COULD MODERN SCIENCE HELP US READ BOOKS BURIED BY VESUVIUS NEARLY 2,000 YEARS AGO?



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Scientists have burned modern papyrus scrolls to recreate the damage suffered by books buried in Herculaneum when Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 CE. By adding tiny amounts of lead to the ink, they made the writing stand out in X-ray scans. The method could help researchers identify ancient scrolls that can be digitally unrolled and read without physically destroying them. The experiment even used passages written by high-school students, including lines from Star Wars and the Bible.

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The Herculaneum scrolls may contain unique Roman and Greek works that disappeared from history. This story links the Roman Empire, the eruption of Vesuvius, ancient libraries, archaeology, scientific technology and artificial intelligence. It also raises a clear historical question: how much of the ancient world has been lost simply because texts could not be preserved or read?

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“What might these scrolls teach us about Roman life that surviving books cannot?”

Source: UC Berkeley News

https://news.berkeley.edu/2026/09/16/to-read-2000-year-old-burned-scrolls-scientists-burn-their-own/