

# **A BRIEF HISTORY OF** **ENGLISH**

The English language is a combination of many different influences. English is like a hearty "language stew" made with a variety of ingredients, all of which add to its flavor, color, and appearance.



The development of the English language can be divided into three major periods:

- ✓ Old English (449 A.D. — 1066 A.D.)
- ✓ Middle English (1066 A.D. — 1500 A.D.)
- ✓ Modern English (1500 A.D. — Present)

**ENGLAND**



England is part of a larger island known as Britain.





The island of Britain consists of England, Scotland, and Wales. In ancient times, however, these countries were not yet separate; the entire island was known simply as "Britain."

The original inhabitants of Britain were known as the Britons (also known as the Celts or Celtic people).



The Romans invaded Britannia beginning in 43 A.D., easily defeating the Celts and putting them under Roman control.



After the Roman invasion, Britain (Britannia) became part of the Roman Empire, the largest and most powerful empire the world had ever seen.



The Romans brought their own culture—including architecture, roads, government, and language—to all parts of their massive empire.



Since Latin was the language of the Romans, it was spoken in all parts of the Roman Empire, including Britannia.



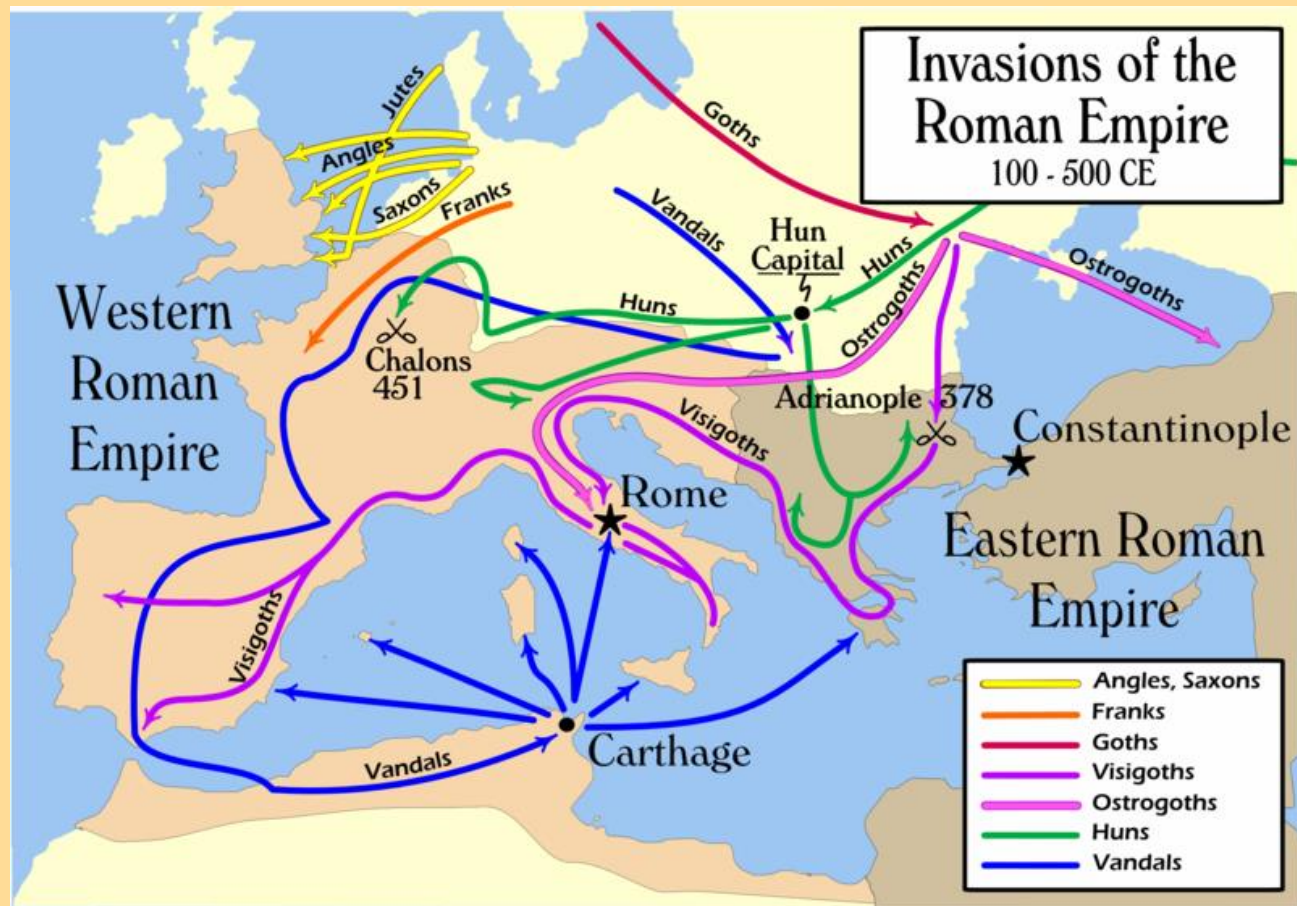
So, before the history of English even officially began, Latin had already made itself known in Britain. Latin and Celtic were already “in the stew pot,” even though more Latin would be added later and the Celtic would eventually disappear for the most part.



