Eduqas GCSE Latin
Component 2: Latin Literature and Sources (Themes)
Travel by Land and Sea

PLINY
A governor travels to his province

Teachers should not feel that they need to pass on to their students all the information from these notes; they should choose whatever they think is appropriate.

The examination requires knowledge outside the text only when it is needed in order to understand the text.

The Teacher's Notes contain the following:

- An **Introduction** to the author and the text, although students will only be asked questions on the content of the source itself.
- **Notes** on the text to assist the teacher.
- **Suggested Questions for Comprehension, Content and Style** to be used with students.
- **Discussion** suggestions and questions for students, and overarching **Themes** which appear across more than one source.
- **Further Information and Reading** for teachers who wish to explore the topic and texts further.

PLINY, *A governor travels to his province* (*Letters X, 15, 16, 17*)

Pliny emphasises to the emperor the difficulties he had to face on his long journey

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, known as Pliny the Younger, was born in c.AD 61. His father died when he was a young child and at some point he was adopted by his uncle, Pliny the Elder.

Pliny was a writer and statesman, with a keen interest in literature. He is most famous for his *Letters*, published in ten books. The first nine of these, published between AD 99 and 109, cover a whole range of Pliny's activities and interests, providing historians with a unique insight into the society of the time – at least from a wealthy and successful man's point of view. The best known is his detailed description of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79 and the death of Pliny the Elder as he attempted to organise an evacuation.

After his death, a tenth book was compiled containing official letters from Pliny to the emperor Trajan and Trajan's replies. This is the only surviving government correspondence of its kind. Pliny had been made governor of Bithynia in AD111 by the emperor Trajan in recognition of his expertise in accounting. He was given powers beyond those of an ordinary governor to sort out the finances of the province, which had been mismanaged.

Pliny's route is described in more detail in *Further Information and Reading*.

This text is largely unadapted: letter 17 is edited for length.

Notes

2   **domine** is the standard term of respectful address which Pliny uses for Trajan and in this context it means 'sir' rather than 'master'.

2-4   the translation is **nuntio** (I am reporting) **tibi** (to you) **me** (that I) **navigasse** (have sailed) **Ephesum** (to Ephesus) **cum omnibus meis** (with all my [companions]) **quamvis** (although) **retentum** (held back) **contrariis ventis** (by contrary winds)**.**

3   **Ephesum:** Ephesus was a prosperous city made capital of the province of Asia by Augustus, giving it substantial power and influence. It was famous for its cult of Artemis and for being home to the Temple of Artemis, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

   navigasse: a shortened form of **navigavisse**. Pliny has sailed over the Aegean Sea and so would have been travelling in a ship built for open water: a craft with a v-shaped hull which was more able to withstand larger waves and adverse weather.

3-4   **contrariis ventis retentum:** see the note on **etesiae** (line 6).

4-5 **partim orariis:** These 'coastal ships' (**orariis**), mentioned also in line 16, are seen in *Picture 5.* Their shallower hulls made them better able to hug coastlines.

partim vehiculis: For Pliny's journey by carriage, there existed well-maintained roads, with stopping places at regular intervals where horses could be changed, food acquired, and accommodation. This network was used especially for the transmission of official correspondence – such as Pliny's to and from Trajan.

6 **etesiae**: the Etesians are strong seasonal winds which blow from the north in the Aegean in the summer months. These had made Pliny's initial journey across the Aegean to Ephesus slower (lines 3-4), although local winds around the islands may have assisted the crossing. Now he predicts that the same winds will hinder his onwards journey north from Ephesus to Pergamum.

8 **recte renuntiasti:** an emphatic start to the reply, moving **recte** to the start of the start of the sentence and alliterating the **r.**

mi Secunde carissime: it is not uncommon for Trajan to address Pliny in such a friendly manner.

