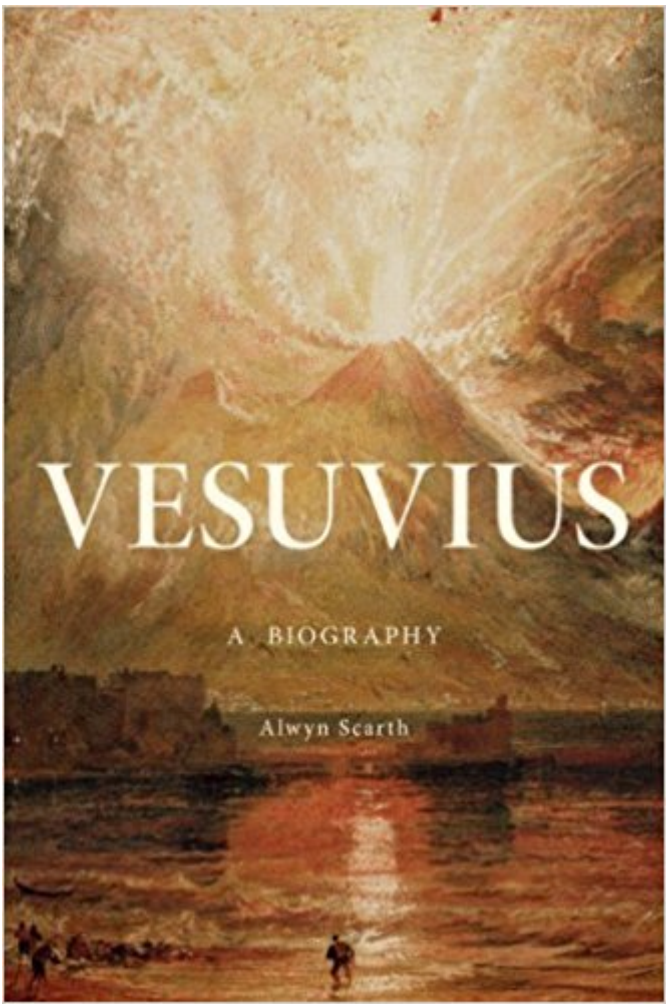
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Vesuvius: A Biography



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Synopsis

Capricious, vibrant, and volatile, Vesuvius has been and remains one of the world's most dangerous volcanoes. In its rage, it has destroyed whole cities and buried thousands alive. In its calm, its ashes have fertilized the soil, providing for the people who have lived in its shadows. For over two millennia, the dynamic presence of this volcano has fascinated scientists, artists, writers, and thinkers, and inspired religious fervor, Roman architecture, and Western literature. In Vesuvius, Alwyn Scarth draws from the latest research, classical and eyewitness accounts, and a diverse range of other sources to tell the riveting story of this spectacular natural phenomenon. Scarth follows Vesuvius across time, examining the volcano's destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum in 79 A.D., its eruptions during the Counter-Reformation that were viewed as God's punishment of sinners, and the building of the world's first volcano observatory on Vesuvius in the 1840s. Scarth explores the volcano's current position overlooking a population of more than three million people and the complex attitudes maintained by the residents, at once reverent, protective, and fearful. He also considers the next major eruption of Vesuvius, which experts have indicated could be the most powerful since 1631. The longer Vesuvius remains dormant, the more violent its reawakening will be, and despite scientific advances for predicting when this might occur, more people are vulnerable than ever before. Exploring this celebrated wonder from scientific, historical, and cultural perspectives, Vesuvius provides a colorful portrait of a formidable force of nature.

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Customer Reviews

Volcanoes in their full glory at the height of an eruption seem more a life force than one of inanimate nature. The temperamental monster Vesuvius, on the east side of the Bay of Naples, well deserves this lively and generously illustrated account of its past 2,000 years. Scarth (Savage Earth) gives detailed accounts of each of the volcano's known eruptions, including the possible geological causes, remarkably precise (considering the large historical distance) analysis of lava and pyroclastic flow patterns, and the aftermath. Scarth discloses that the cone we call Vesuvius wasn't the mountain that buried Herculaneum and Pompeii; that mountain constantly rebuilt itself over the millennia. And more strangely, Vesuvius the destroyer is also Vesuvius the nurturer, as the lava and ash from each eruption eventually became fertile soil. Scarth also tells the fascinating story of Sir William Hamilton, famously cuckolded by his wife, Emma, and Lord Nelson. Hamilton left a more noble legacy: through his studies of Vesuvius, he established the science of volcanology. Readers interested in the earth sciences, antiquity or just a good read will find Scarth's book hard to put down. 101 b&w illus. (Sept.) Copyright Ã Â© Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"In his latest book on volcanoes (after La Catastrophe, Vulcan's Fury, and Savage Earth), Scarth (formerly at Univ. of Dundee) confronts the legendary Vesuvius. A veritable eruption of words is required to do the story justice, and Scarth is up to the task. . . . Recommended to both general and academic readers."--Walter L. Cressle, Library Journal"Now and again a book appears that offers a different perspective on volcanic eruptions. Alwyn Scarth's Vesuvius: A Biography is one such book, and it takes the reader on a fascinating journey through Vesuvius' history seen through the eyes of the people who witnessed the eruptions and who were often directly affected by them. . . . A gripping book."--Lucia Gurioli, Times Higher Education"Scarth has successfully combined a chronicle of a famous volcano's eruptions with a discussion of the history of the eruptions in human terms--daily living, recreation, commerce, art, religion, and the destiny of civilizations. . . . Vesuvius is unmatched for its integration of the scientific, historical, and cultural aspects of a world-famous volcano that must be reckoned with."--Choice"True to its name, Vesuvius: A Biography covers the history of one of Italy's most famous volcanoes, from its birth to its infamous eruption in A.D. 79 that buried Pompeii to what the future holds--with dozens of eruptions in between. Vesuvius will captivate volcano experts with its discussion of how the volcano has affected Italy's history and culture, and will educate novices about the basics of volcanology."--Earth Magazine"Vesuvius is filled with science, in such sidebars as 'the role of pyroclastic flows in 1631.' But Scarth cleverly keeps his narrative flowing with juicy gobbets of gossip."--Peter Birnie, Vancouver Sun"[H]ighly

