



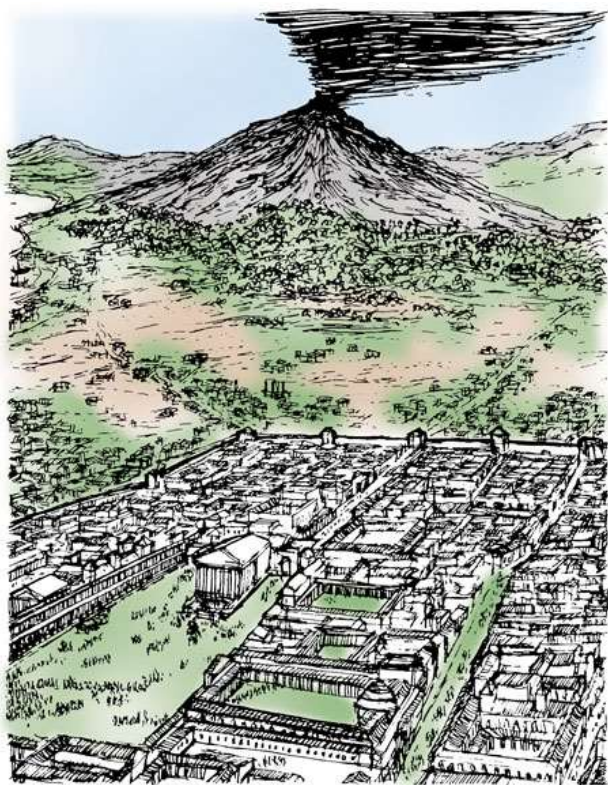
UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL CLASSICS PROJECT

CSCP Support Materials: Notes and Commentary

Eduqas GCSE Latin Component 3A

Latin Literature (Narratives) Pliny, *The Eruption of Vesuvius*

For examination in 2020 and 2021



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Contents

Introduction	1
Pliny the Younger	1
His life	1
His works	1
Pliny the Elder	2
Further reading	3
 Reading the Text	 5
The text	5
Suggestions for reading and teaching	5
About the notes	6
Notes on the text	6
 Notes and Commentary	 7
Section A	7
Section B	8
Section C	11
Section D	14
Section E	17
Section F	19
Section G	22
Section H	25

Introduction

Pliny the Younger

His life

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, known as Pliny the Younger, was the son of a landowner from Comum (now called Como) in northern Italy. He was born in c. 61 A.D. His father died when he was a young child and Verginius Rufus became his guardian. At some point, he was adopted by his uncle, Pliny the Elder.

In August 79 A.D., the seventeen-year-old Pliny and his mother were staying at Misenum on the Bay of Naples (Neapolis) with Pliny's uncle (known as Pliny the Elder). In the long letter now known as Letter VI:16, written to the historian Tacitus, Pliny describes how his uncle died helping rescue people during the eruption of Vesuvius, claiming he himself preferred to stay behind and continue his studies. Pliny became his uncle's heir, inheriting his estate which made him a rich man.

Pliny travelled to Rome for the later stages of his education. For at least part of his time there, Pliny studied with Quintilian, a famous teacher of rhetoric and of Greek and Latin literature. Although he initially made his name as a lawyer, he later embarked on a career in the Senate and became the first member of his family to be a senator. What Pliny did as a politician is recorded on an inscription found in Comum. His expertise in finance was quickly recognised and he moved through various political appointments, becoming consul before he was forty. His achievements reveal, among other

things, an ability to survive and do well under such different emperors as Domitian, Nerva and Trajan.

As consul in 100 A.D., Pliny delivered his *Panegyricus* in honour of the emperor Trajan. His revised and expanded version of this speech is one of the very few surviving Latin speeches not written by Cicero. In around 110 A.D., Pliny was sent to govern the Roman province of Bithynia where he died about two years later (the exact date of his death is not known).

Pliny was married three times: his last wife was called Calpurnia, whom he praises in several of his letters. She was much younger than he was – perhaps only fifteen when Pliny was over forty – but the marriage seems to have been a happy one, except that they did not have children.

His works

From an early age, Pliny was interested in literature: he wrote a Greek tragedy when he was fourteen and was reading extracts from Livy when his uncle embarked on his mission to save people from the eruption of Vesuvius.

A huge amount of Pliny's personal correspondence was published in ten books. The letters in Books I-IX, almost 250 published between 99 and 109 A.D., cover a whole range of topics: these include incidents in the lives of Pliny's friends, gossip about notorious people, the murder of a man by his slaves, city life, Pliny's attitude to his

slaves and freedmen, family life, the pointlessness of chariot racing, the events of 79 A.D. and obituaries. There are also letters which include advice, comments about elections and trials, topographical descriptions and even job references. The letters provide a unique insight into the society of the time, at least from a wealthy and successful man's point of view.

After his death, a tenth book appeared, consisting mostly of official letters from Bithynia to the emperor Trajan and Trajan's replies: this is the only surviving government correspondence of its kind. Each letter deals with a particular problem and in most cases reveal Pliny as a man who has a real concern for the people in his care – if a little over-fussy at times. These letters are a major source for Roman provincial administration, and give a fascinating glimpse of the paperwork with which emperors were required to occupy themselves. In two of the letters, there are the earliest surviving accounts of the teaching, behaviour and official persecution of the early Christians.

Pliny was also proud of his skill as a poet although only fragments quoted in his letters have survived. He particularly enjoyed composing hendecasyllables and tells his friend, Paternus, that he is sending some of his verses to him. Pliny seems to have been annoyed by criticism that his poetry contains coarse language. He defends himself by citing famous poets against whom the same criticism was levelled, including Catullus and Martial. Whether Pliny sees himself as being on a par with these literary greats is not clear. He was certainly on friendly terms with many of the poets of his day and

reveals that he paid Martial's traveling expenses when the poet retired to Spain.

