

Pompeii

The city of Pompeii is a partially buried Roman town-city near modern Naples in the Italian region of Campania, in the territory of the comune of Pompei. Along with Herculaneum, Pompeii was partially destroyed and buried under 4 to 6 m (13 to 20 ft) of ash and pumice in the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79.



Pompeii was lost for nearly 1700 years before its rediscovery in 1748. Since then, its excavation has provided an extraordinarily detailed insight into the life of a city during the Pax Romana. Today, this UNESCO World Heritage Site is one of the most popular tourist attractions of Italy, with approximately 2,500,000 visitors every year.

Early history

The archaeological digs at the site extend to the street level of the 79 AD volcanic event; deeper digs in older parts of Pompeii and core samples of nearby drillings have exposed layers of jumbled sediment that suggest that the city had suffered from the volcano and other seismic events before then. Three sheets of sediment have been found on top of the lava that lies below the city and, mixed in with the sediment, archaeologists have found bits of animal bone, pottery shards and plants.



Carbon dating has relegated the oldest of these layers to the 8th–6th centuries BC, about the time that the city was founded. The other two strata are separated either by well-developed soil layers or Roman pavement, and were laid in the 4th century BC and 2nd century BC. It is theorized that the layers of jumbled sediment were created by large landslides, perhaps triggered by extended rainfall.

The town was founded around the 7th–6th century BC by the Osci or Oscans, a people of central Italy, on what was an important crossroad between Cumae, Nola and Stabiae. It had already been used as a safe port by Greek and Phoenician sailors. According to Strabo, Pompeii was also captured by the Etruscans, and in fact recent excavations have shown the presence of Etruscan inscriptions and a 6th century BC necropolis. Pompeii was captured for the first time by the Greek colony of Cumae, allied with Syracuse, between 525 and 474 BC.

In the 5th century BC, the Samnites conquered it (and all the other towns of Campania); the new rulers imposed their architecture and enlarged the town. After the Samnite Wars (4th century BC), Pompeii was forced to accept the status of socium of Rome, maintaining, however, linguistic and administrative autonomy.

In the 4th century BC, it was fortified. Pompeii remained faithful to Rome during the Second Punic War.



Pompeii took part in the war that the towns of Campania initiated against Rome, but in 89 BC it was besieged by Sulla. Although the blunts of the Social League, headed by Lucius Cluentius, helped in resisting the Romans, in 80 BC Pompeii was forced to surrender after the conquest of Nola, culminating in many of Sulla's veterans being given land and property, while many of those



who went against Rome were ousted from their homes. It became a Roman colony with the name of Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum. The town became an important passage for goods that arrived by sea and had to be sent toward Rome or Southern Italy along the nearby Appian Way.

It was fed with water by a spur from Aqua Augusta (Naples) built c. 20 BC by Agrippa; the main line supplied several other large towns, and finally the naval base at Misenum. The castellum in Pompeii is well preserved, and includes many details of the distribution network and its controls.