readable and fascinating. . . . [A] well-illustrated book of history and science, and not the least of its virtues is a splendid J. M. W. Turner painting on its dust jacket."--Charles Stephen, Lincoln Journal Star"Pacific Circle members should delight in the way that this internationally renowned center has embraced both traditional and nuanced styles of the writings of a life story. . . . [A] truly fine, authoritative, readable, and enjoyable work."--Philip K. Wilson, Bulletin of the Pacific Circle

It was one of the most intresting books that I have ever read dealling with the first know eruption in 79 ad to the last eruption in 1944 the many eruptions in between.

Mount Vesuvius is located in the Campania region of Italy - a beautiful region that includes other areas of volcanic activity in addition to Vesuvius itself. As the title implies, this book presents a vivid history of Vesuvius and its activity, covering the period from over 50,000 years ago up to the present. Included in the earlier parts of the text are brief explanations of plate tectonics and the nature of volcanism. In addition to the volcanic history of the region, the author provides a history of its local human populations over the millennia and how they have been, and continue to be, affected by the constant threat of Vesuvius. The last chapter deals with current efforts in developing emergency plans aimed at protecting the populations in preparation for the next inevitable (but time-wise undetermined) eruption. The writing style is clear, widely accessible, generally lively and often quite engaging. The descriptions of some of the more violent eruptions with regards to their impacts on the local populations, especially the eruption of 79 A.D., are absolutely gripping. Alternatively, I found that the detailed physical descriptions of the several later/intermediate eruptions or volcanic activities tended to be a bit tedious after a while. This book can be enjoyed by anyone, but especially those interested in the effects of volcanism on human populations over the millennia.

Author Alwyn Scarth knows his subject matter intimately. Over the past dozen years he has written a total of eight books on the subject of volcanoes. His latest effort "Vesuvius: A Biography" presents the incredible history of one of the world’s most famous and feared volcanoes in an engaging and completely unique format. His "biography" of this fabled mountain in Southern Italy reveals the stupendous forces of nature that are released each time this volcano erupts. Scarth cautions us all not to be fooled by the breathtaking beauty of the mountain that some so-called "experts" have declared to be extinct. For when Vesuvius rumbles back to life the impact on human life and property will be catastrophic. Scarth passionately argues that the three million people who reside in

the areas surrounding Vesuvius need to learn and understand its destructive history lest they be doomed to repeat it.As most students of history know the most famous and destructive eruption of Vesuvius occured in the year 79 A.D. This was the eruption that buried the city of Pompeii and the neighboring town of Herculaneum. Utilizing the letters from an eyewitness to these events, a man called Pliny the Younger, Scarth recalls in dramatic detail the events of what many consider to be the "granddaddy' of all natural disasters. I simply cannot imagine how terrified these people must have been as these events were unfolding all around them. The best estimates are that some 16,000 people perished. Most of these folks simply did not have time to get out of harms way. Scarth recalls that when the site was finally excavated, it revealed much of what Pompeii looked like in 79 A.D. The city had been buried under nearly 4 meters of ash. Incredibly, a bakery oven containing 81 loaves of bread nearly 2000 years old was uncovered! Meanwhile, Alwyn Scarth also does a workmanlike job of detailing other major eruptions of Vesuvius over the past two millennia. And he manages to do so in language that the average reader with a limited scientific vocabulary can understand. Not an easy task!Prior to reading "Vesuvius: A Biography" I was largely unaware of the wide array of life-threatening and highly destructive ecological events that can be spurred by a volcanic eruption. Aside from the obvious effects like molten lava flows and Plinian eruptions (the powerful and deadly explosion of gas, steam, ash and pumice that can last from several minutes to several hours and rise in vertical columns up to 30 km or more) depending on the location volcanoes can generate earthquakes, violent thunderstorms, mudslides and even on occasion a tsunami! In this book you will discover the hopes and fears of the people who live in the shadow of Vesuvius. You will also learn about how the deep religious traditions in the area play a major role in the way residents view the volcano.All in all, I found "Vesuvius: A Biography" to be an exceptionally well written book. In addition, the dozens of photographs and illustrations and the "Glossary of Terms" greatly enhanced my understanding and enjoyment of this book. Perhaps the greatest compliment I can pay to author Alwyn Scarth is that I want to learn more about Vesuvius. I see that The History Channel has produced a couple of documentaries on Vesuvius over the years and I intend to seek them out. "Vesuvius: A Biography" proves to be an exceptionally well thought out project. Very highly recommended!

Vesuvius has been relatively quiet since its last major eruption in 1944. If its past history is a reliable indicator, it will awaken some day, to the sorrow of the people who insist on living on its flanks. Naples itself has been fortunate to have escaped major damage despite its closeness to the volcano. The power and mystery of the volcano is truly a thing of awe, and this comes thru well in

the book. I would have liked to have known more about Pompeii and Herculaneun and the scrolls found preserved there, but this book was a biography of the volcano, not the towns and their relics. The author does a good job of describing their ordeals in the eruption of 79 AD. It's ironic that more is known about that eruption than later ones in the Middle Ages. The story of William Hamilton, the British envoy to Naples, and a self-taught amateur volcanologist, was a fascinating one. This was a thoroughly enjoyable book, and highly recommended.

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