



POMPEII

The Eruption of

Mount VESUVIUS

These are the ruins of the Roman city of Pompeii.

Pompeii was a busy Roman city that was built near to the volcano mountain, Mount Vesuvius.

In the year A.D. 79 Mount Vesuvius erupted and buried Pompeii and many of its Roman citizens under a 9 metre thick layer of burning hot ash.

The remains of Pompeii have been excavated (dug out) by archaeologists to show us what the Roman city originally looked like, 2000 years ago, and how Romans lived their lives.

Archaeologists also discovered some surprising things – that you will see later.

What can you see in these pictures of Pompeii today?



Pompeii was an important and busy Roman city 2000 years ago.

It is located 200 kilometres south of Rome, in the Bay of Naples on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea.

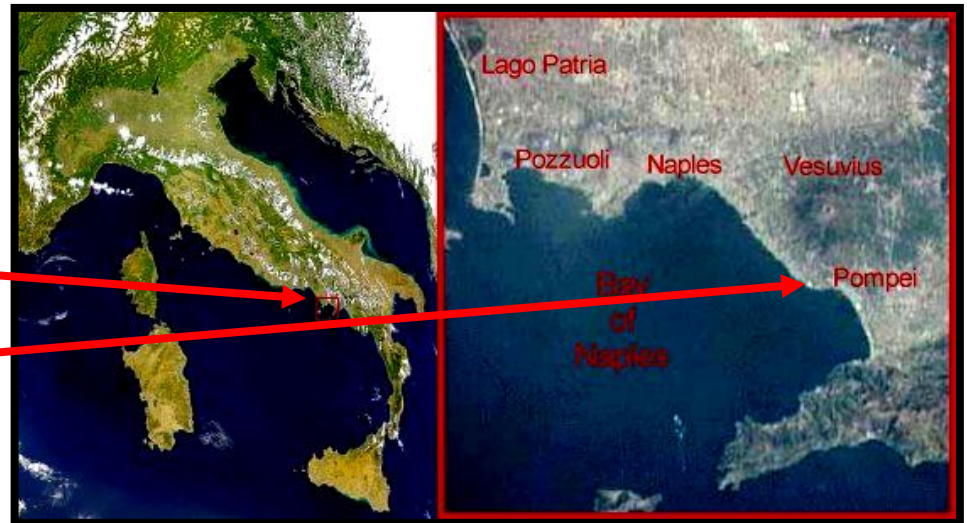
On this map of Europe you can see Italy.

On this map of Italy you can see Pompeii.



On this map of Italy you can see the Bay of Naples.

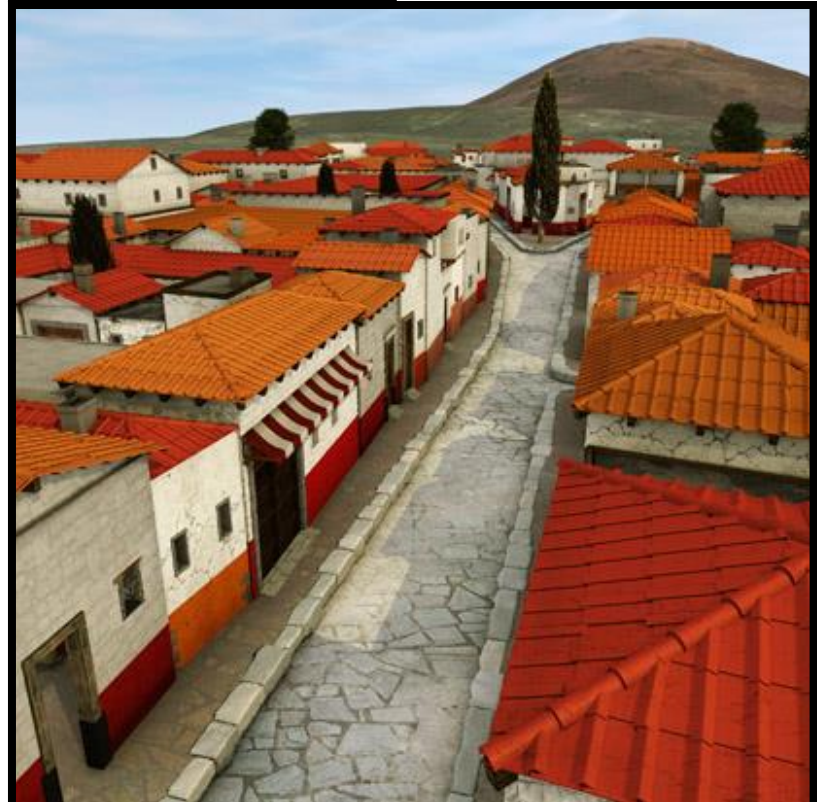
On this map of the Bay of Naples you can see Pompeii.



