

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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Conti, L., Easton, M., Saldais, M., Dumovic, V., & KostECKI, R. (2016). *Oxford big ideas: humanities and social sciences 7*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

10.2 The Mediterranean Sea and the Tiber River

THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA AND SURROUNDING AREAS



Source 1

Source: Oxford University Press

The ancient Roman civilisation began in the region of Latium, in the central west of the Italian peninsula, around the 8th century BCE (see Source 1). A range of physical and geographical features contributed to people settling in Latium and establishing the city of Rome, which became the heart of the ancient Roman civilisation.

Most of the Italian peninsula is mountainous, but there is good farming land in a region known as Latium in the central west. The climate there is mild and wet in winter, and hot and dry in summer. The region is protected by the Apennines, a rugged mountain range that stretches down the centre of the peninsula (see Source 2).

The site on which the city of Rome was built was a strategic choice – it had seven hills that could be easily defended. The first settlers built their homes on these hilltops and farmed at the base of the hills. To the west of the city lay the Tiber River, which gave the Romans a vital trading route and, more importantly, easy access to the Mediterranean Sea.

THE ITALIAN PENINSULA



Source 2

Source: Oxford University Press

The Mediterranean Sea

The Mediterranean Sea covers an area of about 2.5 million square kilometres. It has little tidal movement and mostly stable wind patterns, so it has very few bad storms. This made sailing and navigation very easy. Ancient Rome's position at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea allowed it easy access to a range of seaports and markets around the Mediterranean region. Trade made seaports busy centres, where people of different cultures exchanged goods, ideas, technologies and processes.

The Romans became expert seafarers and they developed a strong navy, which helped them conquer new territories. At its peak, ancient Rome grew to control all the ancient civilisations located around the Mediterranean coast. These included the Carthaginians in north Africa, the Celts on the Iberian peninsula (modern-day Spain and Portugal), the Greeks and the Egyptians. The ancient Romans became so dominant in the region that they called the Mediterranean Sea *mare nostrum* – meaning 'our sea'.

The Tiber River

The Tiber River begins as freshwater springs in the Apennines. It then flows west 400 kilometres across the Italian peninsula to the Tyrrhenian Sea (see Source 2). The city of Rome developed on the eastern bank of the Tiber.

At first, the river did little more than mark off the territory of tribes in the region. As the city of Rome developed, the river became more important as a transport route. Upstream from its mouth it could be navigated for about a quarter of its length. Vessels that sailed its waters included boats propelled by oarsmen and barges dragged along by men walking the banks.

The river also served as an outlet for a huge sewer, the Cloaca Maxima, built around 600 BCE. The sewer's remains can still be seen in Rome today.

A port, Ostia, was built at the river mouth. Later it became an important naval base. Through Ostia and other ports such as Pozzuoli and Portus, trade goods poured into and out of Rome.

The Tiber also caused some problems for Rome. Each year it flooded with snow melt from the Apennines, sometimes seriously. This led successive Roman rulers to erect structures to strengthen riverbanks to protect areas of the city from floods. Wharves were also built.



Source 3 The Tiber River in Rome, with the Vatican in the background

Check your learning 10.2

Remember and understand

- 1 Where did the civilisation of ancient Rome begin?
- 2 What did the ancient Romans call the Mediterranean Sea, and why?

Apply and analyse

- 3 In your notebook, construct an acrostic poem using the word TIBER. Your poem should reflect the impact of the river on ancient Rome. Here is an example to give you an idea of what is required:

Tumbling from the mighty mountains
 Into the Mediterranean Sea
 Barges on its waters
 Enters the mighty Tiber –
 Rome's lifeblood.

Evaluate and create

- 4 Conduct photo research to create a four-page paper or digital album of *one* of the following: the Alps, the Tiber River, the Apennines, the Nile River or the Mediterranean Sea. Add suitable captions that help to explain how you think this feature may have influenced the growth of ancient Rome, and why.