European Geography in the Middle Ages

The Land and People of Europe

Europe is part of a larger land mass known as Eurasia. Despite this land connection, Europe is its own continent due to physical geographic features, cultural traits, and clear divisions from the Asian region. The greatest of these divisions are the Ural Mountains and the Mediterranean Sea. These two physical features have been significant throughout history in creating the continent of Europe and the culture of its people. The diversity of Europe is also as far and wide as its territory. From mountains to great plateaus and from climates of extreme cold to great warmth, the physical and other geographic features make Europe a very unique place. Including the peninsulas of Europe, you have a vast region of physical and cultural difference.

In modern times, you will find many political divisions that define the shape and character of Europe. In the Middle Ages, these divisions were not as clear, and the people and regions of the area were just becoming distinct to create the places they are today. Much of the culture of the region developed from the influences of the Greeks and Romans in ancient times. After the fall of the Roman Empire, new groups began to form based on their ideals and demands for their own. This brought the great diversity to Europe, but also created division and hostility between the growing and developing groups and their rising leaders. Most of the conflict came in fighting over the territory and in establishing and recognizing the value of their lands.

In taking a look at any physical map of Europe, you will see the many valuable geographic features of Europe. Seas and rivers enclose and cross the continent, providing numerous resources to the people. In addition, forests of great trees provided the lumber for the growing civilizations and gave protection to the people. Mountain regions offered beauty, but also great value in the plants and animals supported by the landscape. Add to this the prairies and the vast Mediterranean region offering superior farm lands growing grapes, figs, and olives, and the continent of Europe is a prized land for all of its inhabitants.

People of Europe during the Middle Ages were great at adapting to the land for survival and success. The rivers and fertile lands created migration paths for the early people of Europe, and the availability of resources impacted the settlement and growth of cities. The roads started by the Romans set a start for the future Europeans, but the need for continued trade and interaction led Europeans to depend on their geographic gifts more and more. Still, despite the rivers and roads throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, many areas and peoples were very isolated from their neighbors. Thus, they utilized their local resources for food, shelter, clothing, and all other necessities of life.

War and conflict was also impacted by the geography of Europe. The mountains and other challenging features kept some groups out, while protecting others.

In the end, Europe during the Middle Ages was a place with great diversity and great opportunity. The people of Europe at the time were at the crossroads of the past and the future. And some of those European places would be the strongholds to take the entire region into the Modern Age.
Reading Review:
Discuss the questions with your partner(s) and write complete answers for each. Use the information from the reading, but also use the available atlas for further information.

1. How is Europe a unique continent? What features make it unique?
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2. What are the major waterways of Europe? How are they significant?
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3. According to the atlas, what resources are available in the different regions of Europe? How would these resources have played an important role during the Middle Ages?
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4. What geographic challenges would the Europeans of the Middle Ages have faced? How might they have overcome these challenges?
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5. Using your atlas and background knowledge, what areas do you predict will be significant in the move toward the modern age? What geographic features support your prediction for the area?
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European history requires some knowledge of European and surrounding geography. For this assignment atlases are available and further information may be found in your text or online at the Internet Medieval Sourcebook.

1. Cites

Mark these cities on Map I below with a dot (write the city's name next to the dot). These were all important cities in the classical period or the middle ages. Next to the name of each city indicate in which modern country it is situated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Modern Country</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Modern Country</th>
<th>City</th>
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2. Physical Geography

Mark on the map the locations of the following mountain ranges, rivers and islands. For Mountains use this symbol = M, for rivers use a line, and with the islands write the name of the island next to it.

Mountain Ranges:

1. The Pyrenees
2. The Appennines
3. The Alps
4. The Urals
5. The Carpathians

Rivers:

6. The Rhine
7. The Danube
8. The Nile
9. The Elbe
10. The Seine
11. The Thames

Islands:

14. Sicily
15. Ireland
16. Sardinia
17. Great Britain
18. Corsica
19. Cyprus

3. Regional Names

Most modern states did not exist in the middle ages, for instance there was no 'France' or 'Germany' in the modern sense. 'Italy' was not a united country until 1871. These terms were used, however, although somewhat vaguely. On this final map then indicate the approximate areas meant by the following names.

1. France
2. Germany
3. Italy
4. Spain
5. England
6. Denmark
7. Flanders
8. The Holy Land
9. Egypt
A Map of Middle Ages Europe