In AD 79 Pompeii was a beautiful city.

Its grand public buildings, the Temple, the Forum were built of carved stone.

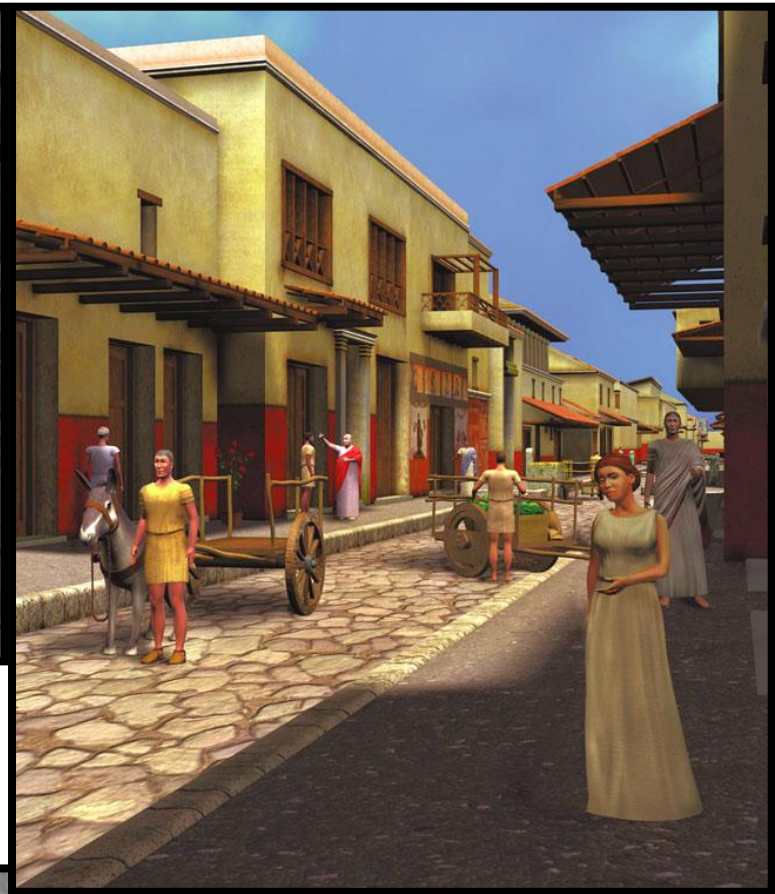
Its shops and houses were built of concrete. It had paved streets with pavements, running water and gardens.

