

京大過去問 1995年 第1問

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The eruption surprised Pompeii on a warm August day A.D. 79. The people of the town were not unaware that Vesuvius was a volcano, but it had been inactive from time immemorial, and its slopes were covered with villas and vineyards. (1)Although sections of the city still lay in ruins from a local earthquake that had shaken the region 17 years before, no one had taken that disturbance as a warning of the disaster to come. The awakening of the volcano was sudden and unbelievably violent. Its crater abruptly collapsed, and a great black column shot into the sky. Pliny the Younger (whose uncle, Pliny the Elder, was nearby and was among those killed) vividly described the eruption: it looked like an Italian umbrella pine — a tall “trunk” spreading out at the top to dense cloud shot with flashes of lightning. From that cloud, driven by a strong northwest wind, there fell on Pompeii a heavy hail of pumice stones, which smashed roofs, riddled the houses and buried the city under a blanket of pumice more than 12 feet deep. When the hail diminished, survivors who had taken refuge in cellars and vaults tried to escape to the shores of the bay nearby. But they were overtaken by a second, slower fall from the cloud — a rain of suffocating ashes that piled up to a height of six to nine feet. Like a palpable fog or a quicksand, (2)it trapped and enveloped people in their houses and even those fleeing in the streets. Their bodies were encased in ash as in a mold, and these casts of hardened ash are today the most moving evidences of the tragedy of Pompeii. By pouring liquid plaster into the now hollow molds, we can re-create the shape of the body, the form of the clothing, the footgear, even the last exhalation of men and women who lived and died in that ancient city.

Pompeii was so utterly wiped out that even its site was lost. But in the last two centuries the city has in a sense been reborn. In 1748 canal diggers came on the buried houses, and the excavation has continued almost without interruption ever since. Generations of archaeologists and laborers, Italian and foreign, have devoted their entire lifetimes to uncovering or restoring the ruins of Pompeii. The two-century excavation of Pompeii is the longest ever made of any city of the ancient world. (3)In part the lure has been the dramatic circumstances of the city's death, in part the fact that in Pompeii we can see an ancient city caught at a certain moment at the height of its career, showing its qualities unspoiled by the passage of time. But above all, Pompeii has a special attraction for scholars interested in studying the everyday life of an ordinary town of an ancient time.

*pumice (stones): 軽石