



This image depicts a fresco which was discovered in a Pompeii home known as the “House of the Centenary.” The wall painting features Vesuvius, its green slopes covered with vegetation growing in the volcanic soil. We also see the Roman god Bacchus who is clothed with clusters of grapes with a panther at his feet. The serpent is Agathodaemon, known as the “good spirit” of vineyards and grain fields.

Before Vesuvius erupted, in 79 AD, the area of Campania was known for its wine. Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History* (published in 77 AD), tell us this:

Then comes the favored country of Campania; in this valley begin those vine-clad hills with their glorious wine and wassail, famous all the world over... (*Natural History*, BOOK III, V [that is, Book 3, Section 5].)

Pliny also describes the specialness of the grapes which were growing near the volcano:

The highest rank is given to the vines of Aminaëa, account of the body of that wine and its life, which undoubtedly improves with age. There are five varieties of these vines; of these the 'younger sister' with a smaller berry sheds its blossom better! and can stand rain and stormy weather, which is not the case with the 'elder sister,' though this is less liable to damage when trained on a tree than when on a frame.

The 'twin sisters,' which have got this name because the bunches always grow in pairs, give a wine with a very rough flavour but of exceptional strength; the smaller of these 'twins' is damaged by a south wind, but the other winds give it nutriment, for instance on Mount Vesuvius and the hills of Sorrento ... (*Natural History*, Book XIV, Section IV.)

The grape-growing slopes of Vesuvius changed, disastrously, in August of 79 AD when the exterior of the mountain transformed itself from vine-bearing to ash-covered.

And ... Vesuvius would never *look* the same. More than 2,000 feet of the mountain had disappeared during two days of pulverizing destruction.

Click on the image for a better view.

Credits:

The original fresco is now maintained by the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Vineyards of Vesuvius - There and Gone

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