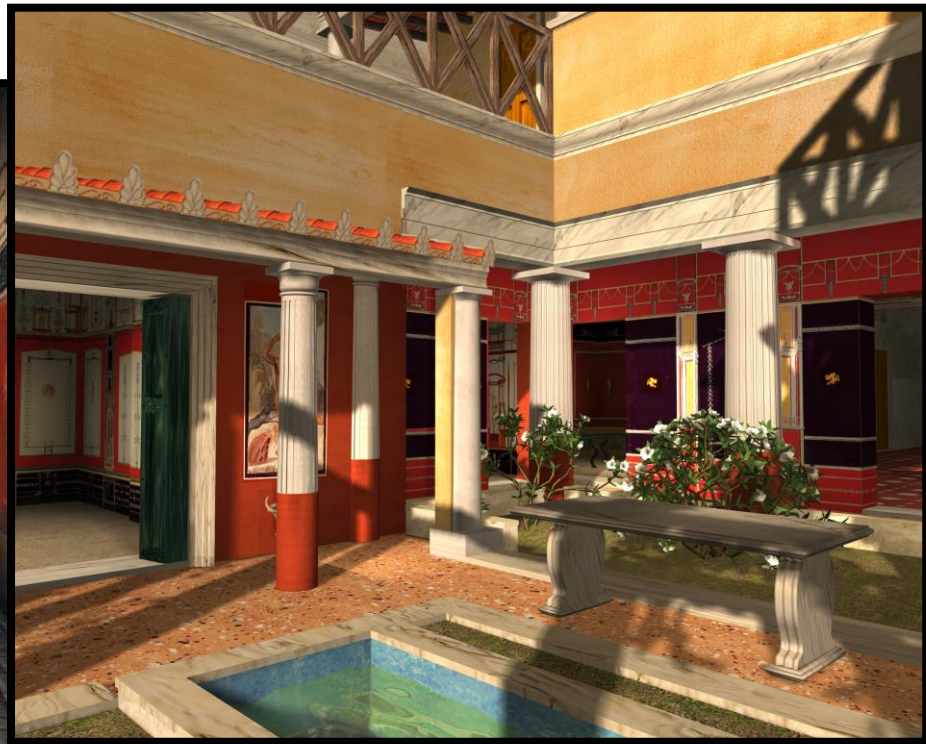




The streets of Pompeii would have been thriving with Romans shopping, buying fish, fruit and vegetables, meat, bread, clothes and household items.

Some would be going to the Temple to pray to their Roman Gods, or on their way to the Forum to hear the Senators and Councillors discuss news they had heard from Rome and talk about how to run their city of Pompeii.





Wealthy Romans lived in beautiful houses with richly decorated and painted walls and lovely gardens with pools and fountains. These wealthy Pompeii citizens would have had many servants to look after them and their houses.



The city even had its own *Amphitheatre* where the citizens of Pompeii would go, in the afternoons and evenings, to watch plays about Greek and Roman Gods and about famous Greeks and Romans.





But all of this busy living by the Roman citizens of Pompeii in AD 79, was done in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius. The mountain volcano had not erupted for so long (hundreds of years) that the Romans did not know that it was a volcano.

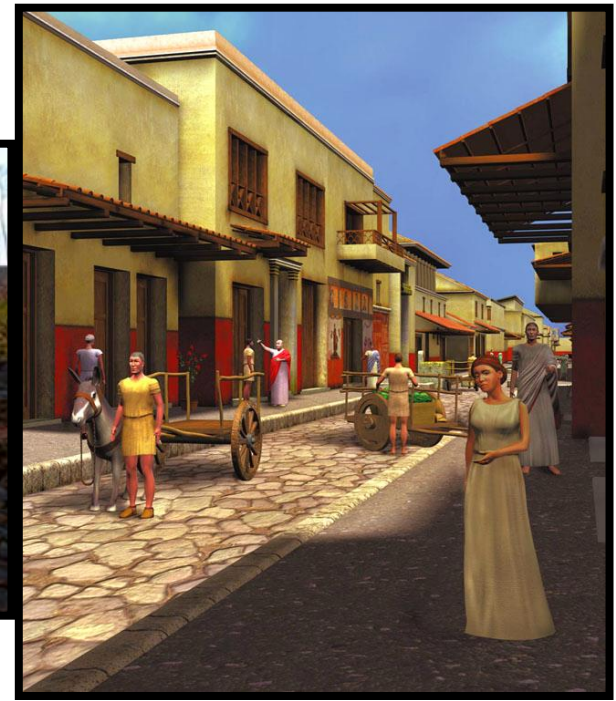
The people of Pompeii grew crops and fruit on the slopes of the mountain because the soils was very good for growing plants.



