

ROME'S PERFECT LOCATION BY CICERO

One reason Rome flourished was its sheltered location some 15 miles from the Mediterranean coast. In addition, it lay at one of the major crossing points on the Tiber River. In the excerpt below, orator and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero explains the importance of the city's geographic location. As you read the excerpt, note the advantages of Rome's location mentioned by Cicero.

The location (Romulus ; the mythical co- founder of Rome) chose for the city... was unbelievably favorable. For he did not move his city down the coast, a step very easy for him to take with the forces at his command, either by invading the territory of the Rutuli or of the Aborigines, or by himself founding a city at the mouth of the Tiber... But with singular foresight Romulus saw and divined that a location upon the seaboard was not the most advantageous for cities intended to enjoy permanence and imperial sway, chiefly because maritime cities are exposed to dangers both numerous and impossible to foresee. A city surrounded on all sides by land receives many warnings of an enemy's approach...such as the crashing (of the forest) and even the noise (of marching troops). No enemy, in fact, can arrive by land without enabling us to know both his hostile intent and who he is and whence (from where) he comes. On the contrary, an enemy who comes by ships over the sea may arrive before anyone can suspect his coming, and indeed, when he appears, he does not show any signs of who he is, whence he comes, or even what he wants...

In addition, cities located on the sea are subject to certain corrupting influences and to moral decline, for they are affected by alien forms of speech and by alien standards of conduct. Not only foreign merchandise is imported but also foreign codes of morals, with the result that nothing in the ancestral customs of a maritime people can remain unchanged. The inhabitants of the seaboard do not remain at home but are tempted far from their cities by the hope and dream of swiftly gained wealth; and even when they remain at home in body, they are exiles and wanderers in spirit...

How, then, could Romulus with a more divine insight have made use of the advantages of a situation on the sea, while avoiding its disadvantages, than by placing his city on the banks of a river that flows throughout the year with an even current and empties into the sea through a wide mouth? Thus, the city could receive by sea the products it needed and also dispose of its superfluous (extra) commodities. By the river the city could ring up from the sea the necessities of a civilized life as well as bring them down from the interior. Accordingly, it seems to me that even then Romulus foresaw that this city would sometime be the seat and home of supreme dominion. For practically no city situated in any other part of Italy could have been

better able to command such economic advantages. Is there, moreover, anyone so unobservant as not to have marked and clearly appraised (evaluated) the natural defenses of our city? Romulus and the other kings planned the extent and location of the city's wall with such wisdom that it followed everywhere the brink of the high steep hills; that the only access... was blocked by a great rampart and girt (encircled) with a deep ditch; and that the citadel, thus fortified, rose from an ascent steep on every side and above a precipitous (very steep) cliff. As a result, even at the terrible time when the Gauls attacked us, the citadel remained safe and uncaptured.