# OLD ENGLISH

**449 A.D. - 1066 A.D.**

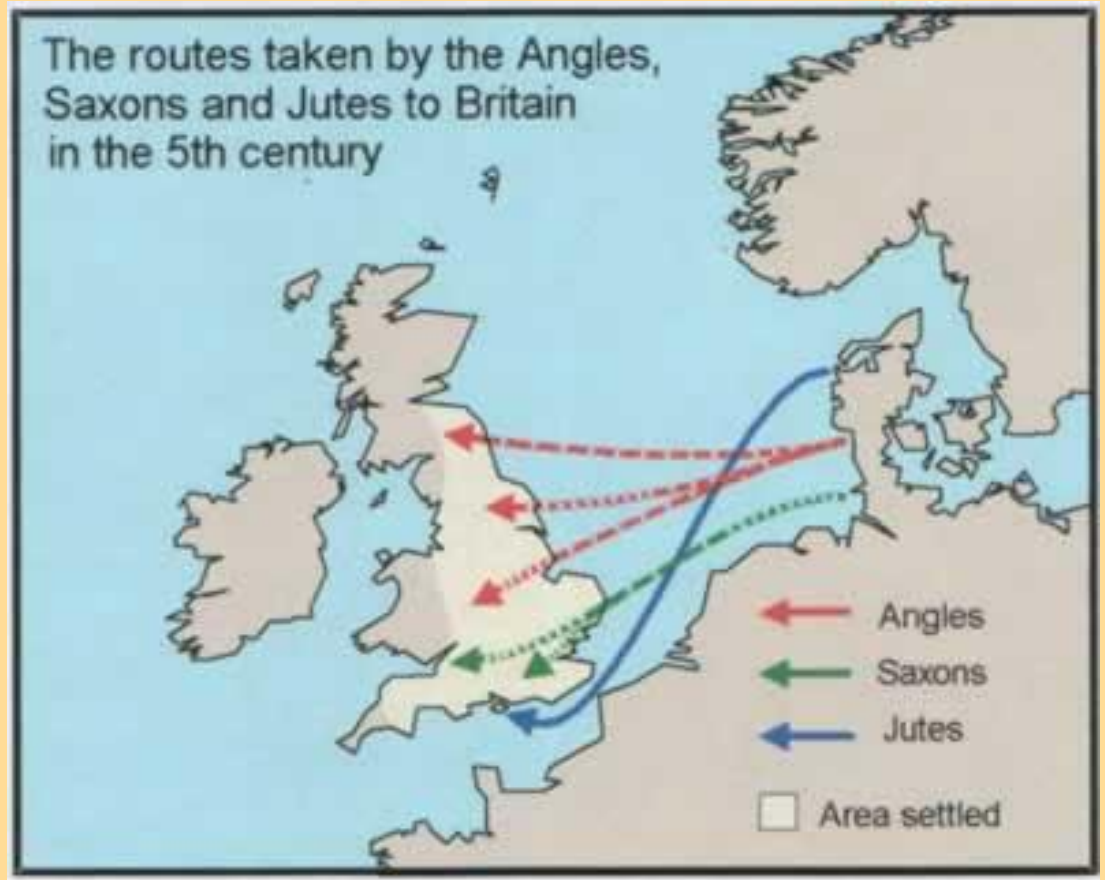
Over time, the Roman Empire grew so large that it became difficult to control. Eventually, the Empire became weaker and more vulnerable to attacks until it finally fell in 476 A.D. (The Fall of the Roman Empire).



