



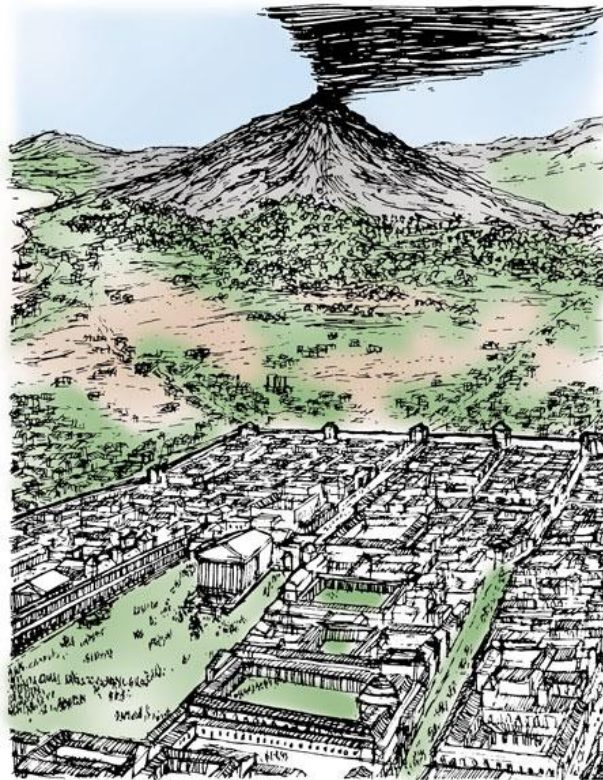
CSCP Support Materials

for
Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 3A

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

For examination in 2020 and 2021

Section C



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*.
- 2 iubet... facit:** historic present tenses to create a dramatic effect.
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.
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.
- 3-4 egrediebatur... exterritae:** the imperfect tense *egrediebatur* suggests that Pliny the Elder was in the process of leaving the house when a letter arrived.
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:** 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.
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*).

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.

8-9 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.

rectumque... gubernacula: the repetition of the two forms of the same word, *rectum* and *recta*, emphasises the determination of Pliny's uncle.

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.