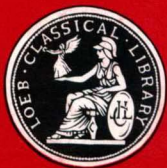


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PLINY
LETTERS
BOOKS I–VII



Translated by
BETTY RADICE

PLINY

LETTERS, BOOKS I-VII
江苏工业学院图书馆
WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY
J. E. R. RADICE
藏书章



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PREFACE

My first thanks are to the Clarendon Press for permission to base my translation of Pliny on the Oxford Classical Texts of Sir Roger Mynors, and to Penguin Books for permission to reprint, with some changes, my translation of the *Letters* first published by them in 1963. I have listed in a Bibliography books and articles which I have found particularly helpful, from which it is clear how much I owe to the published work of Sir Ronald Syme and Mr. A. N. Sherwin-White. Sir Roger Mynors has given me generous help with text and interpretation at all stages, and so has Mr. Sherwin-White; Professors Ernst Badian, G. W. Bowersock, and W. S. Maguinness, Dr. A. Birley, Dr. E. M. Smallwood, and Mr. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix have been equally kind in giving advice and encouragement on special points. The mistakes which remain are, of course, my own.

In compiling the Index I have tried to supply information on the many persons who figure in Pliny's correspondence by reference to parallel literary sources or to inscriptions. I have had in mind readers who find it more encouraging to work from accessible and manageable reference books; consequently inscriptions quoted have been referred

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either to the Selections of Dessau (ILS) or to those of McCrum and Woodhead (MW) and E. M. Smallwood (S). Many will judge this inadequate, but I fancy they will know where to look for further evidence when they need it.

B.R.

INTRODUCTION

THE younger Pliny was in a position to provide essential information for historians of a poorly-documented period, the reigns of Domitian, Nerva, and Trajan. He had a successful senatorial career; he was an active advocate in the Roman Chancery court and was in the habit of publishing his speeches in revised form; he had a large circle of friends both personal and professional to whom he addressed the letters from which he made a selection for publication. (He also dabbled in light verse, not very successfully, to judge by the few extant specimens.) Nine books of his personal letters (247 in all) survive, as well as his official correspondence with the emperor Trajan, posthumously published and later added as a tenth book. Of his speeches, only the one of thanks to Trajan for his consulship in A.D. 100 survives in greatly expanded form, known as the *Panegyricus*.

The details of Pliny's background and career are well known from the *Letters*, and also from some personal inscriptions.¹ He was the son of Lucius Caecilius of Comum, and both the Caecilii and his mother's family, the Plinii, owned considerable properties in the region, to which several letters refer.² As he was seventeen at the time of the eruption of Vesuvius in August 79³ he must have been

¹ The most important are listed in Appendix A.

² II. 1. 8; II. 15; IX. 7.

³ VI. 20. 5.

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born in late 61 or early 62. His education followed the normal pattern of study under a *grammaticus* at Comum, followed by lectures in Rome under Quintilian and the Greek rhetorician, Nicetes Sacerdos.¹ After his father's early death he had Verginius Rufus for guardian, and in Rome came into closer contact with his distinguished uncle, his mother's brother. He and his mother were both at Misenum with the elder Pliny at the time of the eruption. At his uncle's death he inherited the full estate, and a change of name indicates his adoption by will as a son.² His full official title henceforth was Gaius Plinius Luci filius Caecilius Secundus.³ Soon after this, still at the age of eighteen, he began his career with a success in the Centumviral Court,⁴ which was to be his special sphere throughout his active life at the bar. With the support of his older consular friends he started on his senatorial *cursus* with a minor magistracy, as one of the *decemviri stlitibus iudicandis*⁵ presiding over the panels of the Centumviral Court. Next came the routine military tribunate, probably for no more than the minimum six months, during which Pliny served with the Third Gallic legion in Syria as auditor of the auxiliary forces' accounts.⁶ After another minor office (*sevir equitum Romanorum*)⁷ he was *quaestor Caesaris* and then *tribunus plebis*,⁸ and during the latter period of service felt it his duty to suspend his practice in the courts.⁹ Domitian allowed

¹ VI. 6. 3.

² App. A. 1.

³ App. A. 1.

⁴ App. A. 1.

⁵ I. 23. 2.

⁶ V. 8. 5.

⁷ V. 8. 8; I. 18. 3.

⁸ III. 11. 5; VII. 31. 2.

⁹ VII. 16. 2.