In a letter written to his friend Maximus, Pliny recalls a story told to him by Tacitus. When Tacitus was once at the circus, he fell into conversation with another spectator. When this man asked Tacitus if he was Italian or from the provinces, Tacitus replied that the man would know him by his published work, whereupon the man asked 'Are you Tacitus or Pliny?'

Pliny the Elder

Gaius Plinius Secundus (Pliny the Elder) was also born in Comum in northern Italy in 23 or 24 A.D. and was almost certainly educated in Rome. For twelve years, he was on active military service in the Rhine during which time he was a fellow soldier with Titus who would later become emperor. On his return to Rome, Pliny practised as a lawyer: after Vespasian became emperor, he held procuratorships in Gaul, Africa and Spain. He seems to have been extremely proficient in these posts: the historian Suetonius says that he carried out his duties 'with the utmost integrity'.

Later, Pliny became one of the emperor's *amici*, those whom the emperor chose to advise him on particular occasions. When Vespasian was succeeded by Titus, Pliny was appointed commander of the Roman fleet which was stationed at Misenum on the bay of Naples. In this way, he was on hand to observe the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 A.D. which was to result in his death at the age of 55.

Pliny the Younger was immensely proud of his uncle and paints a picture of a man who was disciplined, hard-working and always curious about the world around him. He appears to have needed little sleep, rising before dawn and spending much of the morning studying. Then he would have a light lunch. When he was at leisure, in the bath or sunbathing, he would always have a slave there to read to him or to take notes and once his rest was over, he would again work until it was time for dinner. Even then, he would insist that a book be read to him and he took notes. According to Pliny, his uncle always had someone near him with writing tablets in case he should want to write something down.

The elder Pliny was a prolific author and wrote on various topics, including the wars in Germany, grammar and biographies. However, the only one of

his works which has survived is his *Naturalis Historia*, an encyclopedia in 37 volumes which covers many aspects of the natural world.

Further reading

A.N. Sherwin-White *Fifty letters of Pliny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969)

P.G. Walsh *Pliny the Younger Complete Letters* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics 2006)

J.F. Healy *Pliny the Elder Natural History: A Selection* (London: Penguin Classics, 1991)



Central and southern Italy.

The Bay of Naples (Neapolis). The area covered by this map is about 40 miles (60 kilometers) wide.

Reading the Text

The text

A short section in the original letter which comes after passage A has been omitted. Otherwise, the text is largely unadapted.

As well as the Latin text of Letter VI:16, there is a complete English translation of Letter VI:20 in which Pliny tells how he and his mother escaped from the effects of the eruption.

Suggestions for reading and teaching

When reading a set text, it is important that students:

- understand the story as a whole;
- understand what each Latin word, phrase and sentence means;
- can translate the Latin into correct, natural English;
- appreciate the literary qualities of the text.

To help students understand the text, teachers may like to:

- read the Latin aloud to emphasise phrasing and to stress word groups;
- encourage students to make use of the provided vocabulary;
- break up more complex sentences into constituent parts for comprehension and translation;
- ask a range of comprehension and linguistic questions.

A smartboard / interactive whiteboard can be useful for displaying the text so that it can be marked up or parts of it highlighted e.g. to show which adjectives agree with which nouns.

The storyline of this letter is crucial and therefore teachers may initially wish to maintain a brisk pace and concentrate on establishing the narrative, before undertaking the slower, more detailed exploration of the text when students have become accustomed to the style and language. Most of the text is straightforward and help has been given in the notes when, for example, Pliny has employed an unusual word order or omitted words such as *est* or *fuit*.

Although a sample translation is provided in the course resources, it is important for students to understand that many different “correct translations” can exist. It is advisable for teachers to encourage their students to make their own version as part of the process of evaluating the text for themselves (for example, by choosing between a range of possible English meanings for each Latin word). It might be helpful to begin with a highly literal translation, before developing something more polished in natural English that is as close to the structure and vocabulary of the original Latin as possible. Students will soon see that a degree of paraphrase may be required when the Latin does not readily translate into correct and idiomatic English.

About the Notes

The prescribed text is broken up into short sections A to H and the notes on each passage are followed by a *Discussion* and *Questions*. The notes focus both on language and content, but also include some comment on style and literary effects. The *Discussion* and *Questions* focus mostly on literary appreciation and interpretation.

Rhetorical and technical terms are used throughout the notes. Some of these may be unfamiliar to teachers new to teaching Latin literature; usually a definition is supplied when the term is first used.

The notes are designed to provide for the needs of a wide spectrum of

teachers, from those with limited knowledge of Latin and who are perhaps entirely new to reading Latin literature, to teachers experienced in both language and literature. It is hoped that all will find something of use and interest. Some of the information contained in the notes is for general interest and to satisfy the curiosity of students and teachers. The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

Notes on the text

Some of these notes are based on those previously published in *Selections from Pliny's letters* Handbook (Cambridge Latin texts) by M B Fisher and M R Griffin (ISBN 978 0 521 20487 3).

Section A

Pliny explains the reasons for writing this letter.

Notes

1 **petis**: ‘You ask...’ i.e. Tacitus. Tacitus had apparently asked Pliny to provide an account of the events following the eruption of Vesuvius.

avunculi mei: Pliny’s uncle is Pliny the Elder who had witnessed the features of the eruption at first hand. For his life and works, see the introduction.

1-2 **quo verius... possis**: the younger Pliny was not, of course, an eyewitness to his uncle’s actions once he left Misenum and relied upon the observations of others, as he himself says at the end of this letter. Even then, Pliny is writing his letter many years after the events he describes.

