

Document-Based Assessment

Julius Caesar: Father of the Roman Empire

Julius Caesar has been called the father of the Roman empire and the most influential man in European history. After Caesar's assassination, his nephew Octavian declared him a god. The documents below are just a few of many impressions of him that writers, historians, and artists have left behind for centuries.

Document A

"There is a story that while he was crossing the Alps he came to a small village with hardly any inhabitants and altogether a miserable-looking place. His friends were laughing and joking about it, saying: 'No doubt here too one would find people trying hard to gain office, and here too there are struggles to get the first place [in government] and jealous rivalries among the great men.' Caesar then said to them in all seriousness: 'As far as I am concerned, I would rather be the first man here than the second in Rome.'"

—From *Life of Caesar* by Plutarch

Document B

"O mighty Caesar, dost thou lie so low?
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well.
I know not, gentlemen, what you intend,
Who else must be let blood, who else is rank.
If I myself, there is no hour so fit
As Caesar's death's hour, nor no instrument
Of half that worth as those your swords, made rich
With the most noble blood of all this world."

—Mark Antony, upon discovering Caesar's murder;
From *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*
by William Shakespeare

Document C

"In eloquence and warlike achievements, he equaled at least, if he did not surpass, the greatest of men. . . . Cicero, in recounting to Brutus the famous orators, declares, 'that he does not see that Caesar was inferior to any one of them'; and says, 'that he had an elegant, splendid, noble, and magnificent vein of eloquence.'"

—From *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*
by Suetonius

Document D Julius Caesar



Analyzing Documents

Use your knowledge of history and Documents A, B, C, and D to answer questions 1–4.

- Which side of Caesar does Plutarch's anecdote reveal?
A his drive to be the best
B his desire to serve Rome
C his wish to reach high spiritual levels
D his interest in having many areas of achievement
- According to Shakespeare's Mark Antony, Caesar was
A cunning, cruel, and ambitious.
B weak, foolish, and condescending.
C honorable, noble, and great.
D humble, kind, and compassionate.
- What about Caesar did Cicero admire?
A that he was a cunning strategist
B that he was a practical and realistic leader
C that he was a humble and kind man
D that he was an engaging and talented speaker
- Writing Task** Julius Caesar was murdered more than 2,000 years ago. Why has he continued to be a figure of interest through modern times?

Caesar & Cleopatra

THE UNTIMELY DEATHS OF THOSE TWO GREAT LOVERS AND superstars of antiquity, Caesar and Cleopatra, undoubtedly amplified their celebrity. But the facts of his assassination and her suicide, mythologized by Shakespeare and

by countless novels and films, can get lost in the glare of the legend.

To start, neither Caesar nor Cleopatra was especially attractive; when he met Cleopatra, Caesar was full-faced and balding, while the beauty of the

great Egyptian queen, in the words of the ancient historian Plutarch, “was by no means flawless or even remarkable.” What each had—and recognized in the other—was a vigorous charm, and a gift for amassing power.

When he met Cleopatra, Gaius Julius Caesar was, in fact, the most powerful man in the world, the ruler of the Roman Empire from 59 to 44 BC. After returning from a victorious military campaign in the East, on Feb. 14, 44 BC, Caesar declared himself *dictator perpetuus*, dictator for life. But several senators grew concerned that Caesar’s power would threaten the republican nature of the Roman government. They were also concerned about his

developing relationship with Cleopatra, who was then feuding with her siblings for Egypt’s throne. Though she now might be associated with Egypt, Cleopatra was actually considered Greek. Her family, the Ptolemies, had ruled Egypt for three centuries and cloaked a largely Greek administrative and legal system with a veneer of Egyptian customs to satisfy the natives.

Many of the senators objected to a union between Rome and her traditional enemy, the Greeks. Their discontent grew strong enough to cause a cadre of senators to turn conspiratorial—and for a plan to assassinate Caesar, led by his main rival Cassius, to emerge.

MURDER AT THE SENATE

The Senate had scheduled a meeting for March 15, purportedly for routine business, and the conspirators chose that date, known as the Ides of March, for an attack. They were able to recruit a few of Caesar’s close friends into the scheme, including Cassius’s brother-in-law, Marcus Brutus, by suggesting that Caesar was going to declare himself king on that day. In all, the conspiracy attracted about 60 people, with 20—all senators—to do the killing; the collective responsibility implicit in the act would allow them to transfer power to the senate.

