COULD NEW X-RAY METHODS BRING LOST ROMAN BOOKS BACK FROM THE ASHES OF VESUVIUS?

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Scientists have tested a new way to read the carbonised scrolls buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. They created and burned modern papyrus scrolls, then used X-rays and computer algorithms to detect lead in the ink and virtually unroll the pages. The method may help researchers read more of the roughly 1,800 scrolls from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum without physically opening them and destroying them. news.berkeley.edu

WHY IS THIS INTERESTING?

The scrolls could contain works from the ancient world that have been completely lost elsewhere. This story links Roman history with modern technology and raises an accessible question about how historians can recover evidence without damaging the objects that contain it. news.berkeley.edu

THINK LIKE A HISTORIAN

“Why might historians prefer to scan these Roman scrolls instead of opening them?”

Source: UC Berkeley News news.berkeley.edu

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