On 24th August AD 79, in the afternoon, Mount Vesuvius erupted with a massive explosion that hurled rock, ash and molten lava hundreds of metres into the air.

Lava started to run down the slopes of the mountain, destroying all the fields of crops and fruit that the Romans had been growing in the fertile volcanic soil.





The lava was flowing down the mountain, destroying all their crops, but the Romans of Pompeii, were not really worried.

They carried on with their everyday business, thinking the eruption would not last very long, and the lava would not reach their city.



But then, 18 hours after the volcano had first erupted, there was an enormous explosion, bigger than the first.

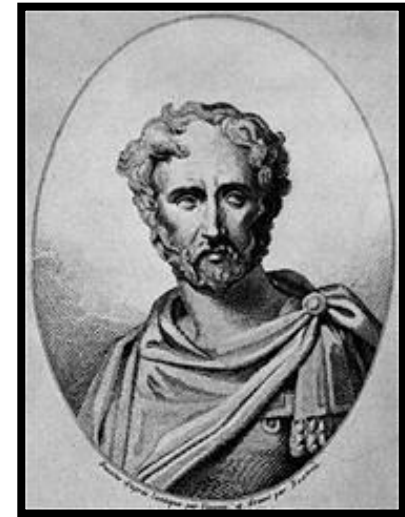
It blew half the side of the mountain off and a huge cloud of red hot ash, rock and gas, hurtled down the side of the volcano and straight over the city of Pompeii.

The citizens tried to run to escape it, but it was too fast.





Stone Pine Tree



Pliny

Plinian eruption of Mt. Vesuvius

An important Roman who witnessed the Vesuvius eruption was a writer called Pliny. He tried to rescue some of the Pompeii citizens but he himself died from breathing in the hot ash and gas. He managed to write notes about the eruption before he died and he described the cloud of ash as like the branches of a Stone Pine tree.

Because Pliny was the first person ever to describe this type of volcanic eruption, scientists have named it after him – so we now have *Plinian eruptions*.

POMPEI

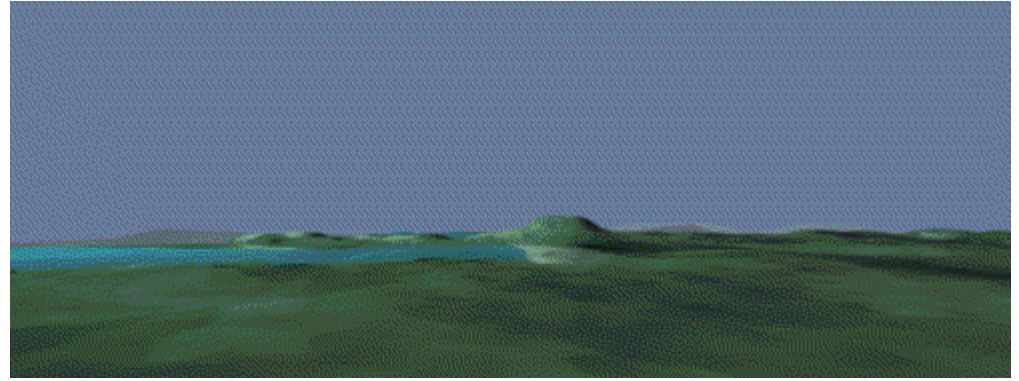
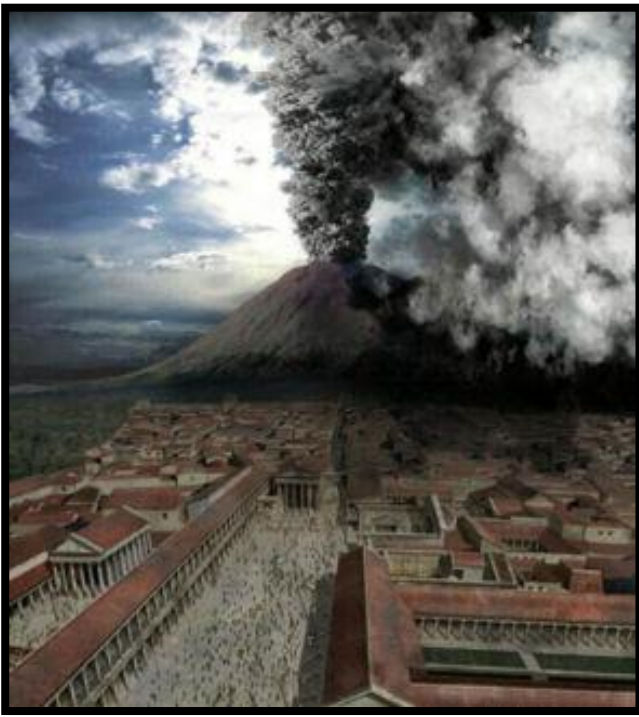
24 agosto 79 d.C.



