



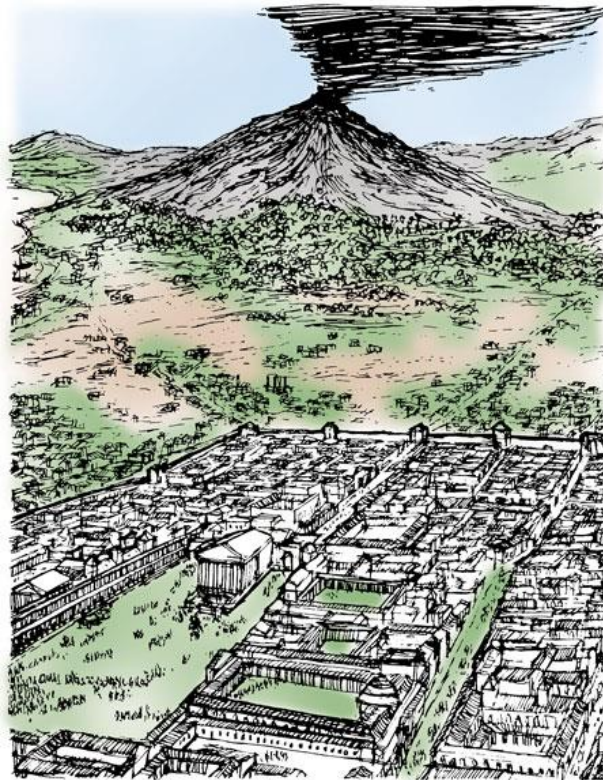
CSCP Support Materials

for
Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 3A

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

For examination in 2020 and 2021

Section D



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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.
- 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.
- 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.).
- 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'.
- 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: 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?