A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE  Have you ever heard the saying, “All roads lead to Rome”? The Mediterranean region was home to the two great civilizations of ancient Europe—ancient Greece and ancient Rome. The city of Rome was founded in about 753 B.C., and Rome conquered a huge empire by about A.D. 100. To aid communication and make it possible for the army to march quickly to distant locations, Rome built a large network of well-paved roads. In ancient Europe, most roads did indeed lead to Rome, enabling that city to control a vast region.

A History of Ancient Glory

Two geographic advantages helped the Mediterranean to become the region where European civilization was born. First, the mild climate made survival there easier than in other areas. So societies had time to develop complex institutions such as government. Second, the nearby Mediterranean Sea encouraged overseas trade. When different societies trade with each other, they also exchange ideas. The spread of ideas often leads to advances in knowledge.

GREECE: BIRTHPLACE OF DEMOCRACY  Beginning about 2000 B.C., people from the north moved onto the Balkan Peninsula. They built villages there. The region is mountainous, so those villages were isolated from each other and developed into separate city-states. A city-state is a political unit made up of a city and its surrounding lands.

Ancient Greece left a lasting legacy to modern civilization. The city-state of Athens developed the first democracy, a government in which the people rule. In Athens, all free adult males were citizens who had the right to serve in the law-making assembly. Athenian democracy helped inspire the U.S. system of government. And Greek science, philosophy, drama, and art helped shape modern culture.

In the 400s B.C., conflict weakened Greece. Several city-states fought a costly series of wars with Persia, an empire in southwest Asia. Then Athens fought a ruinous
war with Sparta, a rival Greek city-state. Finally, in 338 B.C., Macedonia (a kingdom to the north) conquered Greece. Beginning in 336 B.C., the Macedonian general Alexander the Great conquered Persia and part of India. His empire spread Greek culture but broke apart after his death.

**THE ROMAN EMPIRE** As Greece lost power, a state to the west was rising. That state, Rome, ruled most of the Italian Peninsula by 275 B.C. At the time, Rome was a republic, a government in which citizens elect representatives to rule in their name.

The Roman Empire grew by conquering territory overseas, including the Iberian and Balkan peninsulas. At home in Italy, unrest over inequalities led to decades of turmoil that caused Romans to seek strong leaders. Rome began to be ruled by an emperor, ending the republic.

One of Rome’s overseas territories was Palestine, the place where Jesus was born. Christianity spread from there across the empire, and by the late 300s, Christianity was Rome’s official religion.

By A.D. 395, the empire was too big for a single government, so it split into a western and an eastern half. The Western Roman Empire grew weak, in part because of German invaders from the north, and fell in A.D. 476. The Eastern Roman Empire lasted nearly 1,000 years longer.

**Moving Toward Modern Times**

After 476, the three Mediterranean peninsulas had very different histories. The Balkan Peninsula stayed part of the Eastern Roman Empire...
(also called the Byzantine Empire) for nearly 1,000 years. Beginning in the 1300s, Italy saw the birth of the Renaissance, and in the 1400s, Portugal and Spain launched the Age of Exploration.

**ITALIAN CITY-STATES** The invaders who overran the Italian Peninsula had no tradition of strong central government. Italy eventually became divided into many small states and remained so for centuries.

In 1096, European Christians launched the **Crusades**, a series of wars to take Palestine from the Muslims. Italians earned large profits by supplying the ships that carried Crusaders to the Middle East. Italian cities such as Florence and Venice became rich from banking and foreign trade. This wealth helped them grow into powerful city-states.

The **Renaissance**, which began in the Italian city-states, was a time of renewed interest in learning and the arts that lasted from the 14th through 16th centuries. It was inspired by classical art and writings. Renaissance ideas spread north to the rest of Europe.

But the wealth of Italy did not protect it from disease. In 1347, the bubonic plague reached Italy from Asia and in time killed millions of Europeans. (See pages 294–295.)

**SPAIN’S EMPIRE** In the 700s, Muslims from North Africa conquered the Iberian Peninsula. Muslims controlled parts of the Iberian Peninsula for more than 700 years. Spain’s Catholic rulers, Ferdinand and Isabella, retook Spain from the Muslims in 1492.