Animation of Vesuvius eruption on Pompeii

This is how Pliny actually described the eruption of Vesuvius in his letters which were saved and copied by his son after Pliny's death.

I cannot give you a more exact description of its appearance than by comparing to a stone pine tree; for it shot up to a great height in the form of a tall trunk, which spread out at the top as though into branches. ... Occasionally it was brighter, occasionally darker and spotted, as it was either more or less filled with earth and cinders.

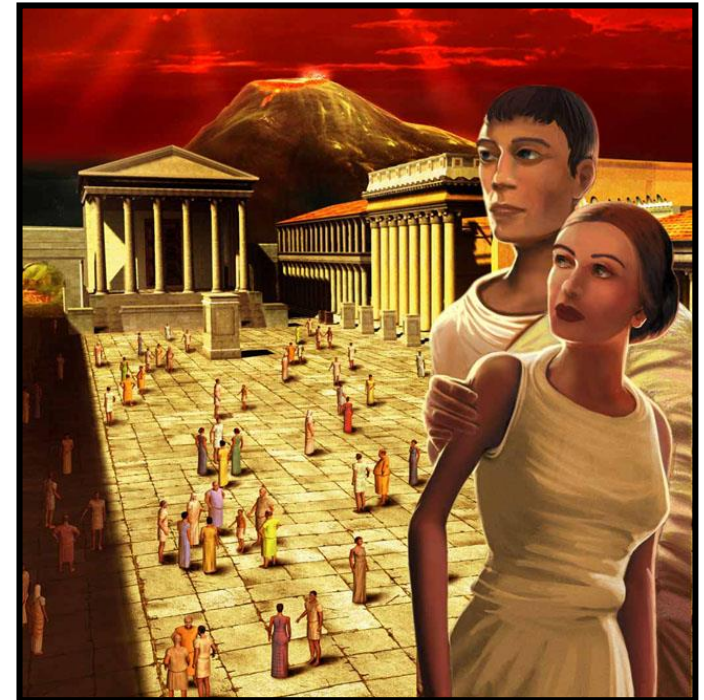


Animation of Vesuvius eruption

When the side of the mountain blew off, the citizens of Pompeii could not escape.

Red hot ash, rock and gas rushed down over the city at a speed of 400 km per hour. This rush of hot ash is called a *Pyroclastic Flow*.

The citizens of Pompeii and their city were buried in seconds beneath a layer of ash and rocks 9 metres thick.



This map of the Bay of Naples shows how far the volcanic ash was blown by the wind and spread across the area.