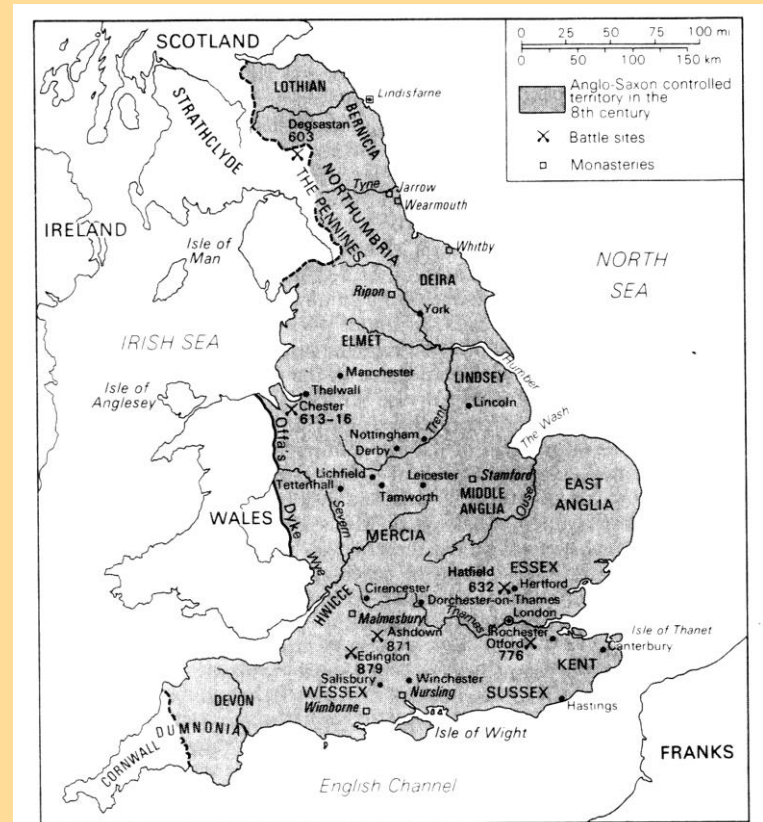
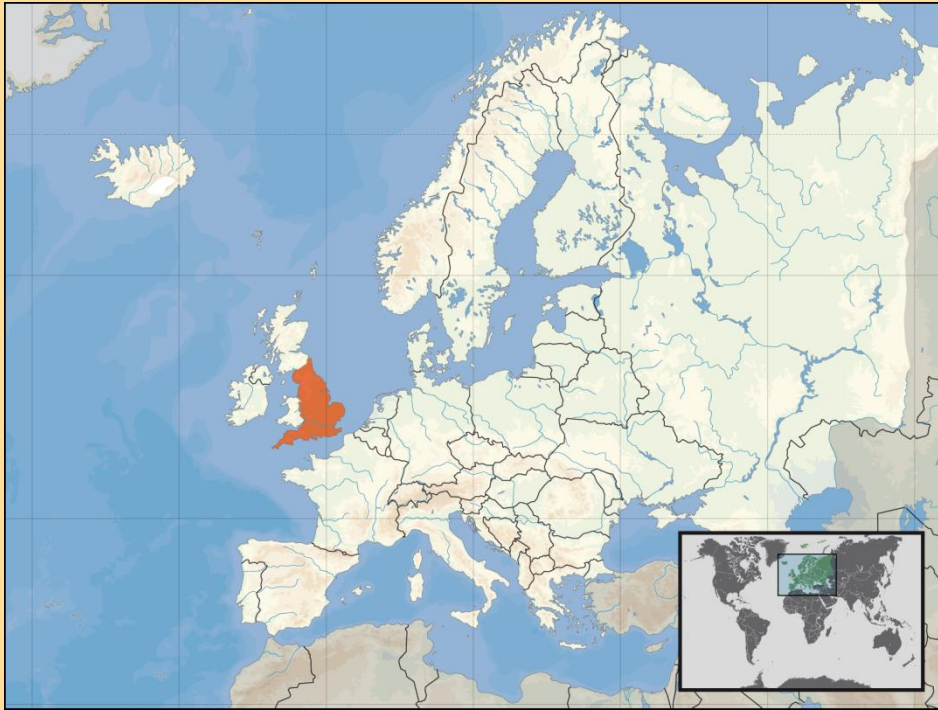
The Fall of Rome began the historical period known as the Middle Ages, also known as the "Dark Ages." The "light" of the Roman Empire had been extinguished.



In 449 A.D., in the midst of this weakening of the Roman Empire and the onset of the Dark Ages, Britain was invaded by several Germanic tribes (from the area now known as Germany): the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. They pushed many of the Celts into the areas now known as Wales.



The area that the Anglo-Saxons invaded became known as "Angleland," a name which would later evolve into "England."



Anglo-Saxon England.

Adapted from R. Treharne and H. Fullard (eds.), *Muir's Historical Atlas: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 9th ed. (1965), George Philip & Son Ltd., London.

