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Growing Old at Rome

Abstract

This chapter presents a brief outline of attitudes to growing old as expressed in the writings of Roman men of the upper classes. These authors were often facing old age themselves and ways in which their ageing status might be viewed preoccupied their thoughts. The chapter discusses the tropes and stereotypes that appear to be part of shared Greco-Roman cultural understanding of old age. As with any stage of life, old age is presented from a myriad of perspectives. It could be philosophical, humorous, cantankerous, painful, tranquil, idealised and demonised. Men and women shared a range of emotional and physical responses to ageing: they might expect and demand respect by virtue of their age and role in the family / society while at the same time fearing dependency, being side-lined and neglected. Then, as now, how one survived or endured old age was often a reflection of social status, rank and gender.

1 Growing Old at Rome

> "Ummidia Quadratilla is dead, having almost attained the age of seventy-nine and kept her powers unimpaired up to her last illness, along with a sound constitution and sturdy physique which are rare in a woman ... with deference to her sybaritic tastes. She kept a troupe of pantomime actors whom she treated with an indulgence unsuitable in a lady of her high position ... she told me that as a woman, with all a woman's idle hours to fill, she was in the habit of amusing herself playing draughts or watching her mimes ..."[1]

1 "Ummidia Quadratilla paulo minus octogensimo aetatis anno decessit usque ad novissimam valetudinem viridis, atque etiam ultra matronalem modum compacto corpore et robusto ... aviae delicatae severissime, et tamen obsequentissime. Habebat illa pantomimos fovebatque, effusius quam principi feminae convenit ... solere se, ut feminam in illo otio sexus, laxare animum lusu calculorum, solere spectare pantomimos suos ..." For the text and translation, cf. Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (Pliny the Younger), Epistulae (Letters), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by Betty Radice, Cambridge, Mass. 1969 (Loeb Classical Library 55), ep. 7.24.1–2, 4–5. For Pliny's "Letters" cf., for example, the following edition: Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (Pliny the Younger), Epistulae (Letters), 2 vols.,

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Ummidia was a wealthy woman who had raised her grandson after the death of his parents. She was a benefactor of her local community and commanded Pliny's respect, despite the fact that she knew how to enjoy herself in old age, passing the time playing draughts and being entertained by her own personal troupe of pantomime actors. She did not, however, allow her grandson to watch the potentially corrupting shows; this was an indulgence of her own (and I like to think perhaps a circle of women friends). We possess this privileged glimpse into the life of an independent elderly woman due to a short obituary written by Pliny, who was a friend of her grandson. Ummidia earns Pliny's praise for dividing her property correctly between her grandchildren (two-thirds going to the grandson and one-third to the granddaughter) and not being suborned by fawning actors to leave it to them, and for the upright and traditional manner in which she had raised her grandson. Pliny gives the strong impression that he did not approve of the *pantomimi*, but it is precisely this element of her life that gives us a flavour of the potential pleasures of old age for a wealthy elderly Roman woman. Unfortunately, Ummidia is almost unique in Roman history, not presumably in her behaviour, but by the fact there is a record of it. Older women tend to disappear from the sources once they are past child-bearing age.[2] When they do appear, it is often as conflicting stereotypes: as mothers or grandmothers of important children or as ageing prostitutes around whom a whole genre of literature developed. The former of these stereotypes produces both good and bad images, the latter almost universally grotesque representations in both literature and art (see below).

The behaviour of Ummidia provides one window into the life of the elderly, but if we look across society, we can begin to examine the many ways in which Romans responded to the ageing process. As with other aspects of the life course, we are somewhat stymied in answering social questions as our sources derive almost entirely from men of the upper-classes, usually of middle or old age themselves, so their preoccupations dominate the aspects of ageing which are visible to us. It is also this group who commissioned works of art which suited their tastes and purposes. The power of the *paterfamilias* was a great

ed. and transl. by Betty Radice, Cambridge, Mass. 1969 (Loeb Classical Library 55, 59). This chapter presents a very brief outline of the range of attitudes to old age found in Roman literature. For much fuller examinations, cf. Tim Parkin, Old Age in the Roman World, Baltimore 2003 (Ancient Society and History); Karen Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome, London 2003; Beate Wagner-Hasel, Alter in der Antike. Eine Kulturgeschichte, Wien-Köln-Weimar 2012; Mary Harlow / Ray Laurence, Growing Up and Growing Old in Ancient Rome, London 2002.

2 Mary Harlow, Blurred Visions. Male Perceptions of the Female Life Course – the Case of Aemilia Pudentilla, in: ead. / Ray Laurence (Eds.), Age and Ageing in the Roman Empire, Portsmouth, RI 2007 (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series 65), pp. 195–208, at pp. 196–201.

safeguard against the vagaries of ageing for the Roman man. His power over the family finances and relationships, coupled with the prime Roman virtue of *pietas* should ideally ensure a *paterfamilias* a secure old age, if not a healthy one.[3]

The Romans inherited a number of literary / philosophical ideas of ageing which were part of the cultural background against which they operated. The erudite elite probably knew their Aristotle who saw life in three stages: youth, the prime of life, and old age. Aristotle viewed the characteristics of old age as opposite to those of the young and was quite pessimistic about growing old. In Rhetoric 2. 13–14, Aristotle explains old age as a process of decline from the prime of life and lists a number of characteristics he considers typical: old men are positive about nothing, show an excessive lack of energy, they are hesitant in their opinions, malicious, mistrustful and see the worst side of everything.[4] They are small-minded, miserly, cowardly and selfish. They are loquacious, nostalgic, always talking about the past, they are querulous and lack moral character. Aristotle does not present an image of old age that is pleasant to experience oneself. In the Roman period similar ideas are expressed by Horace:

> "Many ills encompass an old man, whether because he seeks gain, and then miserably holds aloof from his store and fears to use it, or because, in all that he does, he lacks fire and courage, is dilatory and slow to form hopes, is sluggish and greedy of a longer life, peevish, surly, given to praising the days he spent as a boy, and to reproving and condemning the young. Many blessings do the advancing years bring with them; many, as they retire, they take away."[5]

3 On the duty of children to parents, cf. Parkin, Old Age (see note 1), pp. 205–216; on loss of paternal power, cf. ibid., pp. 230–235; Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 153–159.