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him to proceed to the praetorship without the statutory year's interval,¹ probably in 93, and in the same year he appeared for the prosecution of Baebius Massa by the province of Baetica.² Massa was convicted, but retaliated by charging Pliny's colleague in the case, Herennius Senecio, with *maiestas*. This brought Pliny into closer contact with the so-called "Stoic opposition," of which Senecio was one of the leaders, and later on he made a point of recalling the dangers he faced during the reign of terror in the later part of 93.³ In fact his career does not seem to have suffered; indeed, he was given a three-year appointment by Domitian as *curator aerarii militaris*.⁴ Soon after Domitian's assassination in 96 he came forward to vindicate the name of Helvidius Priscus, one of the Stoics executed in 93, by denouncing his prosecutor Publicius Certus, and a letter written some years afterwards vividly recalls the feeling of uncertainty in the Senate in the early months of Nerva's reign.⁵ Pliny accordingly had to content himself with the fact that Certus did not proceed to the consulship he expected after his post at the *aerarium Saturni*—a post which fell to Pliny himself when Certus died soon after the trial. This too was a three-year appointment, and Pliny and his colleague Cornutus Tertullus held it up to the day when they were suffect consuls in September–October 100.⁶ Pliny's official speech of thanks for his appointment was the *Panegyricus* in its original, shorter form.

¹ VII. 16. 2.

³ III. 11. 3.

⁵ IX. 13.

² VI. 29. 8; VII. 33. 4.

⁴ App. A. I.

⁶ V. 14. 5; *Pan.* 91–2.

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At the end of his treasury and consular duties Pliny continued to be active in the Centumviral Court and the Senate, and also frequently acted as assessor in the *consilium* of the City prefect's court or to Trajan himself,¹ though he looked forward increasingly to honourable retirement. His reward for distinguished public service did not come until 103, when he was elected augur to fill the vacancy left by the death of Julius Frontinus;² Trajan's response to an earlier request for a priesthood³ is not known. The following year he was appointed to another three-year office, as *curator alvei Tiberis et riparum et cloacarum urbis*⁴ on the Tiber Conservancy Board, a post which must have appealed to Pliny's practical nature. He may still have been holding it when he was chosen by Trajan to go out as the emperor's special representative (*legatus propraetore consulari potestate*) to the province of Bithynia-Pontus.⁵ He was well equipped for this commission by his expert knowledge of finance, and still more by his handling of several important public cases involving provincial governors since the one which convicted Baebius Massa. In 99-100 he had secured the conviction of Marius Priscus on behalf of the province of Africa, and in 101 had prosecuted another governor of Baetica, Caecilius Classicus. Moreover, he had gained an inside knowledge of Bithynian affairs during his defence of the proconsular governors Julius Bassus in 102-3 and Varenus Rufus in 106-7.⁶ The mere fact that the province had brought these cases against its senatorial governors showed that its

¹ IV. 22; VI. 11. 1; VI. 31.

² IV. 8.

³ X. 13.

⁴ V. 14. 2.

⁵ App. A. 1.

⁶ VI. 29. 8 ff.

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affairs, both political and financial, were in urgent need of overhauling. Pliny was to tour the cities, report on his findings and settle what he could on the spot.

This he proceeded to do with commendable energy and good sense, undaunted by the multiplicity of the problems awaiting him—political disorders, municipal bankruptcy arising out of unregulated and dishonest public spending, ignorance of legal procedure, and personal animosities of many kinds. The letters published in Book X make fascinating reading, ranging as they do from a detailed report on the problems presented by practising Christians¹ to the importance of covering an open sewer in the interests of public health.² Pliny addressed no more than sixty-one letters to Trajan in a period of less than two years, and some of these are testimonials or formal letters of congratulation. We have no idea how much he settled on his own initiative, and his requests for guidance seem reasonable and are treated by Trajan as such. Some of the replies are presumably drafted by the imperial secretariat,³ while others sound like Trajan replying in person; the tone may be terse, but is very rarely impatient.⁴ In the past Pliny has been unfairly represented as lacking in initiative and consulting Trajan on too many details, but considering the problems he found and his desire to obtain more satisfactory general rulings than the outdated code of Pompey or previous emperors' rescripts to the pro-consular governors, it cannot be said that he made undue use of the diplomatic bag.

Pliny evidently died in the province with his work

¹ X. 96-7.

³ *e.g.* X. 101; 103.

² X. 98.

⁴ *e.g.* X. 38; 95.

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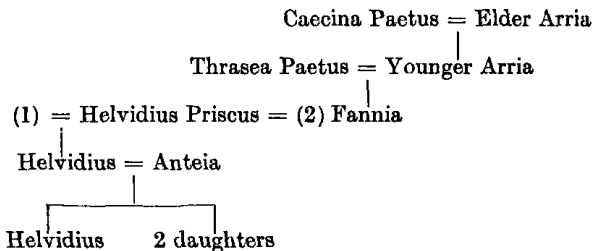
unfinished, but the exact date is unknown. He had arrived in time for Trajan's birthday celebrations on 18 September¹ in a year which could be 109, 110, or 111, and as there is no mention of similar celebrations for the start of his third year we assume that he died before then, perhaps while on tour in Pontus. His old friend and colleague, Cornutus Tertullus, was sent out with similar powers later in Trajan's reign.