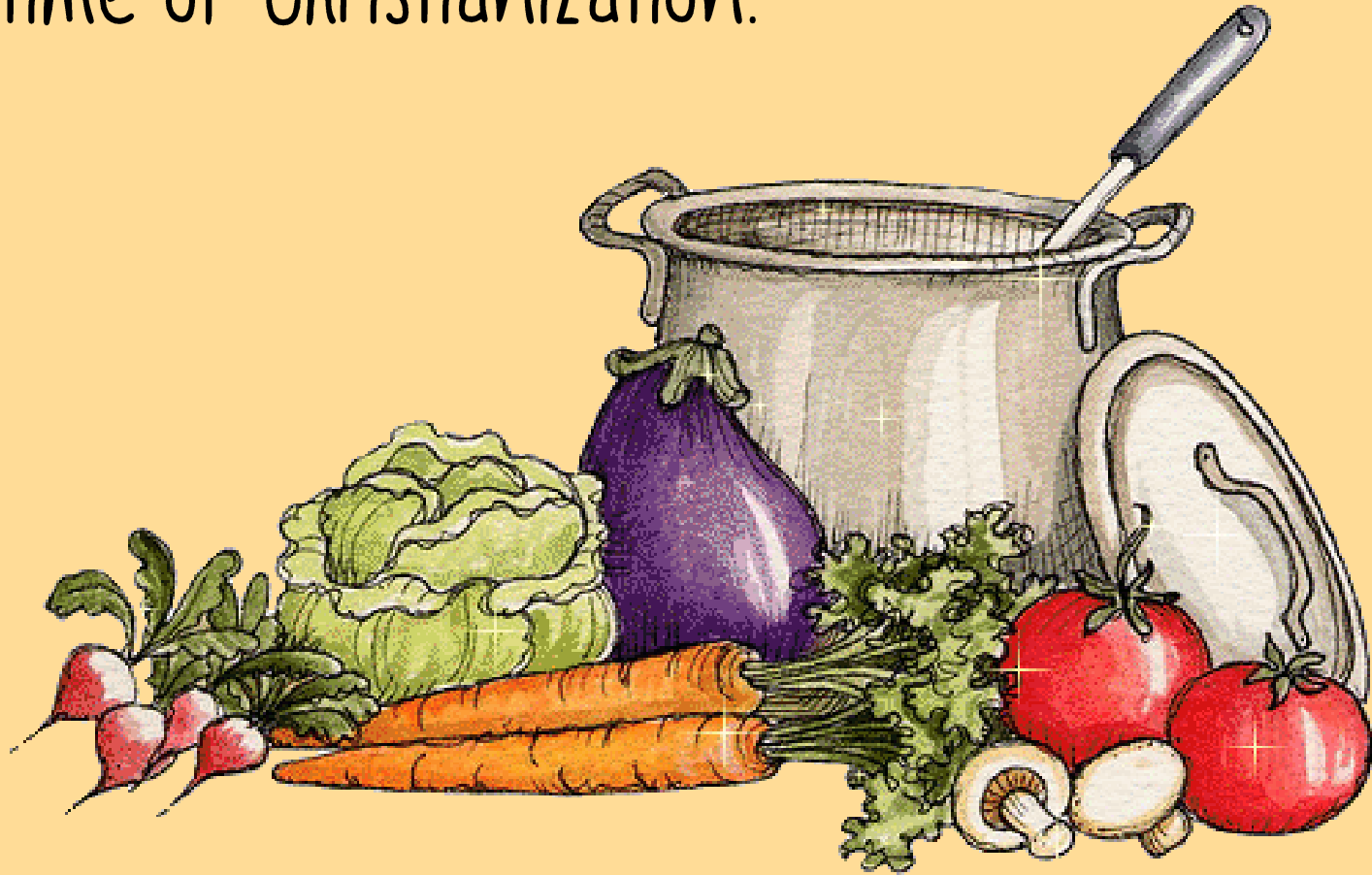
The language of the Anglo-Saxons (as these invaders were called) was crucial to the basis of the English language. It was during this time that their brand of Germanic language, known as Anglo-Saxon, was added to the English "stew pot."



Eventually, Christianity spread to England, and the Anglo-Saxons were converted from pagans to Christians.