4 Chiara Crisciani / Luciana Repici / Pietro B. Rossi (Eds.), Vita longa. Vecchiaia e durata della vita nella tradizione medica e aristotelica antica e medievale, Firenze 2009 (Micrologus' Library 33); Richard A. H. King, Aristotle on Life and Death, London 2001; Silvia Gastaldi, Aristotele e la politica delle passioni. Retorica, psicologia ed etica dei comportamenti emozionali, Torino 1990 (Biblioteca storico-filosofica); Alan Gotthelf / James G. Lennox (Eds.), Philosophical Issues in Aristotle's Biology, Cambridge 1987; see Repici this volume.

5 "Multa senem circumveniunt incommoda, vel quod quaerit et inventis miser abstinet ac timet uti, vel quod res omnis timide gelideque ministrat, dilator spe longus, iners avidusque futuri, difficilis, querulus, laudator temporis acti se puero, castigator censorque minorum. multa ferunt anni venientes commoda secum, multa recedentes adimunt." For the text and translation, cf. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), Ars Poetica (The Art of Poetry), in: id., Satires. Epistles. The Art of Poetry, ed. and transl. by Henry Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge, Mass. 1926 (Loeb Classical Library 194), pp. 442–489, at ll. 169–175.

The similarity of views may imply that Horace knew his Aristotle, or that such views were part of common parlance and recognised stereotypes in the way writers expressed old age in literature. A final example is taken from Ptolemy of Alexandria written in the 2nd century CE; his astrological study of the stages of life has the following:

> "Sixth, Jupiter, taking as his lot the elderly age (56–68), again for the space of his own period, twelve years, brings about the renunciation of manual labour, toil, turmoil, and dangerous activity, and in their place brings decorum, foresight, retirement, together with all-embracing deliberation, admonition, and consolation; now especially he brings men to set store by honour, praise, and independence, accompanied by modesty and dignity.
> Finally to Saturn falls as his lot old age (68 onwards), the latest period, which lasts for the rest of life. Now the movements both of body and of soul are cooled and impeded in their impulses, enjoyments, desires, and speed; for the natural decline supervenes upon life, which has become worn down with age, dispirited, weak, easily offended, and hard to please in all situations, in keeping with the sluggishness of his movements."[6]

These literary and philosophical constructs embody stereotypical characteristics which Roman authors refer to on a regular basis, however, at the same time ancient authors recognised as Seneca did, that there is not "one old age for all men".[7] In the Roman world the definition of old age was a difficult concept to pin down. Ages of man systems might provide a chronological framework in which to situate a life, but these were not

6 "Εκτος δ' ὁ τοῦ Διὸς τὴν πρεσβυτικὴν ἡλικίαν λαχὼν ἐπὶ τὴν τῆς ἰδίας περιόδου πάλιν δωδεκαετίαν τὸ μὲν αὐτουργὸν καὶ ἐπίπονον καὶ ταραχῶδες καὶ παρακεκινδυνευμένον τῶν πράξεων ἀποστρέφεσθαι ποιεῖ, τὸ δὲ εὔσχημον καὶ προνοητικὸν καὶ ἀνακεχωρηκός, ἔτι δὲ ἐπιλογιστικὸν πάντων καὶ νουθετικὸν καὶ παραμυθητικὸν ἀντεισάγει, τιμῆς τότε μάλιστα καὶ ἐπαίνου καὶ ἐλευθεριότητος ἀντιποιεῖσθαι παρασκευάζων μετ' αἰδοῦς καὶ σεμνοπρεπείας. / Τελευταῖος δὲ ὁ τοῦ Κρόνου τὴν ἐσχάτην καὶ γεροντικὴν ἡλικίαν ἐκληρώθη μέχρι τῶν ἐπιλοίπων τῆς ζωῆς χρόνων, καταψυχομένων ἤδη καὶ ἐμποδιζομένων τῶν τε σωματικῶν καὶ τῶν ψυχικῶν κινήσεων ἐν ταῖς ὁρμαῖς καὶ ἀπολαύσεσι καὶ ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ταχείαις, τῆς ἐπὶ τὴν φύσιν παρακμῆς ἐπιγινομένης τῷ βίῳ κατεσκληκότι καὶ ἀθύμῳ καὶ ἀσθενικῷ καὶ εὐπροσκόπῳ καὶ πρὸς πάντα δυσαρέστῳ κατὰ τὸ οἰκεῖον τῆς τῶν κινήσεων νωχελείας." For the text and translation, cf. Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy), Tetrabiblos (Quadripartitum), ed. and transl. by Frank E. Robbins, Cambridge, Mass. 1940 (Loeb Classical Library 435), 4.10.205–206. On the literary construction of age systems in antiquity cf. Tim Parkin, Life Cycle, in Mary Harlow / Ray Laurence (Eds.) A Cultural History of Childhood and the Family in Antiquity, Oxford-New York 2010, pp. 97–114.

