

The Italian Peninsula



Ancient Rome

The civilization of Rome developed on the Italian peninsula, a long, boot-shaped piece of land in Europe, surrounded on three sides by water. To the north of Italy lies the rest of northern Europe. To the south, east, and west lay the seas.

On this small peninsula are two major mountain ranges: the lofty Alps, which extend from west to east along Italy's northern border; and the Apennines, which stretch like a backbone down the length of Italy. Their peaks and hillsides cover most of the peninsula.

The small amount of Italy that is not mountainous is made up of high, rocky coastland or level plains. Several rivers, including the Po and the Tiber, flow through these areas to the sea.

Find the city of Rome on the map on the opposite page. You can see that it is located

about midway down the peninsula, on the Tiber River and close to the sea. This was a good place to found a city. Its hillside location made it easy to defend. It sat at the very point at which crossing the Tiber was easiest. Rome also lay on the route from the Apennine Mountains to the sea.

As you will learn in this unit, several different cultures converged in Rome. The Greeks, for example, settled nearby, on other parts of the peninsula.

As the map below shows, Rome gradually grew from a city into an empire that extended into Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. Today, the legacy of ancient Rome lives on in the contributions it has made to western civilization—for example, in the modern culture of Western Europe and North America. In this unit, you will learn how Rome grew into an empire. You will also learn about Rome's lasting influence on the world today.

The Roman Empire, About 117 C.E.

