

ANCIENT HISTORY

What does the evidence reveal about the physical environment of Campania? In your answer, refer to Sources E and F and your own knowledge.

Source E: Pliny the Elder – extract

Source F: Map of the Bay of Naples area in 79AD

Upon examination of the various ancient primary sources produced before the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 AD, it is evident that the region of Campania was, as Source E describes, “the work of nature in a happy mood”.

As seen in Source F, Campania was a coastal environment which facilitated trade and ports, such as the Gytheum Port in Herculaneum. This nearness to the ocean provided what Source E describes as a “climate so mild”, with short winters and sea breezes creating a temperate atmosphere. This attracted many Greeks and other foreigners to Herculaneum, which overlooked the Bay of Naples. Luxurious houses were built on the cliffs, providing excellent views that helped tourism flourish. Evidence of this can be seen in archaeological remnants today.

This bay was extremely significant for the Campanian people, as the salt pans it formed were rich with sea life, which was useful for eating and procuring garum, a fish sauce. Evidence of the types of sea life is seen on a mosaic in Herculaneum.

The dominating feature, as detailed by Strabo, was Mount Vesuvius, a dormant volcano which provided many benefits, particularly in Pompeii. Previous eruptions had caused the soil to be fertile and “life sustaining” (Source D), and Florus states that Pompeii had “two flowering seasons” and was hence agriculturally prosperous.

This fertile soil encouraged the growth of a variety of fruits and vegetables such as cabbage, peaches and figs, some of which are shown on a painting at the House of Julia Felix. It also promoted the growth of flowers, which were used for perfume, as well as olives, used for oil and grapes, which were fermented into wine, as described by Pliny in other sources. Campania’s wine industry was quite popular and allowed wealth to flow into the town.

The summit of the volcano itself was described by Strabo as flat, porous and blackened, a contrasting view to a painting of it, which also featured grapes, showing the importance of the wine industry. On the painting, it is shown as pointed, though Strabo’s account seems more accurate as he allegedly visited the site himself. He also describes a variety of other towns in the region as shown on Source F, such as Stabiae and Neapolis, but these were not as well-known as Pompeii and Herculaneum, as their position in the physical environment was not as advantageous.