7 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, De Consolatione ad Marciam (On Consolation to Marcia), in: id., Moral Essays, vol. 2, ed. and transl. by John W. Basore, London et al. 1965 (The Loeb Classical Library 254), pp. 2–97, at 21. 4.

consistent, each dividing life into various ages and their associated stage.[8] Even in our own time, the concept of old age has transformed. In the 20th century Western world, it was often framed around retirement ages, but the Romans did not have a concept of retirement in the modern sense of leaving the world of employment and moving on to a new stage of life. There are other parameters we might consider which gave an age framework to the lives of men. The Republican *cursus honorum*, for instance, gave minimum ages for the holding of certain offices.[9] Under Augustus's marriage laws (Lex Julia et Papia Poppea 9 CE), men were not exempt from the penalties of being unmarried until the age of sixty, and women until the age of fifty.[10] Ageing, however, is not just about numbers and years lived, nor is old age marked by a rite of passage as other stages of life might be. The Romans were conscious that appearance and body language might dictate how old they appeared to be, and that physical appearance and mental capacity were perhaps more significant than chronology. Then, as now, people aged at different rates dependent on genetics, life-style and environment. Women's life courses followed a biological framework more closely than men's as women were essentially defined by their ability to produce heirs. Where the life course of the upper class Roman might be marked by periods in office, that of women was sectioned by marriage, motherhood and widowhood – all stages marked by their connection to family.

Ptolemy's scheme is interesting because he divides old age into two stages, 'old age' and 'old-old age'. In the earlier stage a life of dignity and respect, free from manual labour is envisaged. The latter stage is not so 'rosy' and aligns more with Aristotle in that physical decrepitude and mental decline are 'creeping in'. This division appears frequently when writers concern themselves with the subject and asked the question of how to live a good old age.

Medical writers of the period viewed old age as a cooling of the body and recommended a range of regimens that an individual could choose to follow as a way of coping with their inevitable decline.[11] Early authors, following the Hippocratics, saw old age

8 Parkin, Life Cycle (see note 6), pp. 97–101.

9 On the *cursus honorum*, cf. Alan E. Astin, The Lex Annalis before Sulla, Brussels 1958 (Collections Latomus 32); on its changes and effect on the life course, cf. Harlow/Laurence, Growing Up (see note 1), pp. 104–116.

10 For commentary, cf. Susan Treggiari, Roman Marriage. Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian, Oxford 1991, pp. 60–80.

11 For an overview of medical attitudes to the ageing body, cf. Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 34–56; Tim Parkin, The Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds, in: Pat Thane (Ed.) A History of Old Age, London 2005, pp. 58–65.

as a form of disease which could not be cured.[12] In the 2nd century CE, the physician Galen modified this thinking and argued that old age, like other stages of life, was part of a natural process which required its own particular attention, and as bodies differed each therefore required different treatments and regimens.[13] In the fifth book of "De sanitate tuenda", Galen provides a lot of advice on how to live well in old age. He argued that as the body aged, it became cooler and drier, organs no longer function so well and the drying out of the body is apparent in weight loss, faltering limbs and wrinkles. To combat the effects of ageing Galen recommends a regimen which is predicated on the existing constitution of the patient. He advised gentle exercise: In the morning, after a massage with oil, the elderly should walk and take passive exercise[14] even chariot riding was considered good. Other forms of exercise are recommended for those who have the capacity: shadow boxing, discus throwing, using weights. Massage too is recommended to suit the individual: a gentle massage is preferred for those who are frail while stronger bodies can benefit from a more vigorous work out. Tepid baths were recommended as good for moistening and warming the body.[15]

In terms of diet, older people were advised to avoid excess in certain foods such as cheese, boiled eggs, snails, pork, lentil soup, mushrooms and meat from stags, goats, oxen or sheep.[16] Certain breads were also to be avoided but soft bread dipped in goat's milk was good for some, and bread prepared with honey or a honey-wine mixture can also form part of the elderly person's diet. Milk from well pastured animals could be good, but like wine it should be taken to suit an individual's constitution.[17] All vegetables are good, especially if served with oil and fish sauce. Figs, plums and seasonal fruits are also acceptable, but dried fruits could also offer benefits.[18] Wine is good as it both heats the

12 Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Ad Lucilium epistulae morales (Moral Epistles), vol. 3, ed. and transl. by Richard M. Gummere, London 1962 (The Loeb Classical Library 77), ep. 108.28, where he comments on Vergil's "Aeneid" (Publius Vergilius Maro [Vergil], Aeneis [Aeneid], vol. 1, ed. by Henry Rushton Fairclough, Cambridge, Mass. 1967 [The Loeb Classical Library 63], 6.274). For Seneca's "Moral Epistles" cf., for example, the following edition: Lucius Annaeus Seneca, Ad Lucilium epistulae morales, 3 vols., ed. and transl. by Richard M. Gummere, London 1961–1962 (The Loeb Classical Library 75–77).

13 Claudius Galenus, Galeni De sanitate tuenda, ed. by Karl Koch, Leipzig-Berlin 1923 (Corpus medicorum Graecorum V. 4.2), 5.1–2; cf. 5.8 for his view on and ageing body as cold and dry.

14 Ibid., 5. 3.

15 Ibid., 5.10.

16 Ibid., 5. 6.

17 Ibid., 5.7–8.

18 Ibid., 5. 9.

body and acts as a diuretic, and Galen takes some care to explain exactly which wines offer most benefit to particular types of body.[19]

Much of the type of advice given by the medical writers was followed by Pliny's friend, Spurinna. In Pliny's opinion, Spurinna led an exemplary old age, staying in bed until an hour after dawn, then taking a three-mile walk to exercise both his mind and body. Depending on whether he was alone or in company, he either engaged in serious conversation or a book was read aloud to him during this walk. These activities continued when he returned home, until he went out in his carriage with either his wife or his friends. The carriage would drive seven miles, then Spurinna would walk another mile. On his return home he would retire to his room and do some writing. In the late afternoon, before his bath he would take off his clothes and walk around in the sunshine, throwing a ball briskly. He took a short rest after his bath and before dinner. During dinner light literature was read aloud. Dinner itself was a simple affair and either light literature was read aloud or comic entertainment offered between courses. "Thus, Spurinna had reached the age of 77, hale and hearty."[20] Pliny approves of Spurinna's lifestyle and his approach to ageing but not everyone could follow such regimens or remain so apparently in control of their lives.

