

The destruction of pompeii essay sample

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In the city of Pompeii on the morning of August 24, 79 CE, everyday life was commencing as usual. The stirrings of the mountain in the distance went unnoticed until an explosion rocked the streets. Panic broke out as people tried to flee the city and parents made vain efforts to protect their children from the falling ash and rocks that would cover the city. The eruption of Mount Vesuvius did not just demolish a city, it wiped out an entire civilization.

Beginning in the year 62 CE, violent earthquakes rocked the region, warning of volcanic activity. The eruption, beginning that fateful August morning, lasted over 24 hours. The eruption was the first one ever recorded in history. An explosion came from the mountain and fine ash fell on the slopes. Then a Plinian column, composed of gas and ash, rose about 15 miles into the air before branching out like an umbrella to blanket the region. According to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “ It was not until around midnight that the first pyroclastic surges and flows occurred” (“ Pompeii: Portents of Disaster”). A pyroclastic flow is a ground-hugging avalanche of pumice, rock fragments, hot ash, and volcanic gas. These can travel down the mountain at 100 miles an hour and meant certain death for the people in the region. Three cities were hit hard by the eruption – Stabiae, Herculaneum, and of course, Pompeii. The latter two were demolished, but Pompeii was unquestionably the hardest hit. It is hard to imagine the destruction that a volcanic eruption of this degree would cause ([www. bbc. co. uk/history](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history)).

When Vesuvius erupted, ten feet of tephra covered Pompeii, asphyxiating many people. Tephra is composed of volcanic material deposited from the air. After this fell, the pyroclastic flows killed any remaining people of the

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region. Some people of Pompeii were able to escape in time, but many waited too long to leave, if they tried at all. According to Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “ The people of Pompeii were quite unprepared for the eruption of Vesuvius...The signs of impending disaster, though, were there” (“ Pompeii: Portents of Disaster”). The citizens were taken completely by surprise by the blast. Although the earthquakes that rocked the region in 62 CE and the tremors just before the eruption warned of impending danger, these warning signs were ignored or unknown. Even the column of smoke at the very beginning of the eruption was taken as more of a curiosity than a danger sign. The trauma that this eruption caused is evident through the fact that Rome did not rebuild Pompeii or Herculaneum, although it was common practice at the time. One can only imagine the terror and pain these poor people experienced before they died ([www. mci. dist. maricopa. edu](http://www.mci.dist.maricopa.edu)).

Pompeii was lost and forgotten until its rediscovery in 1758. What we found was a city literally “ frozen in time”. About two thousand inhabitants were unable to get away in time and perished. Archaeologist, Giuseppe Fiorelli devised a technique for injecting plaster into the cavities left by decomposed bodies in the volcanic materials. When the plaster hardened, a cast was formed showing the bodies exactly as they died, right down to the expressions on their faces. Uncovered were groups of bodies overcome before they could flee, parents attempting to protect their children, and even dogs still chained to posts.

According to the Associated Press, “...the lava-preserved town was enjoying the peak of prosperity when it was snuffed out by the erupting Vesuvius” (“ Ancient Hotel...Found at Pompeii”). Pompeii was a once-thriving city of
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theatres, businesses, schools, cemeteries, baths, and homes. Unfortunately, we had to find it “frozen” during a crisis; although views of everyday life were still evident such as a bakery with bread still in the oven. Also uncovered were scrolls from Pliny the Younger, describing the eruption in detail as well as details of his uncle, Pliny the Elder, perishing in the blast. These scrolls provided a personal insight to the infamous August day in 79 CE (archives. cnn. com/2000).

When Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, it affected the surrounding region greatly. The city of Pompeii was completely buried for centuries. When it was finally uncovered, it provided a glimpse into ancient history. It's not completely inconceivable that one day, a disaster of this magnitude will affect us, and centuries down the line, we will be the ancient city uncovered.