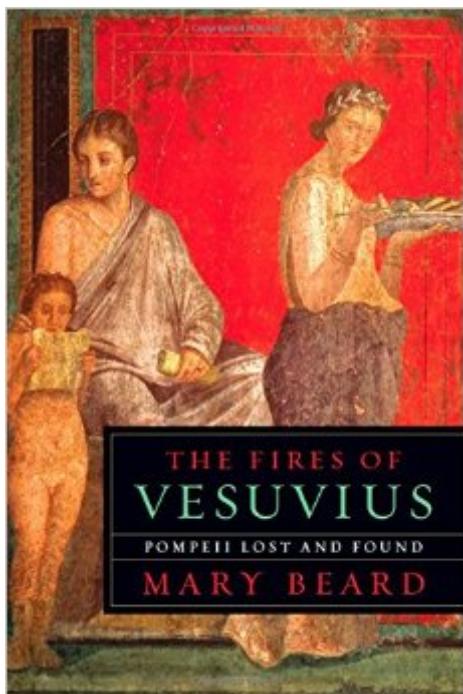


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The Fires Of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost And Found



Synopsis

Pompeii is the most famous archaeological site in the world, visited by more than two million people each year. Yet it is also one of the most puzzling, with an intriguing and sometimes violent history, from the sixth century BCE to the present day. Destroyed by Vesuvius in 79 CE, the ruins of Pompeii offer the best evidence we have of life in the Roman Empire. But the eruptions are only part of the story. In *The Fires of Vesuvius*, acclaimed historian Mary Beard makes sense of the remains. She explores what kind of town it was—more like Calcutta or the Costa del Sol?—and what it can tell us about extraordinary life there. From sex to politics, food to religion, slavery to literacy, Beard offers us the big picture even as she takes us close enough to the past to smell the bad breath and see the intestinal tapeworms of the inhabitants of the lost city. She resurrects the Temple of Isis as a testament to ancient multiculturalism. At the Suburban Baths we go from communal bathing to hygiene to erotica. Recently, Pompeii has been a focus of pleasure and loss: from Pink Floyd's memorable rock concert to Primo Levi's elegy on the victims. But Pompeii still does not give up its secrets quite as easily as it may seem. This book shows us how much more and less there is to Pompeii than a city frozen in time as it went about its business on 24 August 79.

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Customer Reviews

Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE, sending hot gases, pumice, and rivers of bubbling mud through the city of Pompeii. Over a thousand of the victims were preserved within the ash, as were buildings and artworks. Since it was first excavated centuries ago, Pompeii as "frozen in time" has had a real tourist appeal. You can walk the streets feeling that you are experiencing something close to what

the Pompeians did two thousand years ago; such feelings are not baseless, but Pompeian life was drastically different from our own, and the clues the ruins give us about the people's lives are significant but often mysterious and even more often incomplete. Classicist Mary Beard is the perfect guide to the city, as it is now and as best as we can understand it before the eruption, and in [_The Fires of Vesuvius: Pompeii Lost and Found_](#) (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), she has written a delightful, sometimes irreverent, guide to the city. Sure, it has plenty of scholarship attached; ancient texts and modern reports are referenced, and there is an amazing range of evidence (bones of humans, skeletons of animals, oyster shells, bracelets, spilled paint, and traffic barriers), but she writes in a relaxed, almost chatty way that ensures readers will enjoy the fun of the often strange details she has included. Even those who have been to Pompeii themselves will have to adjust their imaginary pictures of life there. For instance, take Beard's description of the baths. We think of the baths as promoting the sort of cleanliness that we ourselves value, but if you find yourself time-machined back to Pompeii, you might want to avoid this sort of "cleanliness". There was, of course, no chlorination, and not even any proper filters.

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