Not everyone was so sanguine about old age. The orator Fronto complained often about his health in letters to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (scholars have estimated that up to a third of his correspondence dealt with matters of health).[21] Fronto probably eventually died of plague in his early seventies but from his fifties onwards appears, to the modern reader at least, to obsess and moan about his health; for example: "I was seized with pain in the knee, but so slight that I could both walk slowly and use a carriage. Tonight the pain has come on more violently, but so that I can easily bear it, if it gets no worse".[22] From the same period, Fronto excused himself from a meeting with the emperor because of his ailments, specifically pain in neck and elbow.[23] In later years he

19 Ibid., 5. 5.

20 Pliny the Younger, Letters, vol. 1, ed. by Radice (see note 1), ep. 3. 1.

21 Edward Champlin, Fronto and Antonine Rome, Cambridge, Mass. 1980, p. 141; Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 44–46.

22 "Genus dolore arreptus sum, verum ita modico ut et ingrederer pedetemptim et vehiculo uterer. Hac nocte vehementior dolor invasit, ita tamen ut iacens facile patiar, nisi quid amplius ingruerit." For the text and translation, cf. Marcus Cornelius Fronto, Correspondence, vol. 1, ed. and transl. by C. R. Haines, Cambridge, Mass. 1919 (Loeb Classical Library 112–113), ep. 5.6 (145–147 CE).

23 Ibid., ep. 5.29.

complains of severe pain in the groin[24] to which the emperor replies that he hopes the pain subsides with the use of fomentations and remedies as he knows the distress pain causes Fronto. Marcus Aurelius receives a swift reply opening with "I have been seized with severe pains in the other side of the groin".[25] It is a testament to the closeness of the relationship between the emperor and his former tutor that Marcus Aurelius is constantly concerned for Fronto's health, and that Fronto has no compunction about opening his correspondence with tales of his ailments.

Seneca, who ended his life hounded to suicide by Nero at the age of sixty-nine in 65 CE, wrote philosophical treatises in the form of letters, many of which deal with growing older and coping with ailments and pain. Like Fronto, he had many complaints but he also found some solace in the ageing process. In describing the start of his day, Seneca says wryly that bodily exercise only takes up a small amount of time now as old age has made him tired as soon as he starts. He runs with a slave as pacemaker, who jokes he is at the same stage of life as his master as they are both losing their teeth.[26] He takes warm baths as opposed to the cold ones of his younger days.[27] For breakfast he has some stale bread, and then takes a nap.[28] In other letters he complains about suffering from sinus and catarrh problems and asthma[29] but he also thanks old age for keeping him bedridden and thus allowing more time with his books and letters.[30] Seneca's stoicism meant that he would prefer to face the troubles of growing older with bravery and patient endurance,[31] and that friends and the study of philosophy bring consolation for such ills.[32] Seneca saw other consolations in old age, particularly in its early stages: "Life is

24 Ibid., ep. 5.18.

25 Ibid., ep. 5.50.

26 Seneca, Moral Epistles, vol. 2, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 83.3–4; cf. letter 12 on Seneca failing to recognise a slave who had been a boy with him as the slave looked so run down and decrepit. The letter highlights the differential rate of ageing between classes (id., Moral Epistles, vol. 1, ed. by Gummere, London 1961 [The Loeb Classical Library 75], ep. 12); Tim Parkin, Ageing in Antiquity. Status and Participation in: Paul Johnson / Pat Thane (Eds.), Old Age from Antiquity to Post Modernity, London 1998 (Routledge Studies in Cultural History 1), p. 27.

27 Seneca, Moral Epistles, vol. 2, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 83.5; cf. ep. 67. 1.

28 Ibid., ep. 83. 6.

29 Ibid., ep. 78.1–2; id., Moral Epistles, vol. 1, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 54. 1.

30 Seneca, Moral Epistles, vol. 2, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 67. 2.

31 Ibid., ep. 67. 6.

32 Ibid., ep. 78.4; ep. 76.

most delightful when it is on the downward slope but has not yet reached the abrupt decline".[33]

While the physical aspects of the ageing body preoccupied those who were having to deal with physical degeneration, literate members of upper-class Roman society were also anxious about being side-lined once they were viewed as elderly. In 44 BCE in his early sixties, Cicero wrote a treatise on old age, dedicated to his life-long friend, Atticus, who was sixty-five. The text of Cicero's "Cato Maior de Senectute" is composed as a dialogue between Cato the Elder and two younger men, Scipio Aemilianus and Gaius Laelius. It is set in the past, approximately a century before Cicero's own time, when Cato would have been 83.[34] It does not detail the daily lives of the elderly but stresses how much older men have to offer the state in terms of experience and knowledge. Through the voice of Cato, Cicero attempts to render the inconveniences of old age to an agreeable state.[35] Cato denies old age is a burden, those who lack the character to live a virtuous life would find any age difficult[36] but he concedes the point that he argues from a favourable position, being wealthy, in good health and held in respect.[37] Cato argues that while physical strength may decline, this does not stop the elderly from being mentally active. He suggests exercises to keep the mind active, such as training himself to remember the names of people, and their fathers and grandfathers.[38] And while physical weakness means the elderly no longer have an obligation to hold office, they still have much to offer in terms of civic life – he could still make public speeches, he would have the time to teach Scipio rhetoric. Cato says it is our duty to resist old age, to fight against it as we would disease – and writing prior to Galen and Pliny – says that old age can be kept at bay by adopting a regimen of health, practising moderate exercise and eating

33 Seneca, Moral Epistles, vol. 1, ed. by Gummere (see note 12), ep. 12. 5. For a fuller discussion of Seneca's attitude to growing older, cf. Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 48–49; Parkin, Old Age (see note 1), pp. 69–72; Harlow/Laurence, Growing Up (see note 1), pp. 125–127.