13-16 sicut (just as) **expertus** ([I] enjoyed) **saluberrimam navigationem** (a very healthy voyage)**, domine** (sir)**, usque Ephesum** (as far as Ephesus) **ita** (so) **inde** (from there)**, postquam** (when) **coepi** (I began) **iter facere** (to travel) **vehiculis** (in carriages)**, vexatus** ([I was] troubled) **gravissimis aestibus** (by the most serious heat waves) **atque** (and) **etiam** (even) **febriculis** (touches of fever) **substiti** ([so] I stopped) **Pergami** (at Pergamum)**.**

13 **saluberrimam navigationem:** the superlative (**saluberrimam**) gives a dramatic contrast with line 15, highlighting the sudden downturn in Pliny's voyage.

15 **gravissimis aestibus atque etiam febriculis:** this text gives us more evidence for the uncomfortable nature of land travel.

Pergami: Pergamum was an important and wealthy city in Asia Minor.

16-17 as Pliny predicted (see note on line 6), after he transferred to the sea once more he was held back by contrary winds (**contrariis ventis retentus**).

17-18 XV Kal. Octobres: Roman dates are calculated by counting how many days they are before key dates in each month. The **Kalends** are on the first day of each month, and so we are being told to count **XV** days (inclusively, i.e. counting the Kalends) before the 1st of October. That gives us the 17th September.

18 Pliny finally reaches his province (**Bithyniam**)! It was located to the north of the province of Asia, in modern Turkey, on the coast of the Black Sea.

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19-20 natalem tuum in provincia celebrare: Trajan was born on the 18th September AD 53. The emperor's birthday was a public holiday, celebrated with sacrifices and games.

Suggested Questions for Comprehension

Read the entire text aloud, emphasising phrasing and word groups. Then reread each sentence, clause or phrase, asking leading questions so that the class comprehend the meaning of the Latin text. It may be desirable to produce a written translation once the students have understood the Latin.

line 1:

- Who is writing this letter? Who is he writing to?

lines 2-4:

- How does he address Trajan? What is Pliny sure of? Where is he reporting that he has sailed to? Who has he sailed with? Although what held him back?

lines 4-5:

- Now he intends to make for where? How will he partly make his way? How else will he partly make his way?

lines 5-6:

- What is arduous for travelling? What do northerly winds do?

line 7:

- Who is now addressing whom?

line 8:

- What does he call Pliny? What does he say Pliny did rightly?

lines 8-9:

- What is Trajan concerned about in his mind?

lines 9-11:

- What does Trajan think Pliny did wisely? Why would Pliny sometimes use ships and other times carriages?

line 12:

- Who is now addressing whom?

lines 13-16:

- What type of voyage did Pliny enjoy? How far did he enjoy a very healthy voyage? What did he do from there? What two things troubled him? Where did he stop?

lines 16-18:

- What did he transfer to? What held him back? Where did he reach? On what date? What does he say about the time it took him?

lines 18-20:

- What does he say he is not able to do? Since it gave him the chance to do what? How does he describe this outcome?

Questions on Content and Style

1. (line 1) Why is Pliny writing to the emperor Trajan?

2. (lines 2-4 **quia...retentum**)

    a) Where is Pliny writing to Trajan from?
    b) Why did he take longer to get there than he expected?

3. (lines 4-5 **nunc...petere**)

    a) Where does Pliny tell us he is heading to next?
    b) How does he intend to travel there?

4. (lines 5-6 **nam...reluctantur**) what problems does Pliny tell us about for different types of travel?

5. (line 7) In what ways is Trajan's address to Pliny different from line 1? Can you explain the differences?

6. (line 8 **recte...carissime**) What impression do you get about how Trajan feels about Pliny from this sentence?

7. (lines 8-9 **pertinet...pervenias**) How does Trajan echo Pliny's words from the first letter here? Why might he do this?

8. (lines 9-11 **prudenter...suaserint**) Explain what the **vehiculis** mention here refers to and how it operated.

9. (lines 13-16 **sicut...substiti**)

    a) How had Pliny intended to travel onwards to his province? What challenges had he faced on the way which prompted him to abandon this route?

    b) How does Pliny through his style of writing draw a contrast between the previous voyage (which had gone well) and the journey overland (which did not)?

11. (lines 16-18 **rursus...intravi**)

    a) When did he finally reach Bithynia?
    b) Why was this considerably later than he had expected
    c) How are **orarias naviculas** different from sea-going ships?