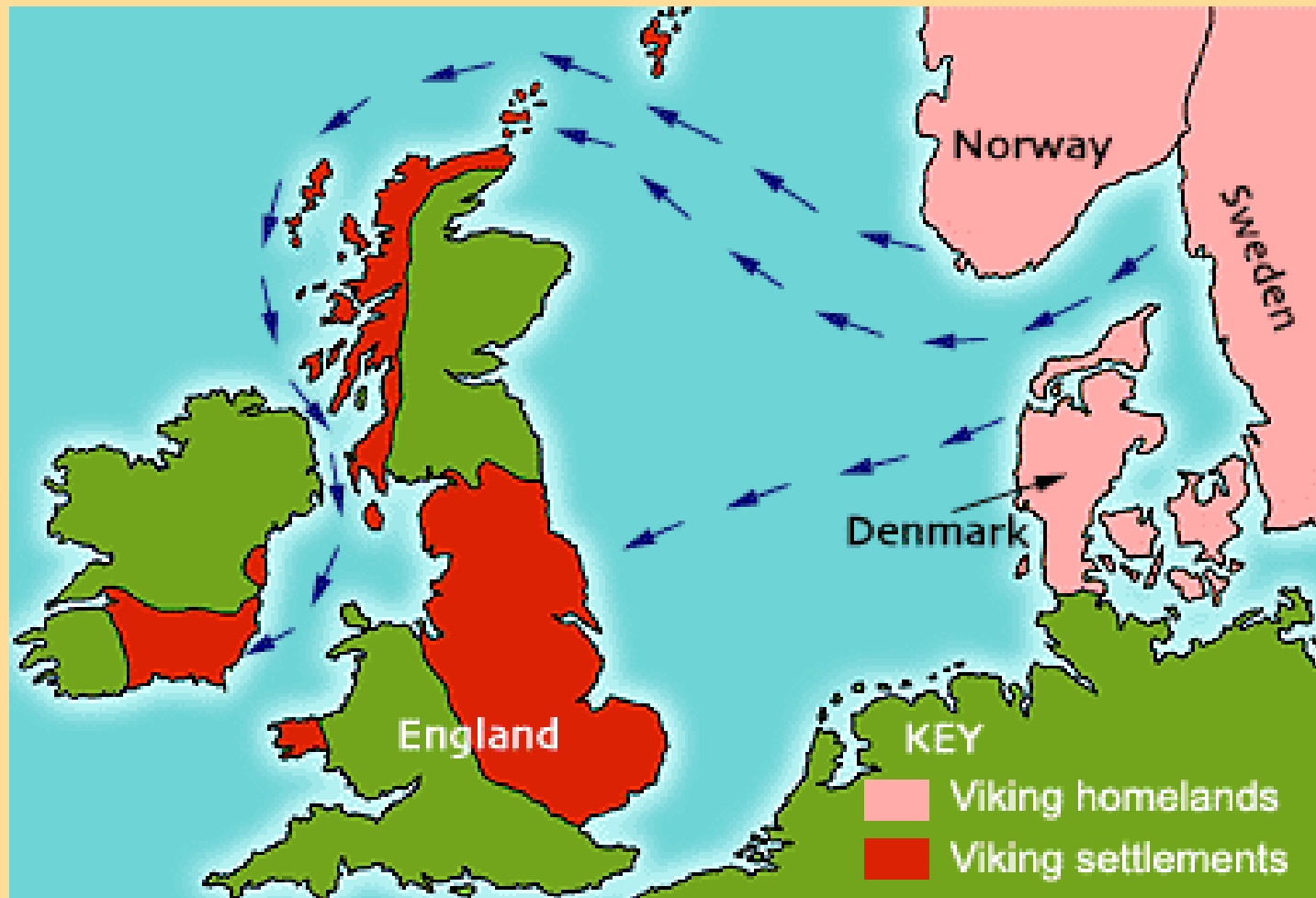
Since Latin is the language of the Christian Church, more Latin entered the English language during this time of Christianization.



