to the* *Romans* circa 150 BCE

*The Romans*

* absorbed Greek attitudes and learning
* gathered thinkers and builders from Asia, eastern Europe, & the Middle East
* became superb organizers who developed *aqueducts to deliver running water, road networks, and military organizations*
* *Roman Legions (armed forces)* were so powerful that they controlled most of Europe, parts of the Middle East, and northern Africa
* were *highly literate* (read/write) in Latin and had great libraries
* demanded slaves, taxes, and submission from conquered lands
* *citizenship rights were denied* to women, non-Romans, and slaves

Roman civilization flourished on the shores of the Mediterranean, leaving a *legacy* (knowledge and culture passed down from one generation to the next)of the following:

1. *beautiful cities and practical agriculture*
2. *elaborate roads*
3. *systems of government*
4. *codes of law*

However, both internal and external forces combined to push the empire towards collapse. *Barbarian tribes ransacked* the civilization that was once Romeand a period of violence and terror followed for over 400 years.

Why did Rome fall?

* *slaves supplied free labour* (small businesses suffered)
* Romans *overspent on luxuries*
* *contagious diseases* (spread by travelling Roman soldiers)
* *bad governing by emperors* (republic ended in 30 BCE)
* empire became *too large to defend*, especially from *barbaric Germanic* *peoples* (Teutones, Visigoths, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Franks, Ostrogoths, Lombards)
* *new religions* weakened the unity of Romans who chose religious allegiances over political ties

Religion: A Force of Change

After the Fall of Rome, religion was very important to reshaping Europe. *Roman* and *Germanic* people *believed in many gods* who each had specific powers and responsibilities.The Roman religion was a *blending of Greek and Roman gods*, and emperors who were revered as gods (like the Egyptian pharaohs).

Throughout the Middle Ages, most people in North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe *converted from pagan religions* to one of the three *monotheistic* *(one God)* religions: *Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.*

The Romans often let conquered peoples practice their ownreligions (eg. Jews in Palestine) as long as they paid their taxes and did not rebel against Roman rule. However, as the number of *Christian converts* increased, the Romans began to *persecute* them. Christians were condemned to die in the arena while spectators watched as Christians were burned alive, slain by gladiators, crucified, or attacked by ferocious animals.Early Christians who died for their beliefs were called *martyrs*.

The *Pope* (main leader of the Roman Catholic Church) ordered *missionaries* (priests who would convert the pagans) to spread Christianity and Roman culture throughout and beyond the empire. This was a dangerous task, but by the end of the 11th century, Christianity became the only official religion in western Europe.

*Constantine the Great* (280-337)

*~ Roman Emperor* whoin 313 CE*,* converted to Christianity and issued the *Edict of Milan* (legalized Christianity throughout the Roman Empire).

~ filled government and military positions of power with Christians

~ made *Christianity the official faith* of the Roman Empire.

~ made Byzantium his capital—refortified the walls and buildings and renamed the capital city *Constantinople* (now it’s known as Istanbul)

~ Christianity in the Byzantine Empire developed into *Orthodox Christianity*

* do not follow the RC Pope (view him as a respected religious leader)
* turn to the Patriarch of the Eastern Church for guidance

*Justinian I and Theodora* ~ ruled together from 527-565

*Justinian*

* *born a commoner* but became a great leader
* brilliant and had interest in *politics, art, literature, religion, science*
* combined laws in the Roman Empire to create a legal code (*Justinian Code*) which is the basis for every Western European country (except England)

*Theodora*

* humble origins & *early feminist*: women allowed to keep inherited property
* kept Justinian from fleeing when a revolt threatened his throne

After the fall of Rome, three groups of people played significant roles in the development of western society: *the Franks, the Celts, and the Vikings*

*The Franks*

* a warlike group of *farmers*
* introduced concept of social classes
* initiated what would become *feudal order*
* uniform systems of laws were introduced
* 2 main leaders = *Clovis and Charlemagne*

*Clovis* ~ Frankish ruler of *Merovingian* family

~ ruled from 481-511 CE

~ founded the country of France with Paris as the capital

*Charlemagne* ~ “Charles the Great”

~ ruled from 768-815 CE

~ *relatively peaceful reign* (defeated the Saxons and

converted them to *Christianity*

~ established the *Carolingian* empire

~ important influences in education, architecture

~ fascinated with science and literature (Carolingian

Renaissance)

*Anglo-Saxons and Celts*

While the Franks settled in France after the fall of Rome, Britain was invaded by *Germanic warriors* (Angles, Saxons, Jutes):

* *invasions* of the Anglo-Saxons *pushed the Celts* to the western edges of the British Isles
* *Celts* had practiced nature worship (Druidism), fought bloody battles, kept slaves, and made human sacrifices until the 5th century: St. Patrick brought Christianity and education (became patron saint of Ireland)
* *Irish monks* continued their work of training Christian missionaries + preserved a keen interest in learning
* *Monasteries* became centres of learning for scholars fleeing the Germanic invasions in Europe
* Irish monks made copies of *The Bible* and many Greek & Latin classic texts--carried books on their belts and spread knowledge and Christianity

*The Vikings*

* originated from Scandinavian countries of *Norway, Sweden, and Denmark*
* built large ocean-worthy ships to sail the seas and rivers in order to attack and *plunder other settlements*
* sailed through the Mediterranean Sea, attacked Spain, Italy, Russia, sacked Paris, and then sailed west to the British Isles and Ireland—eventually settled as far as Iceland, Greenland and (temporarily) in Newfoundland
* had a reputation of being merciless, murderous, and destructive raiders
* were also *farmers and fishers* who were dependent on harvests
* *population growth* placed pressures on resources
* social structures emerged: people treated fairly (except for slaves called *thralls*), and women and men had an equal share of the work
* rich culture of art and literature—*skalds* were poets who sang/recited the Viking histories and legends, and *runes* were used as a form of writing
* *systems of law* (used 12 person juries) and *government* to protect people and property
* *Law Speakers* memorized the law and recited it as needed
* regular meetings of a type of parliament called a *Thing* (made decisions on law, government, and chose their kings)
* criminals were fined, but more dangerous offenders could be declared an *outlaw* = banishment or thought of as dead (could be killed on sight and their possessions or property taken)

*End of the Viking Age* (11th century)

* *Kings* of Europe and the British Isles *began thwarting Viking attacks*
* *Alfred the Great* gave the eastern portion of Britain (*the Danelaw*) to the Vikings—Vikings stopped raiding in order to farm and fish
* Kings in France gave Rollo the province of Normandy (Normandy = “land of the Northmen”)
* settlements in North America and Greenland were destroyed or abandoned
* Vikings gradually *assimilated* into other communities
* end of the Viking Age helped usher in the forces of *Christianity* and *feudalism*