The only details of this career of public service not supplied by the *Letters* are the two early minor posts of decemvirate and sevirate, a priesthood in honour of the deified emperor Titus held at Comum,² and presumably bestowed by Pliny's native town, and his post at the military treasury given him by Domitian. These are known only from inscriptions. The last omission is surely significant. Pliny was friendly with several members of the "Stoic opposition" who had either been executed (Arulenus Rusticus, Helvidius Priscus, Herennius Senecio) or exiled (Junius Mauricus, Fannia, and the younger Arria)³ in the

¹ X. 17a.

² App. A. 3.

³ The leaders of the opposition, spanning several generations, were close related, and, like Pliny, of Cisalpine origin: Thrasea Paetus was a native of Padua.



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purge of 93, and he admired their courage, perhaps the more so as he was aware that he himself was not cut out for political martyrdom. It may well have been an embarrassment to him for the exiles to return and find him, for all his protests, well advanced in his career, and so he deliberately suppressed anything he owed to the Emperor he consistently portrays as a monster of tyranny and caprice.

Pliny was married three times, but nothing is known of his first wife, and of his second, only the bare fact of her death just before the attack on Certus in 97,¹ though Pliny remained on friendly terms with his mother-in-law, Pompeia Celerina, and seems to have managed her affairs for her. His third wife, Calpurnia, was the orphaned granddaughter of Calpurnius Fabatus of Comum, a wealthy landowner and a somewhat testy old gentleman. Pliny's devotion to Calpurnia is undisguised, as is his disappointment at her subsequent miscarriage and consequent sterility, and the *ius trium liberorum* conferred on him by Trajan can have brought him little consolation.

It was natural for him to marry into the provincial gentry, for at heart this is very much what he remained. Though his visits to Comum could never be frequent, he remained sentimentally attached to the lake and his properties in the region, and was far from being a typical absentee landlord. He took as keen a personal interest in the proper management of the farm at Comum as he did in his estates in Tuscany and in his *suburbanum* household near Ostia. He was a generous benefactor to his native town; Comum had a library built and endowed, one-third of

¹ IX. 13. 4.

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a resident teacher's salary paid, provision for needy children from a rent charge on Pliny's property, and received more than two million sesterces by his will.¹ He also kept up his friendships with several north-erners, the lawyer Annius Severus, his business adviser and town councillor Calvisius Rufus, old school friends Atilius Crescens and Romatius Firmus, giving substantial financial help where it was needed and furthering their careers as he in his turn had been supported by Verginius Rufus and Vestricius Spurinna. These friends of his are substantial, responsible citizens, often unknown outside the *Letters*, so that Pliny provides valuable information about municipal life in Cisalpine Gaul and the part played by its people when, like himself, they moved to Rome.²

The correspondence with Trajan, posthumously published (by Suetonius perhaps, or another of Pliny's literary friends after Trajan's death), is presumably unrevised and provides essential information which exists nowhere else for the workings of Roman bureaucracy. The personal letters, carefully revised and selected though they are, must also be regarded as genuine first-hand documentation, and are indeed the best social commentary we have on the Roman empire at the turn of the first century. They provide the normal, if more humdrum pattern of life to be set against the more highly-coloured pages of Pliny's contemporaries, Juvenal, Martial, Suetonius, and Tacitus. Pliny and his circle are very far from being irresponsible aristocrats or idle sycophants, and it is

¹ I. 8. 2; IV. 13. 5; VII. 18. 2; App. A. 1.

² See G. E. F. Chilver, *Cisalpine Gaul*, pp. 95 ff.

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from him we learn how many people truly cared for the proper administration of justice in the courts, the dignity of the Senate as a deliberative assembly, the education of the rising generation, and all the human decencies of behaviour without which life for the common man would be intolerable.

The *Letters* leave us in no doubt about the sort of man Pliny was himself, and he is a man one would like to have known—an affectionate husband, loyal friend, considerate master, and conscientious public servant. But he is not lightly to be dismissed as a prig and a pedant—the lawyer's caution is less in evidence in Bithynia than the practical administrator's common sense, and he is tolerant of other people's foibles as well as being capable of smiling at his own. He is free from petty jealousies, and his personal integrity and professional honesty are beyond question. The one person he cannot tolerate is M. Aquilius Regulus—whose flamboyant affectations and unscrupulous ambitions are the exact antithesis of Pliny's solid principles and unaffectedness. He is certainly a poor critic of his own work, but he is well aware that his talents are not of the first order and that Tacitus is by far his superior;¹ and beside the poverty of his poetic efforts must be set his observant eye for natural phenomena and his excellence as a descriptive writer.