The tradition of the Ides of March notwithstanding, Caesar actually heeded personal premonitions and his wife’s advice to stay home that day (each had had disturbing dreams the night before). But Cassius recruited a friend of Caesar’s to persuade him to come to the Senate meeting. As he left his house, someone—we do not know who—thrust a note into his hand. It went unread.

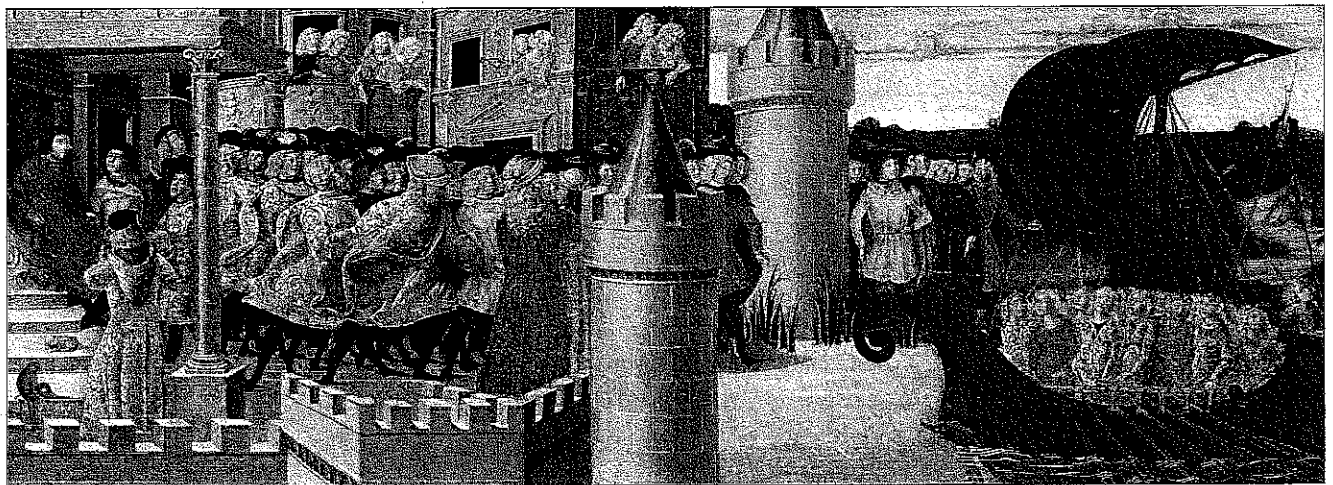
Caesar arrived at the Senate at around 11 A.M. He almost immediately received a petition and as he read it, the senators crowded around him.

PAINTER NEROCCIO DE LANDI WAS ONE OF MANY ARTISTS TO RECORD THE VISIT OF CLEOPATRA TO MARC ANTONY.

At the signal, one of them grasped Caesar’s robe and pulled it down at the neck, and the designated first striker (a tribune of the people,



BOTH GAIUS JULIUS CAESAR AND THE DAUGHTER OF PTOLEMY IX, QUEEN CLEOPATRA, WERE IMMORTALIZED IN STONE AND LEGEND.





named Casca) made a poorly executed stab that barely grazed Caesar's chest. But as Caesar tried to defend himself, he opened himself up to attack by the others.

Blinded by blood, Caesar covered his head with his robe. He said nothing until he saw Marcus Brutus make a thrust; his response was not *Et tu, Brute* ("You too, Brutus"). What he actually said was "You too, my child?" Caesar had a long affair with Brutus's mother and suspected he might be Brutus's father. Caesar received 23 wounds, only one of which could be called fatal. The note, which they found in his hands after his death, fully

ARTISTS THROUGH THE AGES HAVE BEAUTIFIED QUEEN CLEOPATRA, WHO SUPPOSEDLY WAS RATHER PLAIN. THIS PAINTING IS BY FRENCH ARTIST A. CABANEL.

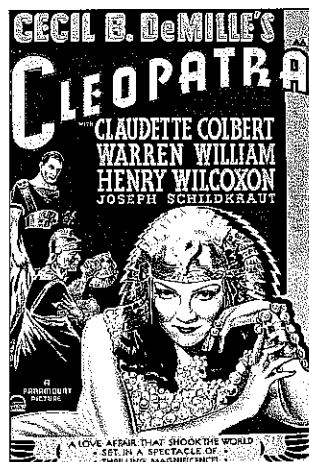
disclosed the conspiracy. Had it been read, history would have been deprived of one of its most famous episodes.