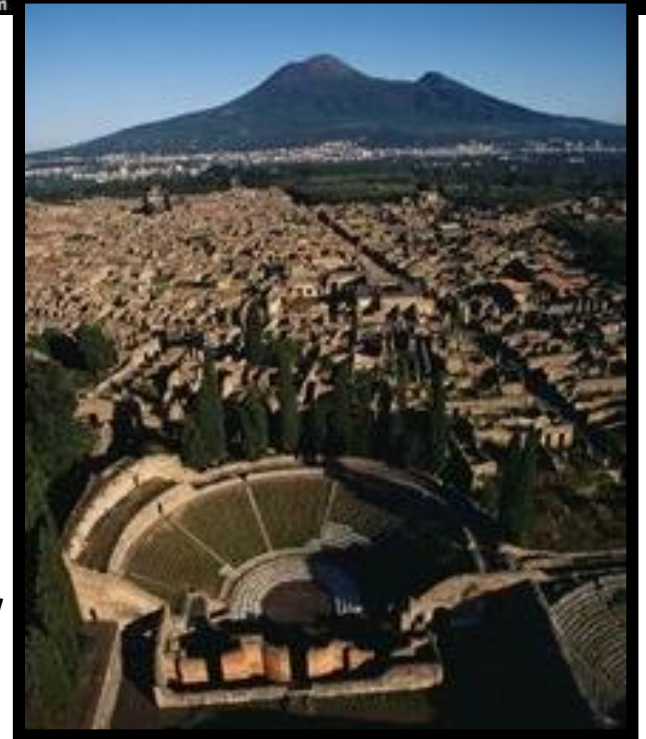
Ash completely buried the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum.

The town of Stabiae was not buried so heavily, but it was the place where Pliny died after breathing in the ash and gas from the volcano.





Archaeologists discovered Pompeii in 1748, and the whole city was finally dug out of the thick layer of ash and soil in 1997, nearly 2000 years later. This photo shows that many of the city's buildings survived being buried. This is because so many of them were made of stone or concrete. Only wooden buildings or wooden parts of buildings were burnt away by the hot ash in AD 79.



We can now see the Roman streets and statues of Pompeii that were buried 2000 years ago.

We can see the *Amphitheatre* as it was in Roman times now uncovered from the ash and mud.



But archaeologists also discovered a surprise – the imprints of bodies in the volcanic ash.

These were the citizens of Pompeii who had been buried by the burning hot ash in AD 79.

The archaeologists made plaster casts of the body imprints and that is what we are looking at now.



