

Map of Ancient Rome showing its seven hills and the Tiber River.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

(Adapted from Discovery Techbook)

At its height, the Roman Empire was one of the largest and wealthiest empires in the world. It lasted for approximately 1,000 years. However, this empire had simple beginnings.

Historians have determined that Rome began as a collection of small settlements located on seven hills near the Tiber River in Italy around 753 BCE. Rome is located in the center of Italy on a peninsula.



Ancient Rome began as a small settlement in the middle of the Italian peninsula.

Over time the towns joined together to form the city of Rome. In 509 BCE, the Roman Republic formed, and the city became the political center of a large empire that extended from Great Britain to Spain and from North Africa to Southwest Asia.

Benefits of Rome's location

Rome's location offered several advantages. One of the advantages was the protection of the hills and mountains found in the peninsula.

Two major groups of mountains found in Italy were very important on the development of ancient Rome. The Alps, Europe's highest mountains, separated the Italian peninsula from the rest of the continent. The Apennine Mountains run north to south along the Italian peninsula. The Apennine Mountains made it difficult for people to cross from one side of the peninsula to the other. These two groups of mountains helped to protect Rome from outside attacks. The seven hills protected Rome.



The Alps and the Apennine mountains surrounded and protected Rome



The Tiber provided a source of fresh water to Romans and was also an important route for trade and transportation.

The climate of Rome also helped the people of the city. The region had mild, rainy winters and hot, dry summers. This climate made it possible for the region to develop a strong agricultural base. The mild climate enabled Romans to grow wheat, grapes, and olives. This abundance of food supported the people and allowed Rome to prosper.

While the climate made year-long agriculture possible, Rome also had the advantage to be near water. The Tiber River helped the agricultural system to prosper. The Tiber River also provided several other advantages to ancient Rome besides agriculture.

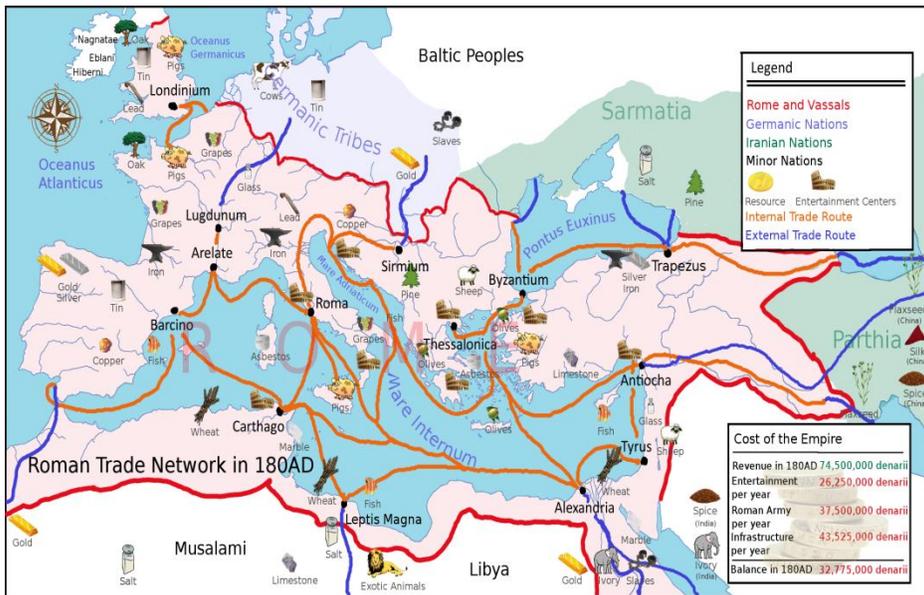
The Importance of Rome's Waterways

Like many other ancient civilizations, the presence of a major river supported the agricultural system of ancient Rome. The Tiber provided a reliable source of fresh water. Romans used this water to irrigate their farms, as well as to provide drinking water for humans and animals.

However, Rome was not near the delta of the Tiber River. Rome developed about 15 miles from where the Tiber River empties into the Mediterranean Sea. This distance provided Rome with additional protection, because invaders had to move inland from the coast to arrive in the city. But, Rome was still near enough to the sea that Romans could use the river as an easy access point to the Mediterranean.



The Tiber River and the Mediterranean Sea provided Rome with the opportunity to trade and conquer.



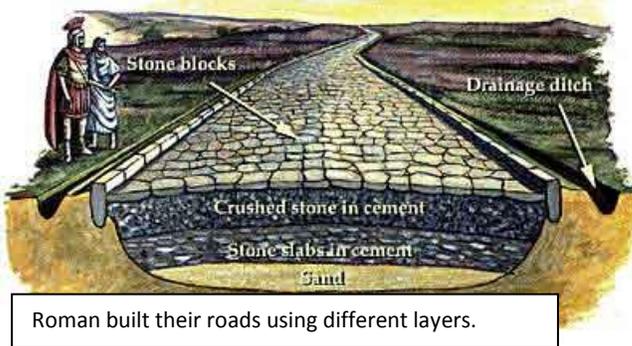
Rome's location on the Italian peninsula, and the Tiber River, provided access to trade routes on the Mediterranean Sea. As a result, trade was an important part of life in ancient Rome. Rome had several trade routes throughout the Mediterranean Sea and established trade with other civilizations throughout the Eastern Hemisphere. Later, the Roman armies used these same routes to conquer large amounts of territory and expand the empire along the Mediterranean.

As the empire continued to expand, it became difficult for farmers in Rome to produce enough food to meet the demand

of the growing population. Romans had to import wheat from North Africa and olive oil from Spain. The need to provide food for its people meant that trade became important in the empire.

Roman Roads and Bridges

The Roman Road



As Romans conquered new territories in Europe, Africa, and Asia, they built roads which connected those territories back to Rome.

The power of Roman engineering is reflected in the construction of these roads. The roads were built of several different layers, and the top layers were often cemented. Rome's work was so extraordinary

that some parts of this original road system still exist today in Europe and the Middle East.



Many Roman roads, like this one in Jordan, were built so well that parts of them still exist today.



Romans built the bridges so well, that even today, 2000 years later, many still exist like this one in Alcántara, Spain.

In addition to roads, Romans also built a network of bridges to create a connection between the city and its territories across rivers. These bridges were built out of stone and as a result were strong and durable.

Roman soldiers built the major construction projects, such as its roads and bridges. The roads were very important for Rome's military, because troops could move quickly and transport supplies from one part of the empire to another. However, traders, messengers, and others also benefited from these roads. Traders were able to bring products and food from North Africa, Asia, and Europe. Rome's system of roads and bridges helped make it possible for the Romans to be an empire for many centuries.