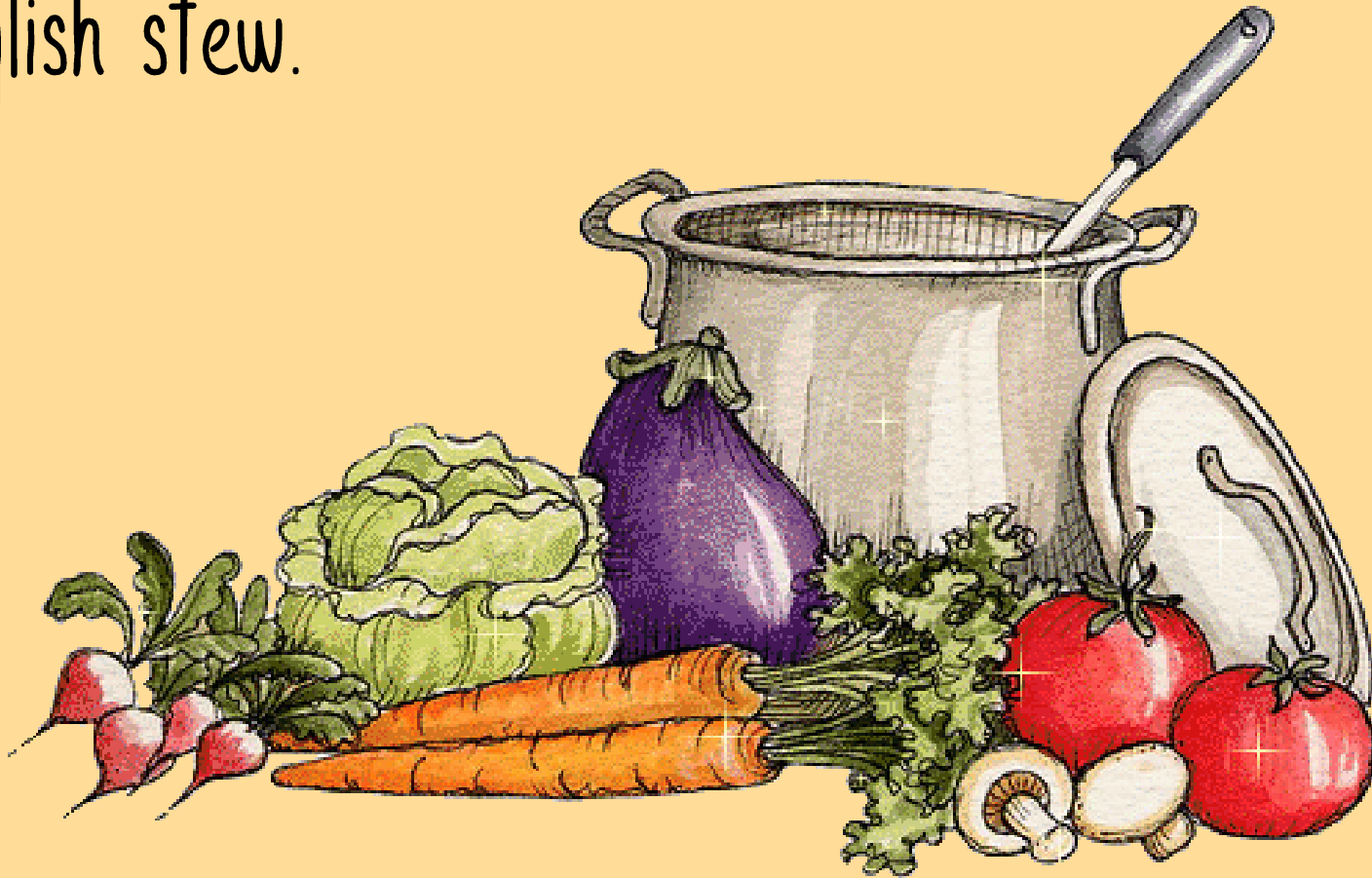
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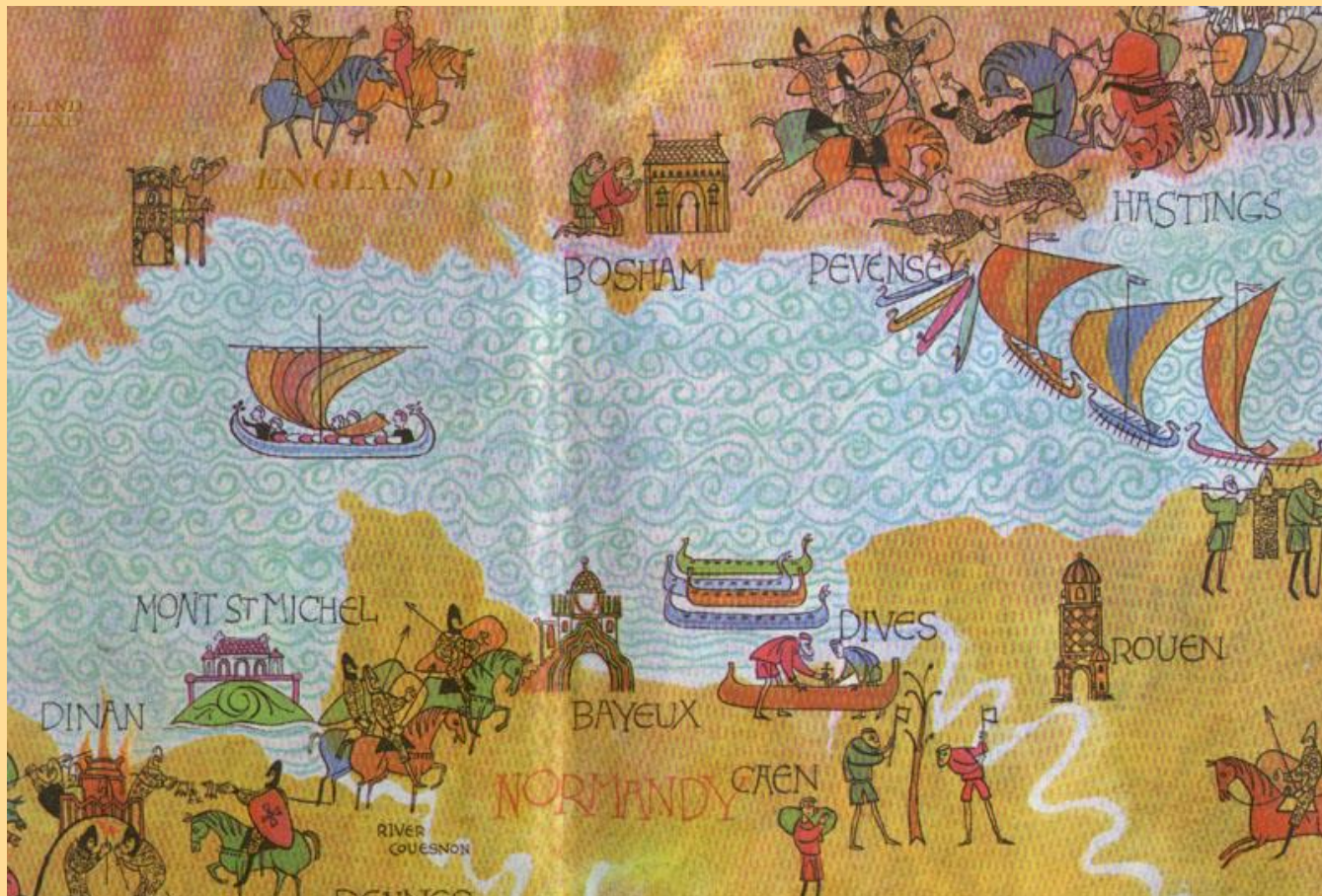
Once these Vikings invaded, their language  
(known as Old Norse) also became part of the  
“English stew.”