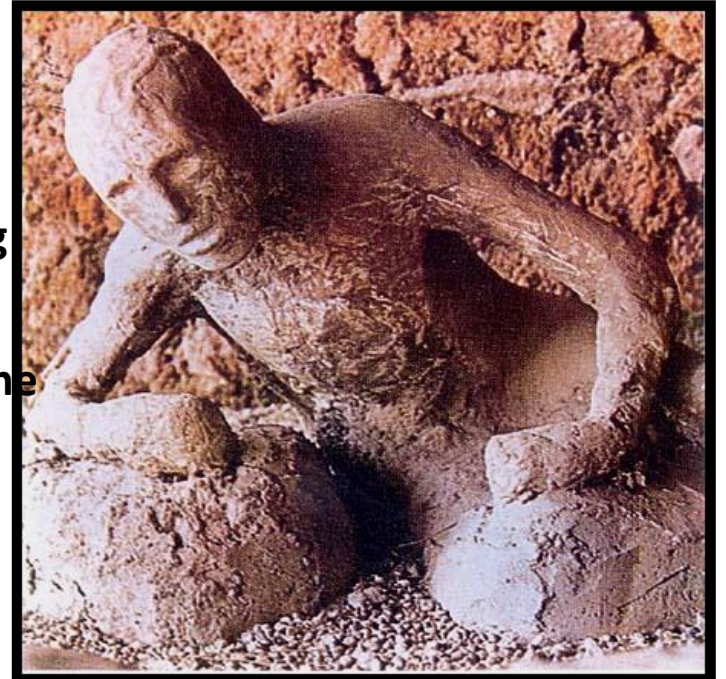


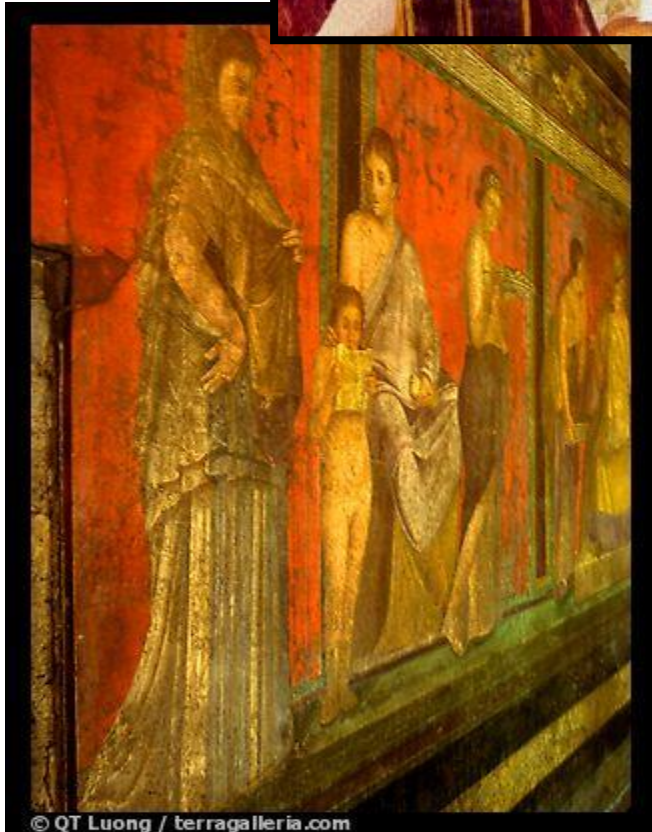
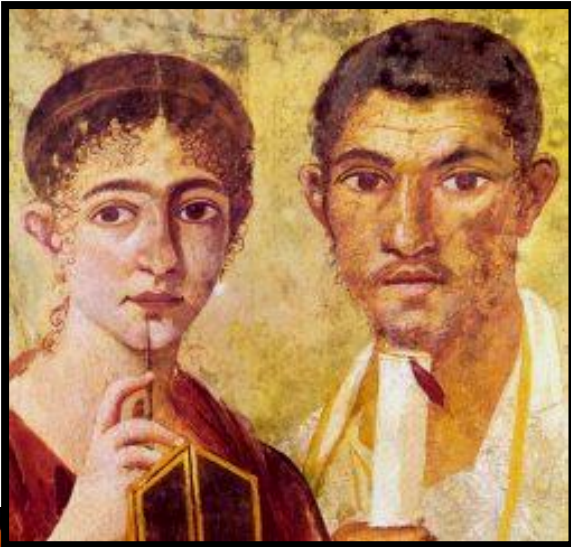
Roman people lie where they died from the ash and gases, buried under the thick ash.

A dog lies on its back having suffocated from breathing in the hot ash.

A man's body lies where he fell over, buried beneath the hot volcanic ash.

Archaeologists were shocked when they discovered these body imprints.