34 For the text and translation, cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, Cato maior de senectute (Cato the Elder on Old Age), in: id., On Old Age. On Friendship. On Divination, ed. and transl. by William A. Falconer, Cambridge, Mass. 1923 (Loeb Classical Library 154), pp. 2–99. For English commentary on the Latin text cf. Marcus Tullius Cicero, Cato Maior de Senectute, ed. by Jonathan G. F. Powell, Cambridge 1988 (Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 28).

35 Cicero, Cato the Elder, ed. by Falconer (see note 34), 1. 2.

36 Ibid., 2. 4.

37 Ibid., 3. 8.

38 Ibid., 6–8.

frugally.[39] The waning of sexual prowess, if not desire, in old age was another common anxiety. Cato welcomes this as a positive as it only detracted from higher pursuits, such as philosophy.[40] One activity that Cato found increasingly of interest in his old age was farming, particularly in noting the cultivation of vines, but also the kitchen garden, the care of cattle and of bees. One can imagine that this is primarily an intellectual interest, gentlemen like Cato did not actually dig the ground, or milk the cows.[41] Finally, Cato / Cicero argues that old age is not to be feared as it means the inevitability of death is not far away and this is the period of life to prepare for it through the study of philosophy.[42]

Although written in the voice of Cato, it is not hard to understand why the subject of old age might have preoccupied Cicero in his early sixties. While it can be argued that he was about the approach the year which many Romans considered 'climacteric'[43] it is perhaps more the precariousness of his political and personal situation that has focussed his mind. Cicero had lost his beloved daughter, Tullia, in 45 BCE and turned to the consolation of philosophy to help him endure his grief. He was also facing a turbulent political time in which he had not only started out supporting the wrong side but was also in danger of being side-lined. Setting the discourse as a conversation between the elderly statesman and two young men was perhaps a way of negotiating a role for older men in the new political reality in which the younger generation were taking over.[44] Despite his words, the possibility of 'retirement' from politics to a life of intellectual pursuits, a life of *otium*, did not seem to be particularly attractive to Cicero.

39 Ibid., 11.36.

40 Ibid., 12.41.

41 Ibid., 15.51–54.

42 Ibid., 23.84–85.

43 "Observatum in multa hominum memoria expertumque est, senioribus plerisque omnibus sexagesimum tertium vitae annum cum periculo et clade aliqua venire aut corporis morbique gravioris aut vitae interitus aut animi aegritudinis. Propterea, qui rerum verborumque istiusmodi studio tenentur eum aetatis annum appellant κλιμακτηρικόν." "It has been observed during a long period of human recollection, and found to be true, that for almost all old men the sixty-third year of their age is attended with danger, and with some disaster involving either serious bodily illness, or loss of life, or mental suffering. Therefore, those who are engaged in the study of matters and terms of that kind call that period of life the 'climacteric'." For the text and translation, cf. Aulus Gellius, Noctes Atticae (Attic Nights), vol. 2, ed. and transl. by John C. Rolfe, Cambridge, Mass. 1989 (Loeb Classical Library 212), 15. 7.1–2.

44 On intergenerational conflict in this period, cf. Elena Isayev, Unruly Youth? The Myth of Generation Conflict in Late Republican Rome, in: Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte 56 (2007), pp. 1–13.

A century and a half later, Plutarch, in a short treatise, "An seni respublica gerenda sit" ("On whether an Old Man Should Withdraw from Public Affairs"),[45] reiterated several of Cicero's themes. Plutarch regarded the experience and wisdom that came with old age as the qualities that should recommend the older statesman for a life in service to the state. To 'retire' or withdraw from public life at the moment one has most to offer was considered shameful. Withdrawal and a life of domesticity was for women, not for men. Plutarch and Cicero were senior statemen who had held significant roles in the state, they did not want to lose the dignity, gravitas and authority that accompanied that status, nor did they wish the state to lose the benefit of their years of experience in holding office.[46]

The portrait images produced during Cicero's lifetime reflected his attitudes towards old age, making a virtue of the physical characteristics of ageing. Sculpted images depicted every wrinkle, scar, drooping eyelids, furrowed brows, thinning lips, accentuated nasal-labial lines and receding hairlines. Figs. 1 and 2 are typical of this veristic style. Fig. 1 dates to the last century BCE. Fig. 2 depicts a similar image which maybe a Republican original or a mid-1st century CE rendering in the veristic style of a balding male with carefully delineated facial features which show sunken cheeks, furrowed, frowning brow, bags under the eyes and down-turned mouth. These portrait styles depict the individual as dignified, serious and authoritative; they reflect the *gravitas* of a life lived in public service.[47]

These portrait busts are meant to be viewed frontally. The artists have worked hard to ensure age is a central feature of the production. The emphasised facial expressions and serious demeanour are understood to reflect the character of the individual – a man who has done his duty to the state and the gods, has *gravitas* and has earned respect. The portrait reflects the very wisdom and experience that Cicero and Plutarch plead for the elderly. Cicero himself, if the portrait is correctly attributed, had a portrait in the same vein.[48] Republican portraiture represents a public way of being remembered and puts an emphasis on the nobility of ageing.