Discussion

Pliny addresses his letter to Tacitus who at this time, like Pliny himself, was a leading lawyer in Rome. Both men were also making their way through the senatorial *cursus honorum*, a ladder of promotion which enabled members of the senatorial class to be awarded official posts in the Roman government. See Cambridge Latin Course Book V: page 46 for details of the stages of the *cursus honorum*.

Both Pliny and Tacitus had a keen interest in literature and Pliny’s account of the eruption was to be used by Tacitus as material for his *Histories*.

Sadly, this part of the *Histories*, covering the years 69 A.D. – 96 A.D., has not survived which makes this letter and letter VI:20 all the more important.

In his inimitable way, Pliny flatters Tacitus; if *he* writes the account, it really will be true and something that future generations will be able to read. Pliny continues to say (in a section of the original text omitted here) that the gods have blessed both his uncle and Tacitus in giving them the power to write something worth reading and to do something which is worth recording.

Questions

1. Who is Tacitus? Why is Pliny writing to him?
2. What confidence does Pliny have in Tacitus?

3. What is your first impression of Pliny?

Section B

Pliny begins his account of his uncle's heroic actions.

Notes

- 1 **Miseni:** Misenum (modern Miseno) was the largest base of the Roman navy. According to mythology, its name stems from one of the companions of Aeneas who was called Misenus. Aeneas and his men escaped from the fallen city of Troy and eventually sailed to Italy. Misenus was a trumpeter who challenged the sea god Triton to a musical competition which was regarded as an act of extreme arrogance. As a punishment for believing that he could play as well as a deity, Misenus was drowned by Triton near the headland which was subsequently named after him. Aeneas' descendants eventually founded a city on the site of the future Rome.

classem: at this time, Pliny's uncle was in charge of the fleet at Misenum, although his responsibilities would probably have been largely administrative.

- 1-2 **nonum... Septembres:** the recent discovery of an inscription suggests that the eruption took place in October 79 A.D., not August as Pliny states here. There has long been doubt about the date, with archaeologists citing the remains autumnal crops, for example, which were found in the ruins of Pompeii. See www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-45874858

- 2 **hora... septima:** in the Roman calendar, daylight hours varied according to the season. Pliny states that the first indications of the eruption appeared in the early afternoon, around noon.

mater mea: little is known about her. In letter VI:20, Pliny describes how the two of them escaped the fallout from the eruption.

indicat: Pliny uses present tense verbs even though he is describing something in the past. This is known as the historic present and often creates a vivid account.

- 2-3 **nubem... specie:** pressure had built up in the magma chamber of Vesuvius. Eventually, this resulted in an explosion which displaced the solidified magma which had acted as a kind of 'plug'. The resulting hot steam, pumice and gases were then forced high into the air, producing the cloud Pliny describes. This kind of eruption is now known as a Plinian eruption in honour of the man who first described it in detail.

- 3 **et... et:** 'both'... 'and'.

frigida: supply *aqua*. Pliny's uncle had a cold bath.

- 4 **iacens:** Romans often reclined to eat although this would not always have been the case at a light lunch which Pliny is describing here.

Note the lack of connectives to give the impression of busyness. In another letter (III:5), Pliny describes how his uncle hated to waste any time, even taking notes while a book was read to him at dinner.

poscit... ascendit: Examples of the historical present. Here, they reflect his uncle's sense of impatience to observe the unusual cloud.

- 5 ***miraculum illud***: even with all his knowledge of natural phenomena, the cloud was sufficiently unusual to arouse the elder Pliny's interest.
- 5-6 ***incertum... cognitum est***: Pliny is able to use the benefit of hindsight to confirm that the cloud was indeed rising from Vesuvius, although this was not exactly clear at the time.
- 7 ***non alia... pinus***: Pliny likens the cloud to an umbrella or stone pine which has a flattened head and wide-spreading branches. These trees are very common in the Mediterranean and ancient readers would readily be able to recognise Pliny's description.



An umbrella pine still visible in the ruins of Pompeii

- 9-10 ***credo... vanescebat***: Pliny was correct. The features he mentions are typical of what has become known as a Plinian eruption.
- 10-11 ***candida interdum, interdum sordida et maculosa***: note the elegant arrangement of words here. The repetition of *interdum* and the reversed order of the adjectives forms a pattern - *candida* (A) *interdum* (B) *interdum* (B) *sordida* (A) et *maculosa* (A). This pattern is known as a chiasmus or a chiastic arrangement and is very common in Latin literature. This stylistic feature appears several times in the letter.

Discussion

Although this letter describes the characteristics of the eruption, Pliny begins with his uncle on whom the whole letter is focused: his main objective is to tell how his uncle died, which is what Tacitus had asked him to do. For modern readers, the description of the cloud, its size and shape, and the technical details confirm what is now

known about this kind of volcanic eruption named in honour of Pliny.

Pliny creates an impression of his uncle as a man of routine and discipline: from this and other letters, his pride and admiration are evident.

As a natural historian (see introduction), Pliny's uncle would have been very interested in what was happening.

Although he already knew Vesuvius, he had previously dismissed it as having little significance. The mountain had been inactive for many years and was covered in vineyards according to the

geographer Strabo (c. 64 B.C. –21 A.D.). It seemed to pose little threat: in letter VI:20 (section J) Pliny dismisses the early tremors as being common in the area and nothing to worry about.

Questions

1. Look at line 1 (*erat Miseni... regebat*): how did Pliny the Elder come to be in the area?
2. Look at lines 1-3 (*nonum... specie*): Who was the first person to notice that something odd was happening?
3. Look at lines 3-5 (*usus ille... poterat*):
 - What had Pliny the Elder been doing that day?
 - What did he do in order to be able to see the cloud more clearly?
4. Look at lines 6-9 (*cuius... diffundebatur*): how effective is the comparison with an umbrella pine in understanding the shape of the cloud?
5. Look at lines 9-12 (*credo... sustulerat*):
 - Quote **and** translate the **three** Latin words Pliny uses in lines 10-11 to describe the cloud.
 - How does word order help create a vivid picture?
 - What explanation does Pliny give for the cloud changing colour?



