10.1 Geography and Economy of Ancient Rome

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

Explore

The Importance of Rome’s Waterways

How did Rome’s geography help it to prosper?

Like many other ancient civilizations, the agricultural system of ancient Rome was supported by the presence of a major river. The Tiber provided a reliable source of fresh water which the Romans used for irrigating their farms, as well as drinking water for humans and animals. However, unlike many other civilizations, Rome did not develop in the river’s delta.

Instead, 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 reach the city. However, Rome was still close enough to the sea that Romans were able to use the river as an easy access point to the Mediterranean.

Rome’s location on the Italian peninsula, and the closeness to 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 developed 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. Wheat was imported from North Africa and olive oil was imported from Spain. The need to provide enough for its people meant that trade became increasingly important throughout the empire.

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