The Destruction of Pompeii

By Shannon Helgeson

Where is it?

Pompeii is located on the west coast of Italy, on the Bay of Naples.
The city of Pompeii is about 5 miles from the volcano Mt Vesuvius.

History of the City of Pompeii

- The area was inhabited since the 700s BCE when the Etruscans lived there.
- Around 200 BCE the Romans took control of the area.
- As a seaside town, they traded in crops, wine, and olives.
- It was also a popular tourist spot, and the people who lived there were fairly wealthy.

The city was full of gardens & public areas to talk & relax…

The Disaster …

- Mt. Vesuvius had erupted many times before.

The mountain tried to warn them …

- As a matter of fact, the people of Pompeii were still rebuilding after the great earthquake of 62 CE, which was caused by Mt. Vesuvius, when the disaster struck.
- 20,000 people lived in Pompeii at the time.
Pliny the Younger Writes about the area, and says:
- Earthquakes and tremors were common, & so people weren’t afraid in 62 CE
- Fires were caused when oil lamps fell due to the shaking
- In the days following the earthquake, anarchy ensued, and theft and starvation plagued the people while they tried to recover
- Some people moved away

Vesuvius blows her top
Aug. 24, 79 CE

Pliny the Elder saw the whole thing, and told the story to his nephew, Pliny the Younger…
- Pliny the Elder was a naval commander at Misenum
- When he saw what was happening he planned to use his ships to try to rescue people from near the volcano

Pliny described what he saw:
- “Ashes were already falling, hotter and thicker as the ships drew near, followed by bits of pumice and blackened stones, charred and cracked by the flames . . . Meanwhile on Mount Vesuvius broad sheets of fire and leaping flames blazed at several points, their bright glare emphasized by the darkness of night.”

But help couldn’t arrive …
- He couldn’t get close enough to the shore
- The ash and volcanic rocks were flying through the air
- The sea was sucking away from the land
- He had no choice but to sail south to Stabiae, where he could still see the devastation

Stabiae wasn’t safe either…
- The story says that when he arrived at the port city, he went into a home to rest
- But the room he was in filled quickly with ash and soot, and he had to retreat back out to his ship
- He believed if he would have stuck around he could have been buried in all the ash
The horror didn’t stop…

- For 18 hours ash and pumice stones rained down on the Pompeii, covering it 8 to 10 feet deep
- Pliny watched as the sea was sucked away, leaving sea creatures on dry sand

He said the sky went black as soot filled the air, and then all he could hear were screams…

How the people died…

- Heat
  - Temperatures reached 600 degrees
  - This was only learned by researchers in Sept. 2010

Past theories …

- Breathing toxic gasses from the volcano
- Suffocation from the ash in the air
- Being hit with flying rocks and debris
- Burial in the ash that fell like snow
- Being crushed by falling roofs and staircases where they tried to hide
- Some tried to escape by sea, but the sea was rough
- Some drowned, either when their boats sank or when the sea was sucked violently out

What they found …

- In 1748 an archaeological dig took place, mainly to find art & riches
- Many pieces of art were found after the site was dug
- This painting was on the wall of one of the homes.

The Cover-Up…

- When archaeologists started to discover several erotic works of art at the site, they began to rebury some of their finds
- This was typical of the time
- This also led some overzealous religious believers to blame the destruction of Pompeii on their “wild” behavior (like Sodom & Gomorrah)

Whole buildings were found

- This theater, known as Teatro Grande, could seat many people for entertainment.
In a school for gladiators, they found…

- A gladiator’s greave, like a shin pad
- The figure in the middle is Athena, and a cupid is flying toward her with weapons

And…

- A gladiator’s shoulder guard
- That’s Hercules on the top
- The two lower figures are worshippers of the god Bacchus

Also, jewelry & the stuff of daily life…

- This coiled snake bracelet is inscribed with the words, “From the master to his slave girl”
- Inscriptions on jewelry were rare
- This slave & master probably had an intimate relationship, common at the time

Found among a group of women…

- This ring is thought to be engraved with a winged horse or Pegasus. The ring was found among several women at the House of the Menander, one of Pompeii’s most prestigious homes.

Was he trying to help?

- These surgeon’s tools were found next to a body in Herculaneum
- In the wooden box were: a slate tablet, needles, surgical knives, tweezers, a probe and six cylindrical instrument containers
Bread still baking…
- 33 bakeries and shops have been excavated
- 81 loaves of carbonized bread were found still in their ovens, waiting to feed the families of Pompeii
- People of Pompeii seem to have not baked their own bread.
- This picture is of a bakery oven. The grind stone would have been in front, and would have been turned by mules. The skeletons of several mules were found in the ruins of one bakery.

This statue was found at Pompeii. It originally was of a wealthy woman of Pompeii. Emperor Tiberius had the original head replaced with his mother Livia’s likeness.

A rare find…
- This cup, made of agate stone, was found in on the beach of Herculaneum, near Pompeii.
- Nearly 300 human bodies were found in that city, dead from the eruption.

Nearby Oplontis also was covered …
- One of the villas unearthed is a luxurious residence attributed to Poppaea Sabina, second wife of the Emperor Nero who ruled the empire from 54 to 68 A.D.

But the most amazing discovery was yet to come…
- Archaeologists realized that the people had been buried under all this ash and rock
- As their bodies decomposed, they left impressions in the hardened ash
- Various techniques were used to make casts in the impressions. The results were remarkable…
This dog was trying to chew through his leash to get free-

Could he have been praying?

15,000+ people died, 3/4 of the population of Pompeii…

Families tried to protect each other…

This child did not survive…
The Garden of the Fugitives

This location gets its name from the 13 people who fled toward the sea and made it only as far as this large vegetable garden.
This child was found with four family members under a fallen staircase, heading for the sea.

Overlooking the mountain

- Mt. Vesuvius has erupted more than 50 times since 79 CE
- In 1631 there was a massive eruption that killed nearly 4000 people
- As recently as 1944 it erupted, less than one year after Italy was invaded by Allied Forces
- Today the volcano is monitored 24/7