More than one hundred persons have letters addressed to them, and many more are referred to by name in the letters. Some of them (Caninius Rufus, for example) emerge fairly clearly from the letters but are unknown elsewhere. Some are well known

¹ VII. 20.

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in literary sources, such as Verginius Rufus or Titius Aristo, the jurist often quoted in the *Digest*, or their careers can be confirmed or amplified from the inscriptions of the period, as in the case of Valerius Maximus or Julius Ferox.¹ Some of Pliny's closest friends (Calestrius Tiro, Voconius Romanus, or even Suetonius) are slow to achieve distinction, and other names he mentions show no promise of the successes they gained long after his death—Bruttius Praesens and Erucius Clarus, for example.² Others (Colonus, Mustius, Sardus, Venator) remain as yet totally obscure and have defeated all efforts to establish their identity. But it is only through the work done on independent sources³ that we can begin to understand the true value of the correspondence, both for what it contains and what it omits. Several names one might have expected to find, but there is no mention of literary figures like Statius (though he and Pliny had at least one acquaintance in common in Vibius Maximus),⁴ nor Juvenal who perhaps had no patience with Pliny's poetic aspirations. (It has even been suggested that Juvenal satirizes Pliny's circle in some of his pseudonyms.)⁵ And even if Pliny did not openly express his dislike of snobbery, it would be clear from the gaps in the list of correspondents that he is no snob himself. He rejoices to see the "noble families" of Republican and Augustan times living

¹ ILS 1018 and 5930 (S. 235 and 381).

² See Index for their careers.

³ See especially R. Syme, *Tacitus* (referred to as "Syme") and articles listed in Bibliography, p. xxxii; A. N. Sherwin-White, *The Letters of Pliny* (referred to as S-W).

⁴ See Statius, *Silvae*, IV. 7.

⁵ See Gilbert Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist*, pp. 291 ff.

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up to their illustrious names, but publishes no letter addressed to any of their descendants.¹ Julius Frontinus is mentioned several times, but receives nothing, and one feels that had Pliny been interested in name-dropping he could surely have found a note addressed to Frontinus to add to his published selection. Neratius Marcellus would also have been a name worth having; and the famous Javolenus Priscus has no more than a surprisingly uncomplimentary reference.² All this suggests that the correspondents genuinely represent Pliny's circle of friends, and also that his interest in publishing his correspondence was primarily literary.

The opening letter of Book I implies that out of an accumulated mass of material Pliny proposes to select the letters "composed with some care" and to put them together "as they come to hand" rather than in chronological order. In actual fact, his arrangement is as careful as his writing. Each book contains letters on a variety of themes, political and legal topics, literary criticism, appreciations of great men, advice and recommendation to his friends, domestic news, descriptions of natural phenomena, courtesy notes, and jokes, arranged so as to provide a lively variation of tone. These are, of course, literary letters, far removed in kind from the only collection comparable in bulk, that of Cicero; the genre is more that of the verse epistles of Horace or Statius, while some of the shorter trifles recall the epigrams of Martial. In general he follows the principle that a letter should deal with a single theme, though there are some which follow the scholastic "rule of three".

¹ Syme, *Tacitus*, pp. 87 and 666.

² VI. 15. 2.

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Revision for publication must have led to some omission of material; practical letters ordering marble for a temple or a pedestal for a statue would surely have originally contained actual measurements.¹ Sometimes too we can see that an introductory paragraph has been added to give the context, and there are many letters in which the formal opening gives the gist of the letter Pliny is answering.²

The order of the nine books is chronological (though that of the letters within them is not), and the firm dates range from 97 (the death of Verginius Rufus in II. 1) to 108/9 (Valerius Paulinus, addressed in IX. 37, was suffect consul in September–December 107). No one would now follow Mommsen in dating publication from 97 onwards, a book a year, and it is generally agreed that the books were published in groups, certainly before Pliny's departure for Bithynia, and probably none before the death of Regulus in 104. The time after Pliny's treasury posts and consulship and his important cases in the Senate would certainly seem more likely for him to be free to give meticulous attention to the task of selection and revision.³ Book IX suggests an increase of leisure for literary pursuits, and one letter (IX. 2) rather implies that retirement from an active professional life might mean the drying up of worth-while material, but there is no formal ending to the series. Probably it was cut short by Pliny's appointment to the post in Bithynia.

¹ III. 6; IX. 39.

² See the list in Sherwin-White, *Letters*, p. 6 ff.

³ See Syme, *Tacitus*, App. 21; Sherwin-White, *Letters*, p. 20 ff.