An artist's impression of the younger Pliny and his mother watching the eruption of Vesuvius.

Section C

Pliny describes how his uncle's plans changed dramatically after receiving a letter from a friend.

Notes

- 1 **magnum... noscendum**: Pliny has already referred to his uncle's curiosity about the world around him.
propius: the first indication that Pliny the Elder was not content simply to watch the unfolding events from Misenum.
eruditissimo viro: Pliny again shows his admiration for his uncle.
visum: supply *est*.
- 1-2 **iubet... facit**: historic present tenses to create a dramatic effect.
- 2 **liburnicam**: a fast, light boat. Later, Pliny's uncle would need more substantial ships.
mihi... copiam: Pliny himself plays a part in the story; he could have accompanied his uncle if he had wanted to.
- 2-3 **respondi... malle**: Pliny opted to continue his studies at home rather than go with his uncle.
- 3 **forte... dederat**: his uncle had set Pliny some work to do. Pliny himself tells us in letter VI:20 that he was reading a book of the historian Livy.
egrediebatur: the imperfect tense *egrediebatur* suggests that Pliny the Elder was in the process of leaving the house when a letter arrived.
- 4 **accipit**: another historic present tense.
codicillos: a message written on parchment.
Rectinae Tasci: Tascius is probably the same person as Pomponianus who is mentioned in line 6 of section D. It is not clear why he and his wife are in different places.
- 5 **subiacebat**: i.e. beneath Mt Vesuvius. Rectina's house was probably in or near Herculaneum.
nec... fuga: supply *erat*. If the message had come by boat, which seems likely, why did Rectina not come with it? In section D, Pomponianus already had *sarcinae* (luggage) loaded onto ships so perhaps Rectina wanted a larger vessel to bring her belongings as well.
- 6 **vertit... obit**: examples of the historic present tense.
- 6-7 **studioso animo... maximo (animo)**: Pliny the Elder's personal curiosity turns to heroism.
- 7-8 **deducit... auxilium**: *deducit* and *ascendit* are historic present tenses. There is no connective between *deducit quadriremes* and *ascendit ipse* to create a fast narrative. This is an example of asyndeton.
- 7 **quadriremes**: as commander of the fleet, Pliny the Elder had access to these large warships with which he hoped to rescue not only Rectina but many other

inhabitants of the area around Vesuvius (*non Rectinae modo sed multis... laturus auxilium*).

8 **erat enim... orae**: while not perhaps as upmarket as the resort of Baiae further along the coast, Herculaneum and the surrounding area was prosperous and popular with Romans. Its proximity to the sea provided a much more pleasant climate than in a large city such as Rome.

9 **properat illuc unde alii fugiunt**: a stylish chiasmic arrangement of words which draws attention to Pliny doing the opposite to the other people in this dangerous situation. The historic present tenses add to the vivid account.

rectum... recta: the repetition of the two forms of the same word emphasises the determination of Pliny's uncle.

tenet: the historic present tense.

10-11 **omnes... enotaretque**: ever a stickler for detail. In letter III:5, Pliny mentions that his uncle always had a slave and writing tablets to hand. Two slaves are mentioned in section G although these may have belonged to Pomponianus.

Discussion

Pliny portrays his uncle as intellectually curious and decisive. His determination to examine the natural phenomena at close quarters becomes focused elsewhere as he launches a rescue mission. His nephew's decision not to accompany him may have saved the younger man's life!

It can be assumed that Rectina and Tascius were known to Pliny – there is no explanation of who they are. Tascius Pomponianus is probably the son of Pomponius Secundus who was a friend of the elder Pliny. There has been much debate as to whether Pomponianus, mentioned in section D, is, in fact, the husband of Rectina. If so, why is he at Stabiae when Rectina seems to be close to Herculaneum? Pliny does not tell his readers – it is simply not an

important part of the narrative for him as he focuses on his uncle.

Pliny's description effectively captures the terror those caught up in the eruption must have felt: *imminenti periculo* (line 4), *exterritae* (4) *nec ulla... fuga* (5) *tanto discrimini* (5) reflect the panic all around. *eriperet* and *orabat* (5-6) are strong verbs which create a sense of urgency. The frequent use of the historic present tense adds to the vivid and immediate danger. Pliny stresses that his uncle was making straight for an area that everyone else was fleeing and that he was completely lacking in fear. The account of his uncle making notes in the midst of all the turmoil may strike the reader as improbable but it would be in keeping with this intellectual man's character.

Questions

1. Look at lines 1-3 (*magnum... dederat*):

- Why did Pliny's uncle ask for a boat?

- What opportunity was given to Pliny and why did he turn it down?

2. Look at lines 3-6 (*egrediebatur... orabat*). How does Pliny convey a sense of danger in this extract? Refer to **Latin** words and phrases and explain your choice.
3. Look at lines 6-7 (*studioso animo... maximo*): explain in your own words how Pliny the Elder's mission had now changed.
4. Look at line 8 (*erat enim... orae*): why were there so many people living in the area?

5. Look at lines 8-11 (*properat... enotaretque*). Choose **one** of the following words which you think best describes the elder Pliny's actions here.

brave surprising foolhardy
heroic selfish

Give **two** pieces of evidence from this extract to support your choice. You do not have to quote the Latin.

Section D

Faced with an unexpected obstacle, Pliny's uncle is forced to change his plans and sails towards Stabiae.

