10.1 Geography and Economy of Ancient Rome

How did geography and trade routes impact the growth of Rome?

Explore

Roman Roads and Bridges

How did Roman roads and bridges impact the economy?

As Romans fought and conquered new territories on and beyond the Italian peninsula, they built paved roads which connected those territories back to Rome. Today's phrase “all roads lead to Rome” reflects the historical fact that Roman roads connected the capital of the empire to most of the distant territories that they conquered.

The strength 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 paved. The Romans also built drainage ditches along the sides of the roads to prevent water from damaging them. Rome's work is so enduring that some parts of this original road system still exist today in Europe and the Middle East.

In addition to roads, Romans also built a network of bridges to create a land-based connection between the city and its territories across rivers and other bodies of water. These bridges were built out of stone and as a result were strong and durable. Many of the bridges included arches. This element of design helped to make the bridges strong, and also allowed boats to move in the water underneath the bridges.

Many of Rome's major construction projects, such as its roads, were built by soldiers. The roads were a priority for Rome's military, because it was important for troops to be able to move quickly and easily 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 spices, jewelry, furs, perfume, and food from North Africa, Asia, and Europe, so people all over the empire could buy goods they might not otherwise have had. Tax collectors also traveled on these roads, bringing wealth and resources from conquered territories back to rulers in Rome. Rome's elaborate system of roads and bridges helped make it possible for the Romans to hold together their large empire for a long time.
Many Roman roads, such as this one in Jordan, were built so well that parts of them still exist today.