

Ashen Sky: The Letters of Pliny the Younger on the Eruption of Vesuvius. Illustrated by BARRY MOSER. Los Angeles: Getty Museum, 2007. Cloth, \$19.95. Pp. 40. ISBN 978-0-89236-3.

Readers familiar with publications of the Getty Museum generally anticipate volumes with substantial narratives and many beautiful photographs. The present book does not fit that expectation. It is slender, with a limited text illustrated by 14 wood-block illustrations by the well-known artist Barry Moser.

The main sections focus on the two letters of Pliny the Younger to Tacitus. Adjunct to these are brief sketches of Pliny the Elder, Tacitus, and Pliny the Younger, and an explanation of the survival of the letters. The book opens with an introduction and a description of the eruption, and closes with suggestions for further reading. The translations are precise and smooth. Text and translations are the work of Benedicte Gilman.

This is certainly not a scholarly book. Whom will it serve? I think it would be a fine companion for a class reading the letters for the first time, or for the ubiquitous "general reader." Moser's illustrations are keyed to specific passages of the translations, and give a vivid, often frightening, sense of what it must have been like to have experienced the eruption of Vesuvius.

All in all, this brief volume is rather like a chocolate delicacy for a true connoisseur of chocolate. It's nice to have, and one can savor it, but it is not essential for one's pattern of life or study.

HERBERT W. BENARIO
Emory University