Notes

- 1-2 *iam... iam... iam*:** the repetition of *iam* (an example of anaphora) serves to emphasise the worsening situation as the elder Pliny's ship approaches the coast.
- 1 *navibus*:** i.e. the warships. The ships were now reaching the fallout from Vesuvius.
- calidior et densior*:** although the thick ash could be seen from some distance away, the heat can also now be felt. In section E, Pliny tells how fires were breaking out all around Vesuvius, some presumably started by the burning rocks ejected from the volcano. The comparative adjectives add to the impression of increasing danger.
- 2 *pumices... lapides*:** the detail given here stresses the danger caused by the pumice and rocks. In section F, Pliny describes how people protected their heads with pillows.
- 2-3 *vadum subitum*:** seismic activity had created shallow water and this, along with the debris from the mountain itself, prevented the ships from getting close. Compare this with section C where Rectina's letter had implied that it was still possible to escape by boat.
- cunctatus*:** this is describing the actions of Pliny's uncle.
- paulum... mox*:** the hesitation was only momentary.
- 4 *gubernatori... monenti*:** the helmsman was not as brave (or reckless?) as his master. He wanted to turn back.
- inquit*:** This might be in the (historic) present tense, but as it is impossible to distinguish between the present and perfect tense (third person singular indicative active) forms of this verb, it could also be perfect tense.
- 4-5 *fortes... fortuna iuvat*:** the use of direct speech brings life to this part of the narrative and accentuates Pliny the Elder's character. In section C, Pliny has already mentioned that others were fleeing: the helmsman obviously thought that was the sensible thing to do.
- The quotation ("*fortes... fortuna iuvat*") is from *Phormio*, a comic play written by the Roman playwright Terence (c. 190 B.C.-159 B.C.).
- 5 *Pomponianum pete*:** as previously discussed, it is not clear why he and his wife were not in the same place – if indeed they are husband and wife.
- 5-6 *Stabiis...infunditur*:** Before the 79 A.D. eruption, Herculaneum and Pompeii were much closer to the coast. The modern shoreline of this part of the bay is much changed so it is more difficult to understand what was happening near Stabiae, modern Castellammare di Stabia, south of Vesuvius. Presumably, the town lay in a secondary bay within the bay of Naples.
- 6-7 *quamquam... conspicuo tamen*:** Pliny creates an ominous atmosphere. Pomponianus is safe for the moment but the approaching danger is evident.
- 7-8 *cum cresceret proximo*:** supply *futuro* – 'when it grew, it would be very close'.

- 8 **sarcinas... in naves:** Pomponianus had already gathered his luggage together on ships hoping for eventual escape.
- 8-9 **si contrarius... resedisset:** Pomponianus was being prevented from leaving Stabiae, not through lack of transport as he had ships, but by the direction of the wind.
-

Discussion

Pliny describes the increasingly deteriorating situation for those living in the vicinity of Vesuvius, focusing on the ash, rocks and effect of the debris on the coastline. However, his account returns to the actions of his uncle who decides to change direction towards Stabiae against the advice of his helmsman.

What happened to Rectina? Her fate is unknown but it may be that the warships dispersed, some trying to reach other parts of the coast to rescue as many people as possible (see section C, lines 7-8).

The details of how exactly Stabiae was cut off are unclear but this does not detract from the account: Pomponianus was stranded there but safe and ready to escape in ships if and when the opportunity arose.

The skeletons of about 300 people were found in boat houses in Herculaneum (see pictures below): presumably, they had gathered there in the hope of being rescued. Scientists think they were killed by a pyroclastic surge of superheated volcanic ash when the column of gas from the volcano collapsed.

Both here and in Pompeii, the remains of people with precious goods including money and jewellery have been discovered. Did some of these people lose their lives attempting to retrieve their property?

Pliny creates a very real sense of menace in his account of the imminent danger. Although it is not yet advancing (*nondum periculo appropinquante*), it is clearly visible (*conspicuo tamen*) and it will only get bigger.



Questions

1. In lines 1-3 (*iam... obstantia*), how does Pliny create a vivid picture of what is happening. Refer to Latin words and phrases and explain your choices.
2. Look at lines 3-5 (*cunctatus... pete*):
 - What did the elder Pliny consider doing?
 - What contribution did the helmsman make?
 - *fortes... iuvat*: to whom do you think Pliny was addressing these words? Himself? The helmsman? The crew? What does this reveal about Pliny?
3. Who was Pomponianus?
4. Where did he live?
5. Look at lines 6-9 (*ibi... resedisset*):
 - Explain how Pomponianus' situation differed from that of Rectina as described in section C, line 4-5.
 - Why could Pomponianus not be complacent about his own position?
 - What preparations had he already made?
 - What did he intend to do?
 - What was preventing him from doing so?

Section E

Pliny describes how his uncle reaches Pomponianus and tries to encourage him and the others as they wait for the situation to improve.