CLEOPATRA IN CHAINS

Meanwhile, Cleopatra was busy consolidating her power. Two years after Caesar's assassination, she took Mark Antony, one of the triumvirate who now ruled the eastern part of the Roman Empire, as her lover. At Cleopatra's behest, Antony murdered the last of Cleopatra's Ptolemy rivals, and the two devoted themselves to a life of debauchery. Antony even left his Roman wife and married the Egyptian queen. His infatuation with Cleopatra began to incense those back in Rome, and eventually, Octavian, Caesar's heir, declared war on her. Antony and Cleopatra marshaled their troops, but they were no match for the might of the Roman army and navy; Cleopatra was taken prisoner by Octavian, who planned to march her through the streets of Rome.

However, the defiant Cleopatra committed suicide in her chamber to foil Octavian's plan—not out of grief over the death of Antony, who had himself committed suicide days before. Plutarch, the first-century Greek historian, is responsible for the story that her death was caused by the bite of an asp, smuggled into her room in a basket of figs. However, the tale cannot be substantiated. The asp was traditionally a symbol of the Egyptian royalty and would have added a nice touch. But, then again, witnesses did notice two marks on her arm.

CLEOPATRA FOR THE AGES. . .IN HOLLYWOOD



Hollywood has romanticized the story of the sultry Egyptian Queen on film, featuring some of the movies' most famous actresses. Theda Bara starred in the 1917 version of *Cleopatra*.

Cecil B. DeMille's lavishly produced *Cleopatra* in 1934 featured Claudette Colbert as the Egyptian Queen; she played Cleopatra as a saucy coquette.

Apparently, DeMille thought he should have a chat with Colbert before casting her, thinking the final scene—Cleopatra committing suicide by clutching an asp to her breast—might frighten her. Before the scene, in which Colbert would mount the throne of Egypt for the last time, DeMille coiled an enormous snake around himself and walked onto the set. "Oh, Mr. DeMille, don't come near me with that!" she

exclaimed. "Well," said DeMille, "how about this?" He showed her a snake the size of an Egyptian asp. "That little thing? Give it to me!" she



cried, and played the scene flawlessly. The 1962 version of the story, starring Elizabeth Taylor, was a box office disappointment but a remarkable role for the actress. It had a huge budget and was a feast for the eyes, but left something to be desired in terms of historical accuracy.

5.5 Gladiatorial Combat: Seneca

The city of Rome was the vibrant center of this extensive empire. It provided services and entertainment to a teeming population of about one million inhabitants from all over the world. The following excerpts reveal the advantages and disadvantages of city life.

Source: "Gladiatorial Combat" is reprinted by permission of the publishers and the Loeb Classical Library from Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 7.3-5, trans. Richard Gummere, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1917), pp. 31, 33.

SENECA

By chance I attended a mid-day exhibition, expecting some fun, wit, and relaxation—an exhibition at which men's eyes have respite from the slaughter of their fellow-men. But it was quite the reverse. The previous combats were the essence of compassion; but now all the trifling is put aside and it is pure murder. The men have no defensive armour. They are exposed to blows at all points, and no one ever strikes in vain. . . . In the morning they throw men to the lions and the bears; at noon, they throw them to the spectators. The spectators demand that the slayer shall face the man who is to slay him in his turn; and they always reserve the latest conqueror for another butchering. The outcome of every fight is death, and the means are fire and sword. This sort of thing goes on while the arena is empty. You may retort: "But he was a highway robber; he killed a man!" And what of it? Granted that, as a murderer, he deserved this punishment, what crime have you committed, poor fellow, that you should deserve to sit and see this show? In the morning they cried "Kill him! Lash him! Burn him! Why does he meet the sword in so cowardly a way? Why does he strike so feebly? Why doesn't he die game? Whip him to meet his wounds! Let them receive blow for blow, with chests bare and exposed to the stroke!" And when the games stop for the intermission, they announce: "A little throat-cutting in the meantime, so that there may still be something going on!"

Question:

1. What do Seneca's observations tell you about the type of person that attended gladiatorial games? Are there any similarities with modern-day sporting events?

5.4 "All Roads Lead to Rome!": Strabo

The city of Rome was the vibrant center of this extensive empire. It provided services and entertainment to a teeming population of about one million inhabitants from all over the world. The following excerpts reveal the advantages and disadvantages of city life.