# MIDDLE ENGLISH

**1066 A.D. - 1500 A.D.**

In 1066 A.D., a major development occurred in the history of English when the Norman-French invaded England.



As a result of this invasion, French was added to the “English stew.”



Since French came from Latin, even more Latin entered the English language (through French) during this time.



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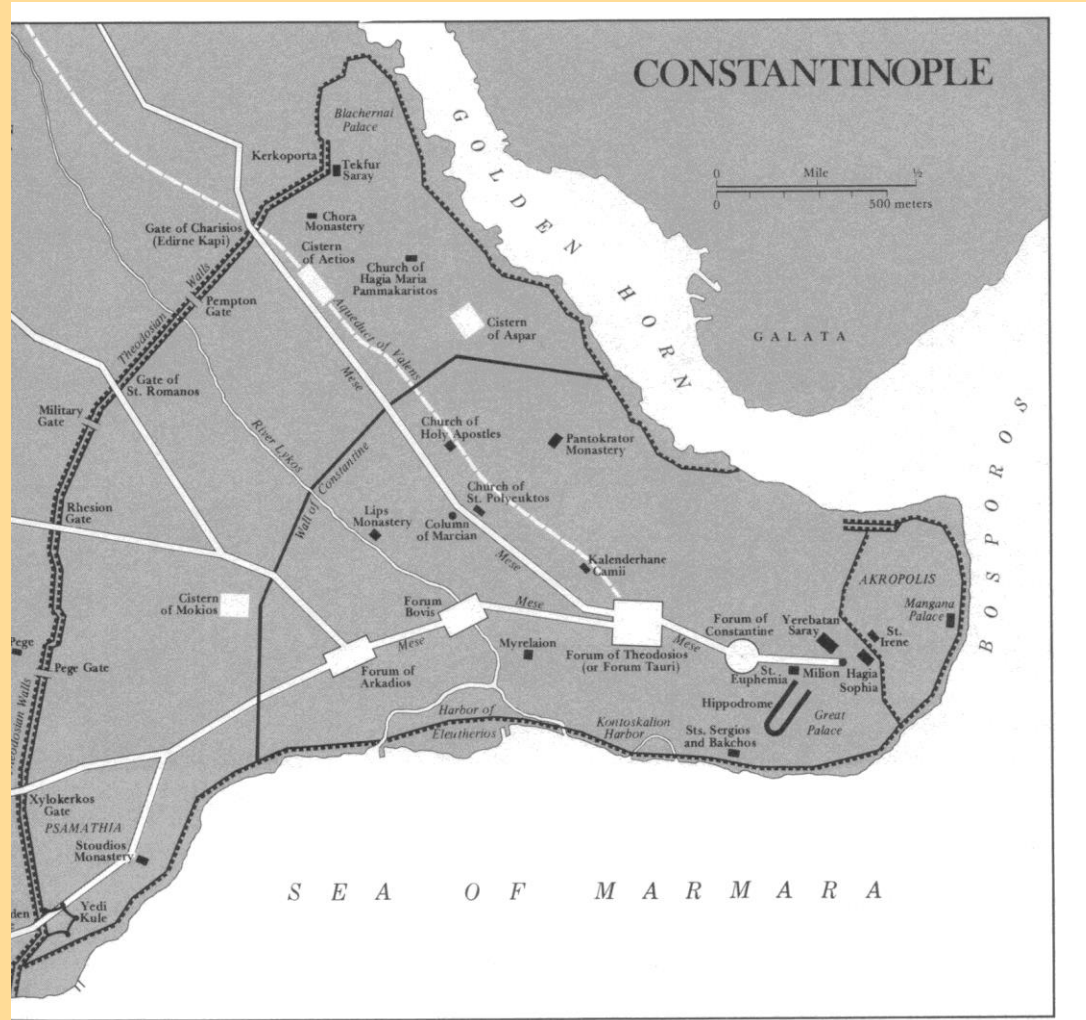
The captions on the tapestry are embroidered in Latin. The entire tapestry is basically a huge "comic strip" written in Latin. Latin was the language used by historians and scholars during the Middle Ages, and most people would have at least recognized basic Latin from their prayer books.