Notes

- 1 **quo**: this could mean 'to that place' i.e. Stabiae, but *quo* could also be a connecting relative referring back to *ventus* in section D i.e. 'with a very favourable wind'.
secundissimo: i.e. *vento* – 'with a very favourable wind'. The breeze which was preventing Pomponianus from leaving worked in Pliny's uncle's favour.
- 1-2 **complectitur...consolatur hortatur**: use of the historic present tense to create an immediate and vivid account. There are no connectives here (asyndeton) – Pliny the Elder is quick to comfort his friend.
- 2 **trepidantem**: supply *virum* or *amicum*. Unlike the elder Pliny who is described as *solutus metu* (section C line 12), Pomponianus is trembling.
timorem eius sua securitate: an effective chiasmic phrase which emphasises the contrast between the two men.
- 3 **deferri... cenat**: even in the midst of a crisis, Pliny's uncle keeps to his usual routine as described by his nephew in Letter III:5. Again, Pliny makes use of the historic present (*iubet... accubat cenat*).
- 3-4 **aut hilaris... hilari**: *similis* is followed by the dative. Pliny is either genuinely cheerful or pretending to be. Whichever is the case, his nephew praises him.
- 4-6 **interim... excitabatur**: Pliny draws a contrast between the normality of his uncle's routine which he has just described with the far-from-normal effects of the eruption.
- 6 **ille**: i.e. Pliny's uncle
agrestium: the whole of the area was farmed as the volcanic soil was extremely fertile. A wall painting from Pompeii shows the slopes of Mount Vesuvius covered in vines.
trepidatione: an echo of *trepidantem* in line 2 emphasising the reaction of most people.
- 7 **in remedium formidinis**: Pliny's purpose in pretending that the fires were simply farmers' bonfires was to soothe the fear of those around him, presumably Pomponianus and his household.
- 7-8 **tum se... somno**: in contrast to the surrounding terror, Pliny is able to fall asleep. Unlike his cheerfulness earlier (lines 4-5) which may have been simulated, his sleep was genuine enough, emphasised by the superlative *verissimo*.
- 9-10 **ab iis... audiebatur**: bedrooms in Roman houses normally had a curtain across the doorway rather than a solid door.

Discussion

The focus is once more on Pliny's uncle (*avunculus meus*) as he arrives in Stabiae. Pliny draws the contrast between Pomponianus' fear and his uncle's apparent lack of concern as he keeps to his normal routine of bathing and dining with a cheerful demeanour. Pliny suggests that his uncle may have been putting on a good face but commends him for doing so.

In lines 4-6, Pliny builds up a vivid picture: *e Vesuvio monte pluribus locis* – 'from more places on Mount Vesuvius', *latissimae flammae altaque incendia relucebant* – 'very extensive flames and fires rising up high were

blazing out'. The tricolon, use of the superlative adjective and the virtual synonyms *flammae* and *incendia* all contribute to the powerful description. There is further contrast between the brightness and glare (*fulgor et claritas*) and the darkness of the night (*tenebris noctis*).

After this description, Pliny quickly refocuses on his uncle who tries to explain the flames away. He is sufficiently relaxed to fall asleep and there is a touch of affectionate humour as Pliny describes his uncle's snoring which those outside the bedroom are able to hear.

Questions

1. Look at lines 1-2 (*quo tunc... leniret*):
 - How did Pliny the Elder manage to reach Stabiae?
 - What did Pliny do when he saw Pomponianus?
 - In lines 2-3, what evidence is there that Pomponianus was frightened? You should refer to Latin words and phrases to support your view.
2. Look at lines 3-4 (*deferri... hilari*):
 - Give **two** ways in which Pliny's uncle tried to create a sense of normality.
 - Pliny suggests that his uncle may have been pretending to be cheerful, but if so, this was just as brave. Do you agree? Explain your view.
3. Look at lines 4-6 (*interim... excitabatur*): show how Pliny creates an effective impression of the effects of the eruption. You should refer to specific Latin words or phrases and explain your choices.
4. Look at lines 6-7 (*ille... dictitabat*):
 - Pliny's uncle tells his companions things that are not true. Pick out and translate the three-word Latin phrase which explains why he did so.
 - Was Pliny right to tell a lie in these circumstances? Give a reason for your view.
5. Look at lines 7-10 (*tum... audiebatur*): explain in your own words how the people in the house knew that Pliny was genuinely asleep and not simply pretending.

Section F

As the situation gets worse, Pliny's uncle and Pomponianus' household make a plan to escape.

Notes

- 1 **diaeta**: Pliny's bedroom seems to have been self-contained rather than in the house itself as it was accessed through a courtyard.

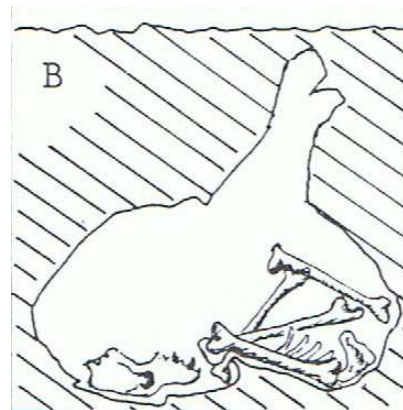
cinere mixtisue pumicibus: the word order is very effective, with the two substances (*cinere* and *pumicibus*) bracketing the participle (*mixtis*) which holds them together.

The towns around Vesuvius, notably Pompeii, were eventually buried. When the hot substances hardened, the shapes of organic matter - including human and non-human bodies - were preserved. By the use of Fiorelli's process, plaster casts of these could be made. Giuseppe Fiorelli was an Italian archaeologist who directed excavations at Pompeii from 1863 – 1875.