Source: "The Glory of the City" is from Strabo, *Geography*, 5.3.8, in *Readings in Ancient History*, vol. 2, ed. William S. Davis (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1913), pp. 179-181.

THE GLORY OF THE CITY STRABO

[The Romans] paved the roads, cut through hills, and filled up valleys, so that the merchandise may be conveyed by carriage from the ports. The sewers, arched over with hewn stones, are large enough in parts for actual hay wagons to pass through, while so plentiful is the supply of water from the aqueducts, that rivers may be said to flow through the city and the sewers, and almost every house is furnished with water pipes and copious fountains.

We may remark that the ancients [of Republican times] bestowed little attention upon the beautifying of Rome. But their successors, and especially those of our own day, have at the same time embellished the city with numerous and splendid objects. Pompey, the Divine Caesar [i.e., Julius Caesar], and Augustus, with his children, friends, wife, and sister have surpassed all others in their zeal and munificence in these decorations. The greater number of these may be seen in the Campus Martius which to the beauties of nature adds those of art. The size of the plain is remarkable, allowing chariot races and the equestrian sports without hindrance, and multitudes [here] exercise themselves with ball games, in the Circus, and on the wrestling grounds. . . . The summit of the hills beyond the Tiber, extending from its banks with panoramic effect, present a spectacle which the eye abandons with regret.

Near to this plain is another surrounded with columns, sacred groves, three theaters, an amphitheater, and superb temples, each close to the other, and so splendid that it would seem idle to describe the rest of the city after it. For this cause the Romans esteeming it the most sacred place, have erected funeral monuments there to the illustrious persons of either sex. The most remarkable of these is that called the "Mausoleum" [the tomb of Augustus] which consists of a mound of earth raised upon a high foundation of white marble, situated near the river, and covered on the top with evergreen shrubs. Upon the summit is a bronze statue of Augustus Caesar, and beneath the mound are the funeral urns of himself, his relatives, and his friends. Behind is a large grove containing charming promenades. . . . If then you proceed to visit the ancient Forum, which is equally filled with basilicas, porticoes, and temples, you will there behold the Capitol, the Palatine, and the noble works that adorn them, and the piazza of Livia [Augustus' Empress],—each successive work causing you speedily to forget that which you have seen before. Such then is Rome!

Question:

1. Does this description accurately represent all of Rome? Why or why not?

5.6 The Stoic Philosophy

The Romans were never known for their contributions to abstract thought and did not produce a unique philosophy. Still, they borrowed well and adapted ideas that complemented their values. For the Roman, duty and organization were particularly important; consequently, the Stoic philosophy, which had originated in Greece in the third century B.C.E., was especially popular among the aristocracy. According to Stoic tenets, a divine plan ordered the universe, so whatever lot or occupation fell to one in life should be accepted and coped with appropriately. Restraint and moderation characterized the ideal Stoic, and he advocated tolerance as an essential component of the "brotherhood of man." To a Stoic who felt that his honor was somehow compromised, suicide was an acceptable and dutiful way of preserving his dignity. The following selections come from the writings of three Stoics of diverse backgrounds. Epictetus was the slave of a rich freedman; Seneca was tutor to the emperor Nero and finally committed suicide at his command in 66 C.E.; Marcus Aurelius became emperor in 161 C.E., an occupation he did not seek, but dutifully executed.

"HOW WILL I DIE?"

EPICTETUS

Source: "How Will I Die?" is from T. W. Higginson, ed., *The Works of Epictetus* (Boston: Little Brown, 1886).

I must die: if instantly, I will die instantly; if in a short time, I will dine first; and when the hour comes, then I will die. How? As becomes one who restores what is not his own.

Do not you know that both sickness and death must overtake us? At what employment? The husbandman at his plough; the sailor on his voyage. At what employment would you be taken? For my own part, I would be found engaged in nothing but in the regulation of my own Will; how to render it undisturbed, unrestrained, uncompelled, free. I would be found studying this, that I may be able to say to God, "Have I transgressed Thy commands? Have I perverted the powers, the senses, the instincts, which Thou hast given me? Have I ever accused Thee, or censured Thy dispensations? I have been sick, because it was Thy pleasure, like others; but I willingly. I have been poor, it being Thy will; but with joy. I have not been in power, because it was not Thy will; and power I have never desired. Hast Thou ever seen me saddened because of this? Have I not always approached Thee with a cheerful countenance; prepared to execute Thy commands and the indications of Thy will? Is it Thy pleasure that I should depart from this assembly? I depart. I give Thee all thanks that Thou hast thought me worthy to have a share in it with Thee; to behold Thy works, and to join with Thee in comprehending Thy administration." Let death overtake me while I am thinking, while I am writing, while I am reading such things as these.

