



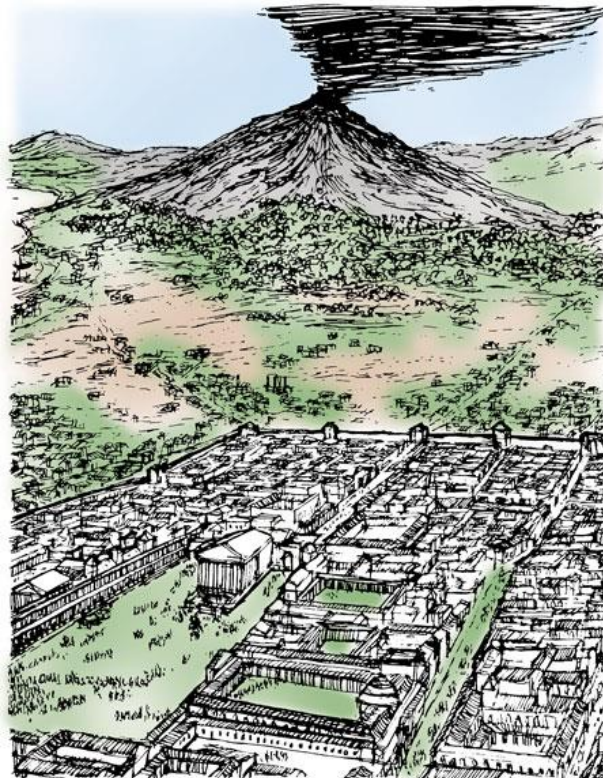
CSCP Support Materials

for
Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 3A

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

For examination in 2020 and 2021

Section G



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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:** stylish word order. The infinitive *adspicere* follows *placuit*.
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:** in addition to the black cloud. 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.
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:** Pliny's uncle probably suffered from asthma. This weakness serves to accentuate his bravery even more.
ubi dies redditus: supply *est*

9-10 is... tertius: assuming the eruption happened on the 24th August, modern counting would give the 26th as two days later. However, by Roman reckoning which includes the first and last days in a sequence, Pliny's body was found on the third day after he set sail.

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?
- How by his choice of words does Pliny stress their differing reactions?

5. Look at lines 7-9 (*innitens... erat*):

- What support did Pliny's uncle now need?
 - What explanation does Pliny give for his uncle's difficulties at this point?
6. Look at lines 9-11 (*ubi dies... indutus*):
- When was Pliny's uncle's body found?
 - 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?
7. In the last line of this passage, Pliny says of his uncle *habitus corporis quiescenti quam defuncto similior*. How much of a comfort do you think this would have been to Pliny? Explain your view.