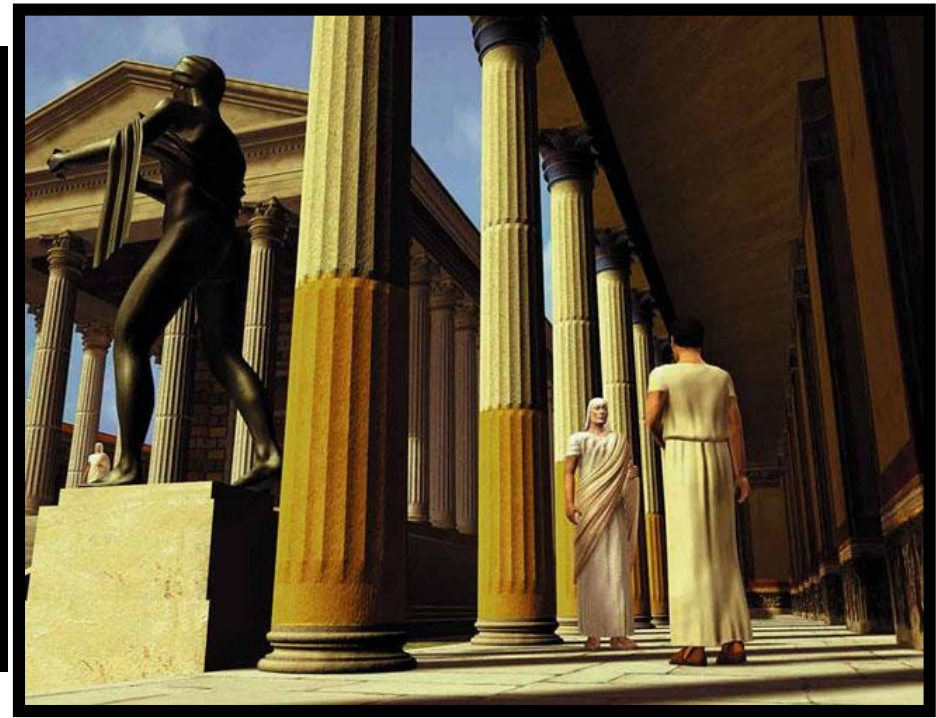




Archaeologists also found many beautiful Roman things that had been *preserved* by the volcanic ash.

Paintings on the walls of houses show a Roman man and his wife, a Roman God (Bacchus) and a fawn, and paintings of Romans doing different activities.

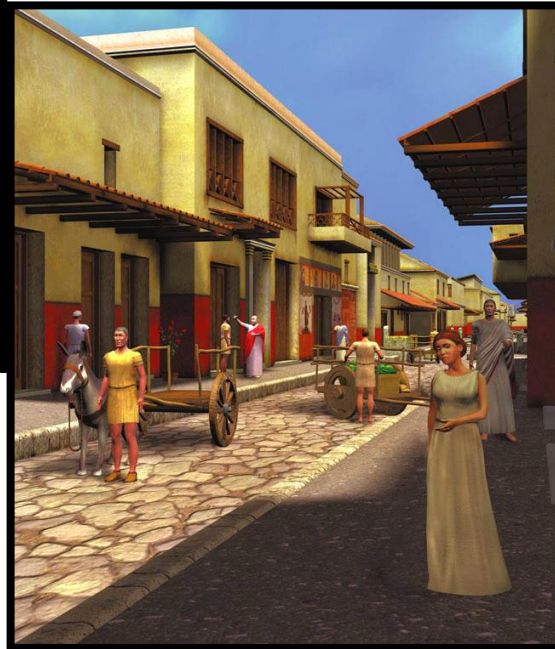
These paintings told the archaeologists a lot about how the Romans lived 2000 years ago.



This helped the archaeologists work out what Pompeii must have been really like in Roman times – these 2 pictures show the same thing: *The Temple of Apollo* in Pompeii;

the picture on the left shows the temple as it is now –

the picture on the right shows what the temple would have looked like in Roman times, showing the same statue exactly as it was; that statue has not moved for 2000 years.



Though the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 was a tragedy for the citizens of Pompeii, because the city and its people were kept so well by the volcanic ash, archaeologists have used it to help us understand a lot more about how Roman people lived over 2000 years ago.