

January 2020

The Untold Hero: A Review of The Shadow of Vesuvius and the Sacrifice of Pliny the Elder

Giovanni Gonzalez
CSUSB

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making>



Part of the [Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gonzalez, Giovanni (2020) "The Untold Hero: A Review of The Shadow of Vesuvius and the Sacrifice of Pliny the Elder," *History in the Making*: Vol. 13 , Article 23.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/history-in-the-making/vol13/iss1/23>

This Review is brought to you for free and open access by the History at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in History in the Making by an authorized editor of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.

The Untold Hero: A Review of *The Shadow of Vesuvius* and the Sacrifice of Pliny the Elder

By Giovanni Gonzalez

The city of Pompeii is one of the greatest archaeological sites in the world today. It is also home to one of the best-preserved sites for understanding what daily life was like in the Roman Empire. The story we know of Pompeii began in 79 C.E. when Mt. Vesuvius erupted and destroyed Pompeii and the surrounding towns around the Campania region. The story of Pompeii can be told through the archaeological remains that were left behind at the site. However, the story of Pompeii before, during, and after the eruption is hardly talked about. In Daisy Dunn's book, *The Shadow of Vesuvius*,⁷ she writes about the experience of the eruption from the eyes of Pliny the Elder who was killed at Pompeii. Dunn gives us insight into how Pliny the Elder shares his experiences before the Vesuvius eruption and how his nephew Pliny the Younger was able to finish his uncle's story.

The Shadow of Vesuvius tells us about the life of Pliny the Elder who sacrificed his life to save the citizens of Pompeii and the surrounding area. Dunn took written works found in Pliny the Elder's book *Natural History* to describe his experiences when he saw the volcano erupt. His book details the events as he began to notice Vesuvius was going to erupt at any moment and people - mostly soldiers - stationed around the mountain saw signs of an inevitable eruption. Pliny's nephew, Pliny the Younger, knew that his uncle was going to the heart of the disaster to save some of Pompeii's citizens from peril. The Younger was left with the task of finishing his uncle's story of his courageous efforts and knowing he is going to die. One thing that Daisy Dunn has done with

⁷ Daisy Dunn, *The Shadow of Vesuvius: A Life of Pliny* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2019).

Reviews

writing her book is that she makes connections to both Pliny's story and Virgil's book, *Aeneid*.

Daisy Dunn compared her book to the *Aeneid* with how similar both Pliny the Elder and Aeneas are with the characters and locations of where Pliny takes place. The city of Misenum is named after Misenus, the trumpeter of Aeneas, who fought alongside Hector in the Trojan War. Their journeys are similar because Pliny the Elder travels to the burning site of Pompeii while Aeneas travels to the burning location that is the Underworld. Another point that Dunn draws on from Virgil's *Aeneid* is that both main characters were told not to go on their journey by the people close to them. For Pliny, it was his mother who begged him not to go to Pompeii and, for Aeneas, his wife Creusa told him not to leave her side as Troy was beginning to fall, but he did anyway. Dunn describes the scenery of Pompeii as to the Virgilian Underworld with fire everywhere and the screaming of people being caught on fire by their surroundings. Dunn draws on Virgil to talk about how both of their main characters are willing to risk their lives for the sake of others to tell their stories once they are gone.

The Shadow of Vesuvius is one of the best accounts of the eruption of Pompeii through the lives of people that lived it. Daisy Dunn was able to tell the story of Pliny the Elder and how his nephew Pliny the Younger was able to finish his story for his uncle and the aftermath of the eruption. Dunn drew connections with Virgil's *Aeneid* and how both Pliny the Elder and Aeneas went through similar situations with their loved ones and their journey to their destination. Dunn's book is a strong example of telling the story of Pompeii and how Pliny the Elder became a hero that was willing to die for the sake of saving people from Mt. Vesuvius. With her book, we have a better understanding of how life was in the surrounding areas that were impacted by the eruptions, coupling with the archaeological evidence, to fully grasp life at Pompeii.

Bibliography

Dunn, Daisy. *The Shadow of Vesuvius: A Life of Pliny*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2019. \$19.86 (Hardcover).

Author Bio

Giovanni Daniel Gonzalez is currently a second-year transfer student at CSU San Bernardino, double majoring in Anthropology and History. Giovanni's interests include Ancient History, Roman Egypt, Classics, Classical Archaeology, Ancient Warfare, Trade and cross-cultural interactions. With help from the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship, Giovanni is planning to go to Graduate School to earn his Ph.D. in Ancient History. After earning his Ph.D., Giovanni plans to teach at a university level in History and Anthropology.

