



Pliny the Younger

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Life

Pliny (PLIHN-ee) the Younger came from Rome's equestrian class, which supplied businessmen and government bureaucrats for centuries. He was adopted by his uncle, [Pliny the Elder](#), and prepared to practice law and hold government offices. He was a renowned orator, but only one of his speeches, *Panegyricus* (100 c.e.; *Pliny's Panegyric*, 1644), a panegyric in honor of the emperor Trajan, survives. After holding some minor offices, Pliny obtained a consulship in 100 c.e. In 112 c.e., Trajan appointed him governor of Bithynia, a province in northern Turkey. No event in his life can be dated after that year. Though married several times, he was childless.

Throughout his life Pliny exchanged letters, actually literary essays, with numerous friends; while in Bithynia, he wrote frequently to the emperor. His *Epistulae* (97-109 c.e., books 1-9; c. 113 c.e., book 10; *The Letters*, 1748) consists of 248 letters in ten books. Book 10, perhaps published posthumously by friends, consists of business correspondence; the other nine books contain letters on various subjects. Most noteworthy are two letters describing the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 c.e., which Pliny witnessed, and one detailing his persecution of Bithynian Christians.

Influence

Pliny's letters served as literary models, even as late as the eighteenth century. Volcanologists prize his description of the eruption of Vesuvius, and church historians find his account of the early Christians invaluable.

Bibliography

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Hadas, Moses. *A History of Latin Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1952. Hadas's conversational style is engaging as he describes the Roman literary world, including Pliny and his letters.

Hoffer, Stanley E. *The Anxieties of Pliny, the Younger*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999. Finds evidence in Pliny's letters of conscious and unconscious tension in the writer's upper-class Roman life.

Sherwin-White, A. N. *The Letters of Pliny: A Social and Historical Commentary*. 1966. Reprint. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. Indispensable for studies of Pliny.

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