Also in 1492, Queen Isabella paid for Christopher Columbus’s first voyage. Portugal had already sent out many voyages of exploration. Both Spain and Portugal established colonies in the Americas and elsewhere. Their empires spread Catholicism and the Spanish and Portuguese languages throughout the world.

### A Rich Cultural Legacy

Mediterranean Europe’s history shaped its culture by determining where languages are spoken and where religions are practiced today. And the people of the region take pride in the artistic legacy of the past.

**ROME’S CULTURAL LEGACY** Unlike many areas of Europe that Rome conquered, Greece retained its own language. Greek was, in fact, the official language of the Byzantine Empire. In contrast, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian are Romance languages that evolved from Latin, the language of Rome.

The two halves of the Roman Empire also developed different forms of Christianity. The majority religion in Greece today is Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Roman Catholicism is strong in Italy, Spain, and Portugal.

**CENTURIES OF ART** This region shows many signs of its past civilizations. Greece and Italy have ancient ruins, such as the Parthenon, that reveal what classical

### Background

The Renaissance shaped modern life by stressing classical culture, material comfort, and the value of individuals.

### Making Comparisons

What is similar about the cultural legacies left by the Roman and Spanish empires?
architecture was like. Spain has Roman aqueducts, structures that carried water for long distances, and Muslim mosques, places of worship.

The region also has a long artistic legacy, which includes classical statues, Renaissance painting and sculpture, and modern art produced by such artists as Pablo Picasso of Spain. The pictures on page 291 contrast Renaissance Italian art with Muslim Spanish art.

Economic Change

Because of the Mediterranean region’s sunny climate and historic sites, tourism has long been a large part of its economy. In other ways, the economy has been changing rapidly since World War II.

AGRICULTURE TO INDUSTRY In general, the Mediterranean nations are less industrial than those of Northern and Western Europe. For centuries, the region’s economy was based on fishing and agriculture. Fishing remains important, and olives, grapes, citrus, and wheat are still major agricultural crops.

But in the late 20th century, the region’s economy grew and changed. Today, manufacturing is increasing. The making of textiles is Portugal’s biggest industry. Spain is a leading maker of automobiles, and Italy is a major producer of clothing and shoes. Service industries, such as banking, also make up a much larger part of the economy than before.

In the 1980s, Greece, Portugal, and Spain joined the European Union (EU). This aided growth by promoting trade with other EU nations and by making financial aid from the EU available.

ECONOMIC PROBLEMS The region still faces economic challenges. For example, Italy’s northern region is much more developed than its southern half. The reasons for this include the following:

- The north is closer to other industrial countries of Europe, such as Germany and France.
- The south has poorer transportation systems.
- The government tried to promote growth in the south but made bad choices. It started industries that did not benefit the local people.

Another problem is that the entire Mediterranean region is poor in energy resources and relies heavily on imported petroleum. This makes the region vulnerable because trade problems or wars could halt oil supplies and prevent industries from functioning.

Modern Mediterranean Life

Mediterranean Europe saw political turmoil in the 20th century. Two dictators, Benito Mussolini in Italy
and Francisco Franco in Spain, ruled for long periods. After Franco died in 1975, Spain set up a constitutional government. After World War II, Italy became a republic but has had dozens of governments since then. Greece has also experienced political instability.

**THE BASQUES** Spain has had an ongoing conflict with a minority group. The Basque people live in the western foothills of the Pyrenees. Their language is the only pre-Roman language still spoken in southwestern Europe. In the late 1970s, Spain granted the Basque region self-rule. But some Basques want complete independence and have used violence to fight for it. The conflict remains unresolved.

**CITY GROWTH** The transition from agriculture to manufacturing and service industries has encouraged people to move from the country to the city. Urban growth has created housing shortages, pollution, and traffic jams. The people of Mediterranean Europe want to preserve their historic cities, so they are trying to solve these problems. For example, Athens is expanding its subway system to reduce traffic and pollution.

Despite their problems, Mediterranean cities give intriguing insight into the past. In Rome and Athens, classical ruins stand near modern buildings. Florence has glorious works of Renaissance art. Granada, Spain, has Catholic cathedrals and a Muslim palace. In Section 2, you will read about Western Europe, a region that also has a rich history.