45 Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus (Plutarch), Moralia (Morals), vol. 10, ed. and transl. by Harold Cherniss, Cambridge, Mass. 1976 (The Loeb Classical Library 427), pp. 73–153; sections 783 b–797 f.

46 On respect due to senators, cf. Parkin, Old Age (see note 1), pp. 106–129.

47 On Republican portrait traditions, cf. Jane Fejfer, Roman Portraits in Context, Berlin-New York 2008 (Image & Context 2), pp. 263–268; Jeremy Tanner, Portraits, Power and Patronage in the Late Republic, in: Journal of Roman Studies 90 (2000), pp. 18–50; Diana E. E. Kleiner, Roman Sculpture, Yale 2002, pp. 31–47.

48 A bust identified as Cicero is in the Capitoline Museum in Rome.

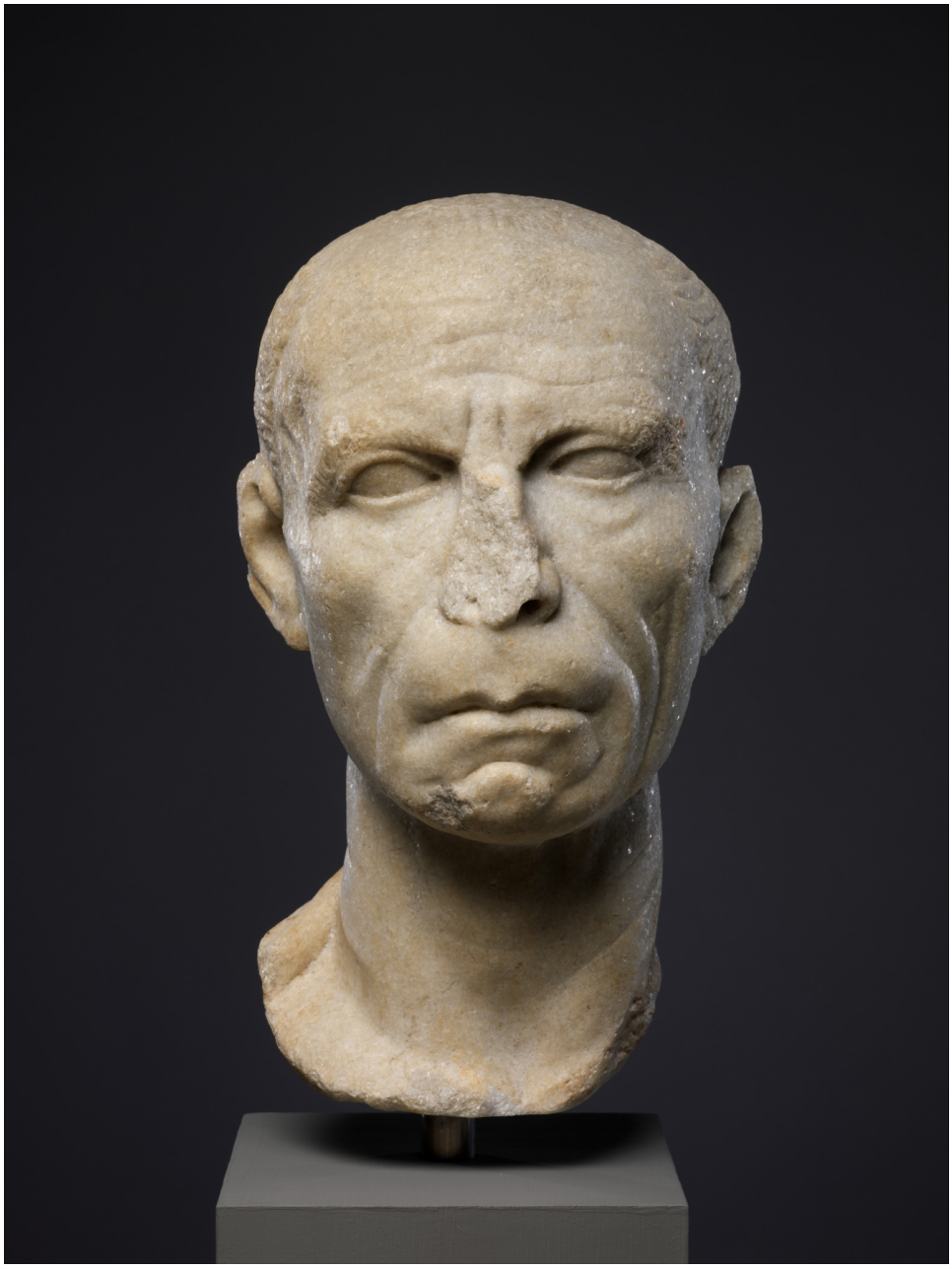

Fig. 1: Marble portrait of a man, late 1st century BC, Rogers Fund, 1921, Acc. No. 21.88.14, Metropolitan Museum of Art. URL: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/251040; 7.6.2022.