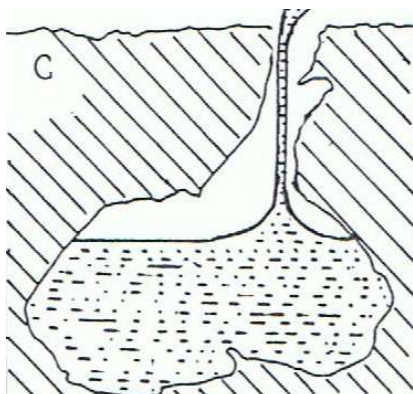
Fiorelli's process



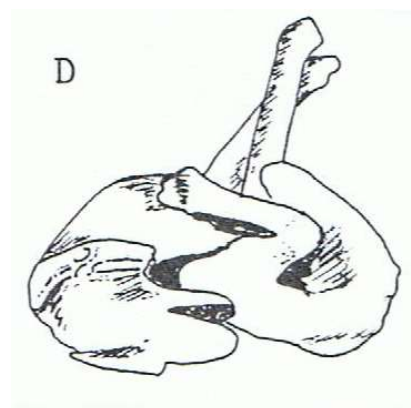
A dog dies in the eruption



In time, the body rots, leaving a cavity



Plaster is poured into the cavity



When the plaster is set, a perfect cast is left

- 2 **mora**: supply *fuisset* – ‘if there had been...’ The omission of the verb here creates a sense of urgency – speed is of the essence.
- exitus negaretur**: in section D (line 8), Pliny says the danger was not yet approaching. The amount of ash in the courtyard suggests that things had deteriorated very quickly indeed.
- 3 **pervigilaverant**: possibly because they were too afraid to sleep, unlike Pliny’s uncle.
- 4-5 **in commune... vagentur**: there are only two options – either to stay in the house or to roam about outside. The verb *vagari*, from which the English word ‘vague’ is derived through the related adjective *vagus*, suggests a lack of plan or purpose except to be out in the open. As Pliny goes on to explain, the house was starting to shake and there was a real danger that it would collapse.
- Note the continued use of the historic present (*consultant... subsistant... vagentur*) to heighten the tension, following on from those in lines 3-4 (*procedit... reddit*). Compare also *constringunt* in line 10.
- 5 **vastis**: translate as ‘huge’. In letter VI:20, passage J, Pliny says tremors were common in Campania. Obviously, this was much more serious.
- 6 **nunc huc nunc illuc abire aut referri videbantur**: an effective phrase to describe the movement of the buildings from side to side.
- 7 **rursus**: ‘on the other hand’. Pliny effectively shows that neither option was entirely safe.
- quamquam levium exesorumque**: ‘though light and porous (i.e. the pumice stones)...’
- 8 **quod tamen... elegit**: a comparison of the two dangers made them choose to leave the house.
- 8-9 **apud illum... apud alios**: i.e. Pliny’s uncle (*apud illum*) and the others (*apud alios*).
- ratio rationem... timorem timor vicit**: another chiasmus which effectively contrasts the attitude of Pliny’s uncle who made a rational choice and the others who were swayed by fear.

Discussion

As the fallout from the eruption reaches Stabiae, there is no longer any sense of normality. Pliny’s uncle has to be woken up to prevent his being trapped in his room.

There is now a crucial decision to be made; do they stay in the house and risk it collapsing around them or take their chances outside where the pumice stones are raining down?

The description of the house shaking – *crebris vastisque tremoribus* – is terrifying, even for those who live in an area where tremors are commonplace. *quasi emota sedibus* (‘as if detached from their foundations’) vividly conveys the violence of the tremors as does *nunc huc nunc illuc abire aut referri videbantur*: the buildings are now tottering from side to side.

Although the pumice is light, it remains a danger but going outside proves to be the lesser of two evils. Even then, Pliny contrasts how his uncle and the others made the decision to leave the house, one by weighing up the arguments and making an informed choice and the rest

having one fear being overtaken by a greater fear.

This passage ends with a matter-of-fact statement: the pillows tied on their heads gave some protection from falling objects.

Questions

1. Look at lines 1-3 (*sed area... negaretur*):

- What evidence is there that Pliny's uncle's bedroom was not in the main house?
- What new danger presented itself?

2. Look at lines 3-4 (*excitatus... reddit*):

- What had Pomponianus and the others been doing while Pliny slept?
- Why do you think they had acted in this way?

3. Look at lines 4-5 (*in commune... vagentur*): what decision did they now have to make?

4. Look at lines 5-7 (*nam... videbantur*): how does Pliny create a vivid picture of what was happening to the buildings at this

point? You should refer to specific Latin words or phrases and explain your choices.

5. Look at lines 8-11 (*sub dio... vicit*):

- Pick out **and** translate the two adjectives in line 8 which describe the pumice.
- What was the danger of leaving the house?
- What did Pliny and the others eventually decide to do?
- In lines 10-11, how does Pliny use words and word order to convey how each person made the decision? You should refer to specific Latin words or phrases and explain your choices.

6. Look at lines 11-12 (*cervicalia... fuit*): what was the purpose of the pillows?

Section G

In a moving account, Pliny describes his uncle's experiences as they try to flee the eruption and his eventual death.

Notes

- 1 **dies alibi illic nox**: chiasmic arrangement of words for effect with the words *alibi* and *illic* placed next to each other to accentuate the contrast.
dies: supply *fuit*.
nox omnibus noctibus nigrior densiorque: repetition of *nox... noctibus* to stress the darkness. This was not simply an ordinary night-time darkness. The adjectives *nigrior* and *densior* are placed at the end of the clause for effect, the comparatives underlining the still worsening situation for those in the area.
- 2 **faces multae varia(que) lumina**: in contrast to the darkness mentioned in the previous line. Note the chiasmic arrangement to draw the reader's attention.
- 2-3 **egredi in litus... ex proximo adspicere**: chiasmic word order. The infinitive *adspicere* follows *placuit*.
- 3 **mare admitteret**: Pliny gives the impression of the sea being a living being (personification).
- 3-4 **adhuc... permanebat**: hope of escape is dashed. The adjectives *vastum* and *adversum* give the impression of an unassailable enemy.
- 4-5 **ibi... hausitque**: the first indications that Pliny's uncle was beginning to feel the effects of the ash and smoke.
semel atque iterum: one drink was not enough for Pliny the Elder to continue.
poposcit hausitque: the two verbs together perhaps reflect the desperation of Pliny's uncle: no sooner had he demanded water, he drank it. *hausit* suggests draining every drop.
- 5-6 **flammae... odor sulphuris**: The descriptive phrase *flammarumque praenuntius* is neatly bracketed by the two features Pliny mentions, the flames and the smell of sulphur.
- 6-7 **alios... vertunt, excitant illum**: yet another chiasmus stressing the difference in reaction between Pliny's uncle and those with him. Note the continued use of historic present tense verbs (*vertunt* and *excitant*) to enhance the vivid narrative.
- 7 **innitens servolis duobus**: the use of the word *servolus* instead of *servus* is rather poignant here as the hitherto strong and brave Pliny has to be supported by two young slaves.
adsurrexit et statim concidit: Pliny's weakness is now evident. *concidit* could be an example of the historic present, but since it follows on from *adsurrexit* which is in the perfect tense, it might also be perfect.
ut ego colligo: a reminder that Pliny is telling the story of his uncle's fate which makes it all the more tragic.
- 8-9 **crassiore... aestuans erat**: This weakness serves to accentuate his bravery even more.

ubi dies redditus: supply *est*.