# MODERN ENGLISH

**1500 A.D. - PRESENT**

Around 1500, there was a renewed interest in the Greek language when the city of Constantinople was conquered by the Turks.



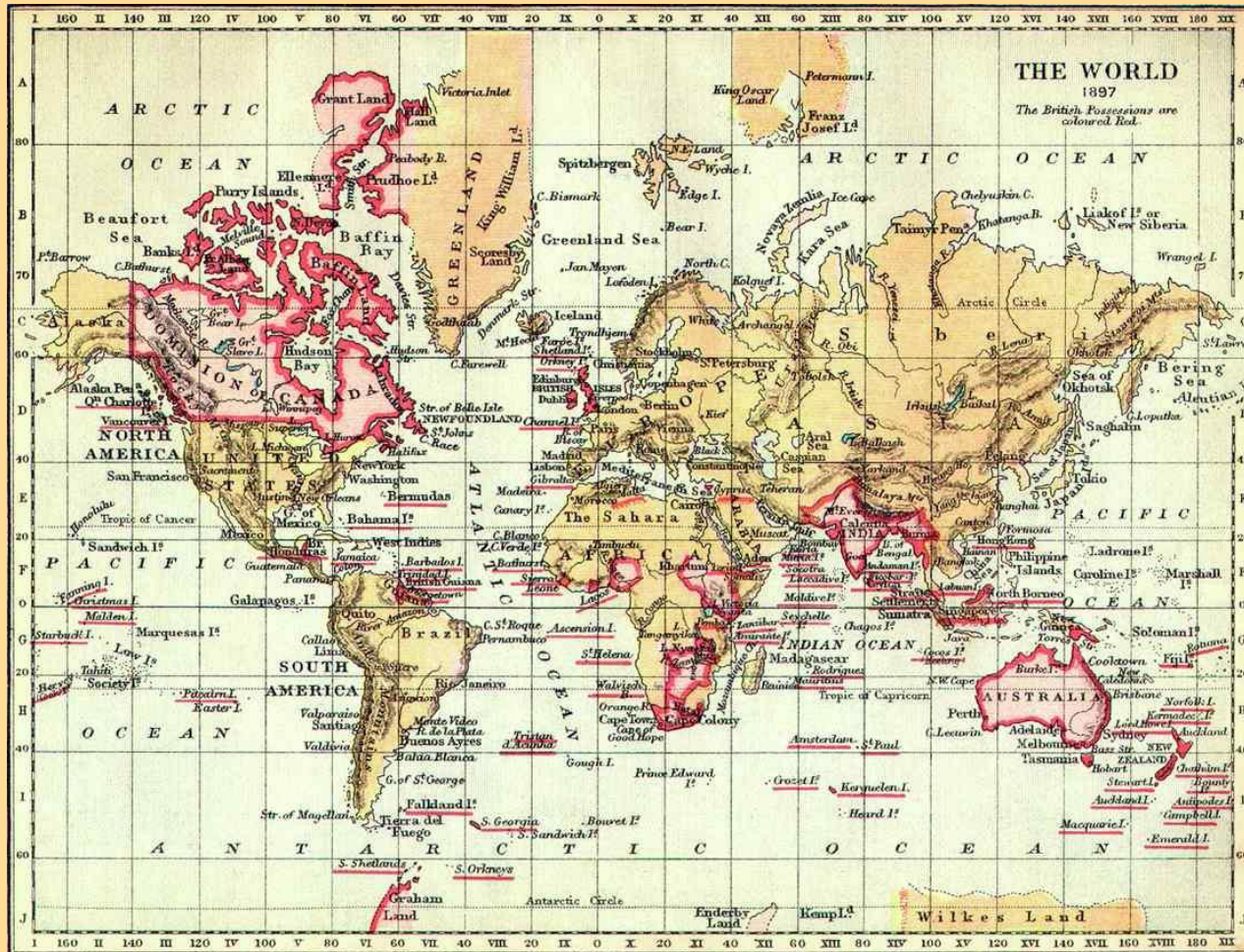
Greek scholars living in Constantinople fled to other countries in Europe and shared their knowledge of ancient Greece and the Greek language with the English and European scholars.



As a result, many Greek words entered the English language at this time. (Other Greek words had entered the language much earlier through Latin, since the Romans borrowed many Greek words and "Latinized" them.)



The Modern English period is also marked by vast exploration and colonization of many different parts of the world.



Because of this exploration and colonization, many new words from many different languages entered into the "English stew."



Today the "English stew" is a rich mixture of words coming from many different languages.



English's three MAJOR ancestors, however, are:

✓ Anglo-Saxon (20-25%)

✓ Latin (60%)

✓ Greek (10%)

Together, these three languages make up 90-95% of English. Everything else is in the remaining 5%.