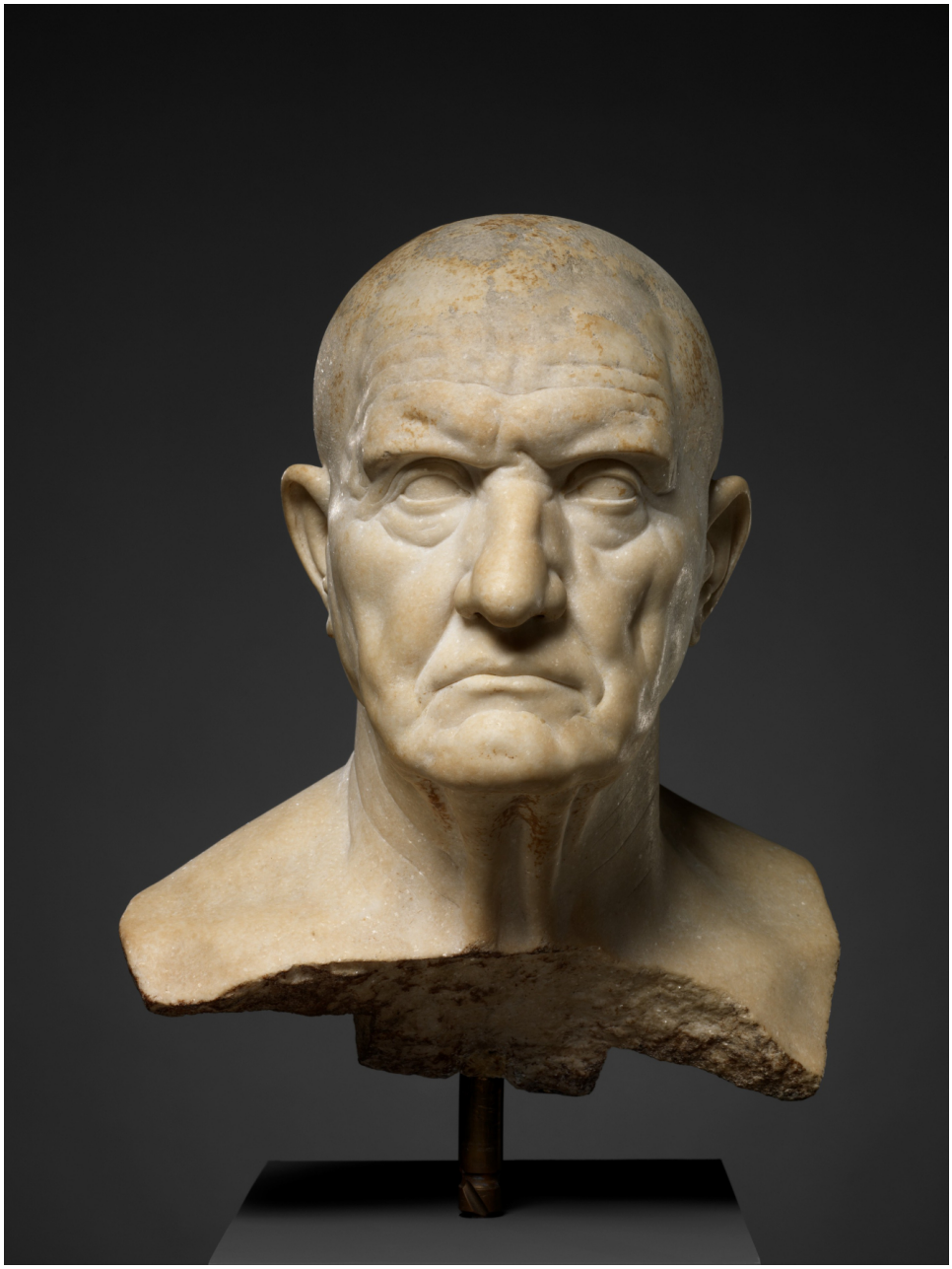

Fig. 2: Marble bust of a man, mid-1st century AD, Rogers Fund, 1912, Acc. No. 12.233, Metropolitan Museum of Art. URL: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248722; 7.6.2022.

However, as we have seen above, this does not mean everyone was equally sanguine about the ageing process. Even Cicero was said to have worn his tunic low at the back of his legs to hide his varicose veins.[49] Julius Caesar was apparently embarrassed by his baldness to the extent that he created the world's first known comb-over by bringing the hair from the back of his head to the front. Suetonius reports that he was pleased to be awarded the laurel wreath as he could use that to cover his balding head.[50] Hair loss is a common part of the physical aspect of ageing and was clearly an issue for some men. In the 4th century CE, Synesius of Cyrene, a neo-Platonist philosopher, warrior lord and bishop, wrote a treatise with the title "On Baldness" ("Calvitii Encomium"). This was partly a response to an "Encomium on Hair" ("Encomium comae") by the 2nd century CE orator Dio Chrysostom.[51] Synesius bemoans the fact that he was "wounded to the heart when the terrible thing happened and my hair began to fall off" and was anxious about how women would view him: "What wrong have I done that I should appear unsightly to the fair sex?"[52] But he then goes on to list a catalogue of positive attributes of baldness: all philosophers are bald and wise, while a man with hair is unlikely to be wise. Bald men, Synesius argues, along the lines of Cicero and Plutarch, make up the worthy in society, they are the priests, prophets, generals, school masters, and guardians of youth, and possess a superiority of intelligence.[53] Synesius was a highly educated member of the upper classes and his treatise, like those of Cicero and Plutarch is as much about expressing his own intelligence and rhetorical skills as it is about its subject matter. Synesius, moreover, includes parody and humour in his sketches of bald and hairy men, so it is hard to know how seriously to take his words. His treatise does highlight the point that men may begin to lose their hair at any age, but the very fact that their hair was thinning aged them socially.

The physical attributes of ageing, such as greying and thinning hair, were easy targets for writers of satire and comedy who chose to highlight the grotesque and to exaggerate

49 Marcus Fabius Quintilianus (Quintilian), Institutio Oratoria (Institutes of Oratory), vol. 5, ed. and transl. by Donald A. Russell, Cambridge, Mass. 2001 (Loeb Classical Library 494), 11.13.143.