"WHAT IS THE PRINCIPAL THING IN LIFE?"

SENECA

Source: "What Is the Principal Thing in Life?" is from Seneca, *Natural Questions*, 3. Preface, 10–17, trans. J. Clarke (London, 1910).

What is the principal thing in human life? . . . To raise the soul above the threats and promises of fortune; to consider nothing as worth hoping for. For what does fortune possess worth setting your heart upon? . . . What is the principal thing? To be able to endure adversity with a joyful heart; to bear whatever occurs just as if it were the very thing you desired to have happen to you. For you would have felt it your duty to desire it, had you known that all things happen by divine decree. Tears, complaints, lamentations are rebellion [against divine order]. . . .

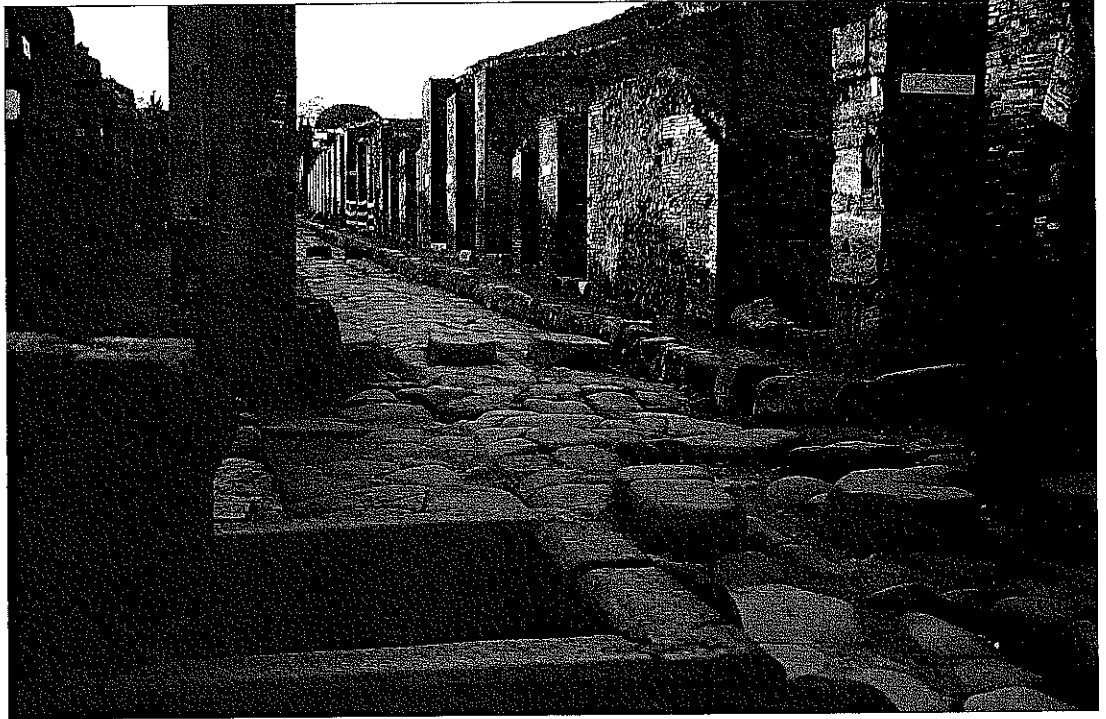
What is the principal thing? To have life on the very lips, ready to issue when summoned. This makes a man free, not by right of Roman citizenship but by right of nature. He is, moreover, the true freeman who has escaped from bondage to self; that slavery is constant and unavoidable—it presses us day and night alike, without pause, without respite. To be a slave to self is the most grievous kind of slavery; yet its fetters may easily be struck off, if you will cease to make large demands upon yourself, if you will cease to seek a personal reward for your services, and if you will set before your eyes your nature and your age, even though it be the bloom of youth; if you will say to yourself, "Why do I rave, and pant, and sweat? Why do I ply the earth? Why do I haunt the Forum? Man needs but little, and that not for long."

Question:

1. Why can this be considered a philosophy compatible with Roman values?

The Wrath of Mt. Vesuvius

There's more to the volcano's story than the burial of Pompeii.