12. (lines 18-20 **non possum...celebrare**) Why does Pliny end up calling the delay **auspicatissimum**?

Discussion

Themes: travel by barge, carriages and carts, Roman roads, delays

These letters are an important back-and-forth exchange between two powerful men, although there would have been weeks between the replies even using the imperial post. Students might like to consider how different Pliny's communication would have been in the age of social media: How would he document his journey? What audience would he cultivate? How could he create a similar tone? How would private messages be different from a public account on, for example, Instagram? This may help students to explore the private / public nature of the correspondence, and the fact that Pliny is very aware of his presentation of himself.

It is interesting to read Pliny's account alongside Ovid's account of another journey (under duress!) to the Black Sea region. It has been suggested that Pliny has deliberately tried to emulate Ovid in his presentation: can students find any evidence which supports this?

Pliny was travelling to the province with his wife Calpurnia who was around 15 years old at this time. According to Pliny, she was interested in literature and music. Students could check their understanding of the events and challenges of the voyage by writing her own letter home to her aunt.

General questions on the passage and theme

1. Do you think Pliny and Trajan had a good relationship?

2. What were the main problems facing a Roman travelling by sea?

3. How similar were Ovid's journey to Tomis and Pliny's journey to Bithynia? In your opinion, which one of them had a more difficult journey?

Further Information and Reading

For more information on sailing in general and on travelling by road, refer to the notes in the *Introduction to the Teacher Notes*.

Pliny's journey to Bithynia gives us a great deal of information about travel in the ancient world and the practicalities. Sherwin-White calculated that the journey took him around three to four weeks. Pliny does not say in these letters which route he took out of Italy. He would have had two options: overland to Brundisium in the south of Italy (the route followed by Horace in our text *A journey by canal*) where he would then board a ship, or he could have taken a ship directly from one of Rome's harbours (Ostia or Pontus), hugging the Italian coastline before making for southern Greece.

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Pliny does mention that he sailed round Cape Malea (at the southern tip of the Greek Peloponnese) – notorious for bad weather and difficult sailing conditions.

To avoid this, travellers often landed at Corinth, then made the short journey overland across the Isthmus to the sister harbour at the other side, where they would board another ship.

Pliny then headed towards Ephesus. Ancient travellers would either have taken a route via Athens or continued through the Aegean islands (the dotted line shows a possible route for Pliny although we do not know for sure which route he took). Pliny mentions that the Etesian Winds hindered his progress to Ephesus. These winds blow continuously across the Aegean from the north in the summer months.

After Pliny made land at Ephesus, he intended to travel overland to avoid the contrary wind. Once he reached Pergamum, however, the heat and his illness forced him to reconsider. He headed back to the coast (the port town of Elaeus) and boarded a ship once more heading

north. Eventually Pliny landed at the port of Cyzicus and then travelled overland to Prusa, his final destination.

Knowledge of the imperial post network is not required for GCSE but some students may be interested in further study. The website below maps the routes of the imperial travel network or *cursus publicus* (as shown on the *tabula Peutingeriana,* a 13th-century chart supposedly based upon a 4th century Roman original) onto Google Maps, showing how this important system of roads and stopping points criss-crossed vast swathes of the Romans empire and beyond. This was the official imperial post, used for carrying authorised dispatches and providing a network for those travelling on imperial business. A permit issued by the emperor was required to use this network. Some of the stopping points along the *cursus publicus* provided lodgings, others repair facilities, most an opportunity to change horses and, in the case of dispatches, riders. In normal conditions, this system facilitated travel of around 60 miles in a day. In an emergency, it appears that 100 miles a day could be achieved. Pliny would have also made regular use of the *cursus publicus* to carry his correspondence with the emperor.

Pliny's journey to his province is simple to plot, and the site will tell you the stopping points on the route, distances between them, and the time it would take.

https://omnesviae.org/

A.N. Sherwin-White, *Fifty letters of Pliny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1969)
P.G. Walsh, *Pliny the Younger: Complete Letters* (Oxford World's Classics 2006)