9-10 *is... tertius*: what Pliny means by “the third day” after the eruption, assuming that it happened on 24th August, is 26th, as when the Romans counted a sequence of days they included the first and last days as part of the sequence; nowadays we would describe 26th as two days after 24th August, as we would start counting after the first day.

corpus inventum: supply *est*. The phrase comes as a shock when the reader learns that the Elder Pliny did not survive.

10-11 *integrum... indutus*: the Roman historian Suetonius suggested that Pliny’s uncle may have asked his own slaves to kill him once he realised that he was unlikely to survive the effects of the smoke. Here, his nephew makes it clear that this was not the case.

11-12 *habitus... similior*: Pliny’s uncle’s death was as peaceful as it could be given the circumstances.

Discussion

Having described the party deciding to leave the house, Pliny gives a vivid account of the further deterioration of the conditions outside. Although there is an initial glimmer of hope when the torchlight dispels the thick darkness, the situation on the shore has not improved at all: the huge hostile sea still prevents their escape and now the smell of sulphur is evident. Pliny’s focus again shifts to his uncle as he describes the decline in the older man’s strength – lying down, taking drinks of water to alleviate the choking, leaning on slaves for support, getting up, immediately

collapsing again and finally choking to death on the fumes.

This is in stark contrast to the portrayal earlier in the letter of a strong and decisive man bravely setting out to rescue firstly a friend and then many people caught up in the disaster: the fact that it is his own nephew narrating the story makes it even more moving. The description of the body looking as if it was just someone asleep is particularly touching – although, of course, Pliny himself was not present at the time.

Questions

1. Look at lines 1-2 (*iam... solvebant*): how by choice of word and word order does Pliny create a vivid picture of the situation?
2. Look at lines 2-4 (*placuit... permanebat*):
 - Why did they decide to go to the shore again?
 - How does Pliny make the sea sound particularly frightening?

3. Look at lines 4-5 (*ibi... hausitque*): how does Pliny emphasise that his uncle was struggling to cope with the conditions? Make two points.
4. Look at lines 5-7 (*deinde... illum*):
 - What new feature of the eruption does Pliny mention?
 - What effect did this have on a) Pliny’s uncle b) on the others?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How by his choice of words does Pliny stress their differing reactions? <p>5. Look at lines 7-9 (<i>innitens... erat</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What support did Pliny's uncle now need? • What explanation does Pliny give for his uncle's difficulties at this point? <p>6. Look at lines 9-11 (<i>ubi dies... indutus</i>):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When was Pliny's uncle's body found? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick out and translate two adjectives from line 10 which suggest that he died of natural causes. • What speculation might there have been about Pliny's uncle's death? <p>7. In the last line of this passage, Pliny says of his uncle <i>habitus corporis quiescenti quam defuncto similior</i>. How much of a comfort do you think this would have been to Pliny? Explain your view.</p> |
|---|---|

Section H

Pliny ends his account saying that he is confident Tacitus will know which part of the account to use in writing his history. Pliny assures him that he either witnessed these events at first hand or was told about them immediately afterwards, so his account is accurate.

Notes

- 1 **interim Miseni ego et mater** – : Pliny gives the impression that he is going to include his own story and then breaks off – a literary device to create anticipation? He records his personal experience and that of his mother in letter VI:20.
nihil: supply *est*.
 - 1-2 **nec tu... voluisti**: an echo of *petis... scribam* in section A, line 1 where Pliny says Tacitus has asked for an account of his uncle's death.
 - 2 **finem ergo faciam**: a short and to-the-point phrase with *finem* placed first to emphasise that Pliny's account is at an end.
 - 3 **cum maxime vera memorantur**: Pliny is confident his story is accurate as he found out the details immediately.
 - 3-4 **quaeque statim... audieram**: i.e. in the days immediately following his uncle's death.
 - 4 **tu potissima excerpes**: Pliny is sure that Tacitus will be able to choose the most important details.
 - 4-5 **aliud est... aliud... aliud... aliud**: 'it's one thing...and another thing...one thing...a different thing'. Different genres of writing demand different things. Note the contrast between *epistulam* and *historiam*, and *amico* and *omnibus*. The repetition of *aliud* (anaphora) adds to the effect.
-

Discussion

Pliny's account of his uncle's death comes to an end but he anticipates the other letter he will write about his own escape (*interim Miseni ego et mater*). Here, he has done what Tacitus asked him to do. There is a touch of flattery

when he expresses his confidence that Tacitus will know what to include in his own account: as previously discussed, this part of his *Histories* has not survived.

Questions

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Look at lines 1-2 (<i>interim... faciam</i>):<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why has Pliny finished his story at this point?• What else might he have written about? | <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Look at lines 2-3 (<i>unum... persecutum</i>):<ul style="list-style-type: none">• From what two sources has Pliny obtained his material? |
|--|--|

- Why is he confident that it is accurate?
3. Look at lines 4-5 (*tu... scribere*):
- What will Tacitus need to do?
 - In your own words, explain why he will have to do this.
4. **From the whole of the letter**, what impressions have you gained of a) Pliny's uncle and b) Pliny himself? You should give evidence from the text to support your view. You do not need to refer to the Latin.