THE ANCIENT CITY OF POMPEII WAS BURIED IN ASH WHEN MT. VESUVIUS ERUPTED IN 79 AD. SOME OF THE DEAD WERE CAPTURED IN THE SETTLED ASH, ALLOWING ARCHEOLOGISTS TO MAKE PLASTER CASTS OF THE DECEASED (BELOW).

FOR MOST PEOPLE, MT. VESUVIUS CALLS TO MIND the devastation of Pompeii, the ancient jewel of a city buried in ash when the famous volcano erupted in 79 AD. But two other sizable cities, Herculaneum and Stabiae, were destroyed at the same time. Vesuvius has, in fact, been erupting for the last 17 millennia—there have been about three dozen eruptions since Pompeii—producing devastating explosive eruptions every few thousand years and medium-force eruptions every few hundred.

An estimated 3,360 people were killed in Pompeii, Herculaneum, and other towns near



southern Italy's Bay of Naples. A deadlier eruption came more than 600 years later, in 1631. Though small by comparison, that eruption killed at least 3,500 people because there was a far larger population living in the mountain's shadow. It also signaled a new cycle of explosions, all damaging, and two of which were catastrophic. In 1794, the town of Torre del Greco was destroyed, and in 1944, San Sebastiano was the target of Vesuvius's wrath.

There was a considerable difference between the kinds of devastation visited upon Pompeii and Herculaneum, a difference that had to do with both geography and weather. Pompeii lies to the southwest of Vesuvius, whereas Herculaneum lies to the northwest. More significant is that Herculaneum had been built on a promontory between two streams that flowed down the slopes of Vesuvius—a propitious site as far as scenery and cool climate were concerned (the city's setting was the envy of the region), but one that lay in harm's way.



On the day of the eruption the prevailing wind was toward the southwest; this meant that when Vesuvius literally blew its top Pompeii was subjected to a rain of ash and pumice stone, or lapilli, while Herculaneum was swallowed by advancing waves of mud.

TERROR IN TWO FORMS

No lava flowed over Pompeii, but ashes and lapilli settled over the city of 2,000 to a depth of at least 10 feet. The ash covering the bodies of the dead made it possible for modern archaeologists to fashion plaster casts of the displaced space, yielding eerily lifelike sculptures of people in their final moments. Most appear to have been asphyxiated by lethal gasses. Many seem to be fleeing, but drop when they can no longer breathe: A father lifts himself on one arm as he tries to crawl toward his children; down the street, a man sits in a corner with his hands clasped over his nose and mouth.

But Pompeii's end was almost gentle compared to Herculaneum's. Rivers of hot volcanic mud (created when escaping steam mixed with earth, ash, and pumice) followed the stream beds and submerged the town to depths of 65 to 85 feet. Because the mud took longer to deluge the town than the ash and pumice did at Pompeii, the citizens had more time to escape.

But, unlike at Pompeii, where bodies were left intact, people who hesitated were caught in the hot mud and left as skeletons.

WHAT NEXT?

Since 1944, Vesuvius has been in a state of repose, its longest sleep since the cycle that ended in 1631. But it has the potential to be even more dangerous and deadly today, since the surrounding area supports a population of some 2,000,000 people—one of the highest densities in the world. Given such density, volcanologists believe that roughly three million people in outlying areas could be affected to some degree if Vesuvius were jolted awake.

FRENCH ARTIST JEAN BAPTISTE GENILLION DEPICTED THE ERUPTION OF VESUVIUS (BELOW), WHICH DESTROYED POMPEII AND HERCULANEUM. ONE PAINTING (LEFT) SURVIVED THE RAIN OF ASH.



PLINY THE YOUNGER'S ACCOUNT

Pliny the Younger, who witnessed the eruption that destroyed Pompeii in the first century AD, described it to Tacitus:

"You might hear the shrieks of women, the screams of children, and the shouts of men; some calling for their children, others for their parents, others for their husbands, and seeking to recognize each other by the voices that replied; one lamenting his own fate, another that of his family; some wishing to die, from the very fear of dying; some



lifting their hands to the gods; but the greater part convinced that there were now no gods at all, and that the final endless night of which we have heard had come upon the world.

"The fire fell at a distance from us: then again we were immersed in thick darkness, and a heavy shower of ashes rained upon us, which we were obliged every now and then to stand up to shake off, otherwise we should have been crushed and buried in the heap."