



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE SCHOOL CLASSICS PROJECT

CSCP Support Materials

for

Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 3A

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

For examination in 2020 and 2021

Section A

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.
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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?