Pompeii

Pompeii (/pɒmˈpeɪ(i)/ pom-PAY-(ee), Latin: [pɔmˈpe̯i.iː]) was an ancient city in what is now the comune of Pompei near Naples in the Campania region of Italy. Along with Herculaneum, Stabiae, and many surrounding villas, the city was buried under 4 to 6 m (13 to 20 ft) of volcanic ash and pumice in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD.

Largely preserved under the ash, Pompeii offers a unique snapshot of Roman life, frozen at the moment it was buried,[1] as well as insight into ancient urban planning.[2][3] It was a wealthy town of 10,000 to 20,000 residents at the time it was destroyed.[4] It hosted many fine public buildings and luxurious private houses with lavish decorations, furnishings and artworks, which were the main attractions for early excavators; subsequent excavations have found hundreds of private homes and businesses reflecting various architectural styles and social classes, as well as numerous public buildings. Organic remains, including wooden objects and human bodies, were interred in the ash; their eventual decay allowed archaeologists to create moulds of figures in their final moments of life.

EARLY HISTORY

History

The first stable settlements on the site date to the 8th century BC when the Oscans,[18] a population of central Italy, founded five villages in the area.

With the arrival of the Greeks in Campania from around 740 BC, Pompeii entered the orbit of the Hellenic people. The most important building of this period is the Doric Temple,[19] built away from the centre in what would later become the Triangular Forum.[20]: 62 At the same time the cult of Apollo was introduced.[21] Greek and Phoenician sailors used the location as a safe port.

In the early 6th century BC, the settlement merged into a single community centred on the important crossroad between Cumae, Nola, and Stabiae and was surrounded by a tufa city wall (the pappamonte wall).[22][23] The first wall (which was also used as a base for the later wall) unusually enclosed a much greater area than the early town together with much agricultural land.[24] That such an impressive wall was built at this time indicates that the settlement was already important and wealthy. The city began to flourish and maritime trade started with the construction of a small port near the mouth of the river.[20] The earliest settlement was focused in regions VII and VIII of the town (the old town) as identified from stratigraphy below the Samnite and Roman buildings, as well as from the different and irregular street plan.

Eruption of Vesuvius

The eruption lasted for two days.[51] The first phase was of pumice rain (lapilli) lasting about 18 hours, allowing most inhabitants to escape. Only approximately 1,150 bodies[52] have so far been found on site, which seems to confirm this theory, and most escapees probably managed to salvage some of their most valuable belongings; many skeletons were found with jewellery, coins, and silverware.

At some time in the night or early the next day, pyroclastic flows began near the volcano, consisting of high speed, dense, and scorching ash clouds, knocking down wholly or partly all structures in their path, incinerating or suffocating the remaining population and altering the landscape, including the coastline. By the evening of the second day, the eruption was over, leaving only haze in the atmosphere through which the sun shone weakly.

A multidisciplinary volcanological and bio-anthropological study[53] of the eruption products and victims, merged with numerical simulations and experiments, indicates that at Pompeii and surrounding towns heat was the main cause of death of people, previously believed to have died by ash suffocation. The results of the study, published in 2010, show that exposure to at least 250 °C (480 °F) hot pyroclastic flows at a distance of 10 kilometres (6 miles) from the vent was sufficient to cause instant death, even if people were sheltered within buildings. The people and buildings of Pompeii were covered in up to twelve different layers of tephra, in

total, up to 6 metres (19.7 ft) deep. Archaeology in 2023 showed that some buildings collapsed due to one or more earthquakes during the eruption, killing the occupants.[54]

REDISCOVERY AND EXCAVATIONS

Rediscovery

Titus appointed two ex-consuls to organise a relief effort while donating large amounts of money from the imperial treasury to aid the victims of the volcano.[62] He visited Pompeii once after the eruption and again the following year[63] but no work was done on recovery.

Soon after the city's burial, survivors and possibly thieves came to salvage valuables, including the marble statues from the Forum and other precious materials from buildings. There is wide evidence of post-eruption disturbance, including holes made through walls. The city was not completely buried, and the tops of larger buildings would have been visible above the ash, making it obvious where to dig or salvage building material.[64] The robbers left traces of their passage, as in a house where modern archaeologists found a wall graffito saying "house dug".[65]

Over the following centuries, its name and location were forgotten, though it still appeared on the Tabula Peutingeriana of the 4th century. Further eruptions, particularly in 471–473 and 512, covered the remains more deeply. The area became known as the La Civita (the city) due to the features in the ground.[66]

MODERN ARCHAEOLOGY

Modern

After those of Fiorelli, excavations continued in an increasingly more systematic and considered manner under several directors of archaeology though still with the main interest in making spectacular discoveries and uncovering more houses rather than answering the main questions about the city and its long term preservation.[76]

In the 1920s, Amedeo Maiuri excavated older layers beneath those of 79 AD for the first time to learn about the settlement history.[77] Maiuri made the last excavations on a grand scale in the 1950s, and the area south of the Via dell'Abbondanza and the city wall was almost completely uncovered, but they were poorly documented scientifically.