50 Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, Julius Caesar, in: id., De vita Caesarum (Lives of the Caesars), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by John C. Rolfe, Cambridge, Mass. 1914 (Loeb Classical Library 31, 38), pp. 37–149, at 45.

51 For a fuller commentary on Synesius "On Baldness", cf. Mary Harlow, Introduction, in: A Cultural History of Hair in Antiquity, London-New York 2019 (A Cultural History of Hair 1), pp. 1–3.

52 Synesius (of Cyrene), Calvitii Encomium (In Praise of Baldness), ed. and transl. by George H. Kendal, Vancouver 1985, 1.

53 Ibid., 1. 3.

many of the characteristics of old age which we first came across in Aristotle. Juvenal, writing in the 1st century CE, highlights the hideousness of ageing in his description of "the unceasing miseries of a long old age".

> "'Give me a long life, Jupiter, give me many years.' But just think of the many, never ending disadvantages an extended old age is full of! Take a look at its face, first of all – ugly and hideous and unrecognisable – and the ugly hide in place of skin and the drooping jowls and the wrinkles ... But old men all look the same: voice and body trembling alike, head now quite smooth, a baby's dripping nose. The pathetic creature has to munch his bread with weaponless gums. He's so disgusting to his wife and kids and to himself that he makes even Cossus the fortune-hunter feel sick."[54]

As the satire progresses, the debilitations of old age accumulate: the old man cannot enjoy food, or sex, or even conversation as he is now deaf; his dignity is lost as he needs to be fed by his slaves and, finally his memory goes and he cannot tell the difference between his slaves and his children. Juvenal's character with his wrinkled skin, baldness and incapacity provides a very different reading of the sculpted portraits, and also of Galen's, Cicero's and Plutarch's notions of growing old gracefully and usefully. Karen Cokayne notes the similarities between Juvenal's fictional old man and the situation of Domitius Tullus whom Pliny reports as being so incapacitated by age that his slaves needed to feed him and clean his teeth. The final indignity for a man of status was having to lick the fingers of his slaves.[55]

While Juvenal may ridicule old men for their impotence, increased sexual appetite was also a matter for criticism. Sexual misbehaviour on the part of old men (and women) was the antithesis of the attitudes advocated by Cicero / Cato in "De Senectute". One

54 "'Da spatium vitae, multos da, Iuppiter, annos.' [hoc recto voltu, solum hoc et pallidus optas.] sed quam continuis et quantis longa senectus plena malis! deformem et taetrum ante omnia vultum dissimilemque sui, deformem pro cute pellem pendentisque genas et talis aspice rugas quales, una senum facies, cum voce trementia membra et iam leve caput madidique infantia nasi; frangendus misero gingiva panis inermi. usque adeo gravis uxori natisque sibique, ut captatori moveat fastidia Cosso." For the text and translation, cf. Decimus Junius Juvenalis (Juvenal), Saturae (Satires), in: id. / Aulus Persius Flaccus, Juvenal and Persius, The Satires of Juvenal, ed. and transl. by Susanna Morton Braund, Cambridge, Mass. 2004 [Loeb Classical Library 91], pp. 43–512, satire 10, pp. 364–397; ll. 190–191, 198–202).

55 Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 54–55; Pliny the Younger, Letters, vol. 2, ed. by Radice (see note 1), ep. 8.18. On Pliny and old age, cf. Parkin, Ageing in Antiquity (see note 26).

of the stock characters of Roman comedy was the *senex amator*, the elderly lover. The humour lay in the over-turning of acceptable social behavioural norms wherein love and passion were the prerogative of the young. For a father, already ugly and unattractive by virtue of his age, to chase after young women caused embarrassment to his grown-up sons and threatened the *status quo*. Such a character is exemplified by Demipho in Plautus's "Mercator". As Karen Cokayne has shown, Demipho is set up as the antithesis of the respectable Roman *paterfamilias*. He is described as physically abhorrent (grey-haired, knock-kneed, pot-bellied, big mouthed, with lantern jaws and splayed feet) and very conscious of his own role-reversal bad behaviour. Demipho seeks to justify his desire for a young girl, his own son's girlfriend, by arguing for a reconsideration of social norms: old age should be the right time to have an affair, youth a time for making money.[56] Such a suggestion flies in the face of Roman tradition wherein youth is a time for love, passion and the running up of debt rather than accumulation of wealth. In the "Mercator" the topsy-turvy world of comedy is, of course, righted by the end of the play and normality resumed with Demipho agreeing to behave in a way more suited to his age and the son getting the girl. The humour lies in the audience shared understanding of cultural norms about old age and youth and knowing that any subverting of values lasts only for the duration of the play. Comedy does however offer a good foil to the moralising and medical writings discussed above.[57]

While the elderly lover is ridiculed for behaviour unsuited to his age, we should note that two of the most conspicuous individuals mentioned in this paper – Cato the Elder and Cicero – despite any pontificating on the virtue of sexual abstinence and the decline of sexual prowess in old age, both remarried as older men to much younger women. It was the Roman tradition for a wife to be perhaps 8–10 years younger than her husband, an age-gap any greater than this could raise questions.[58] Among the upper classes of Roman society we can track several examples of men marrying multiple times to ever younger women. Pompey the Great, for instance, married five times to increasingly younger women. His last two wives, Julia – the daughter of Julius Caesar – and Cornelia Metella, were younger than his children by a previous marriage and Cornelia would have made a more suitable partner for his son – but both these marriages were characterised by Plutarch as being particularly affectionate and loving – rather subverting Plutarch's

56 Titus Maccius Plautus, Mercator, or the Merchant, in: id., The Merchant, the Braggart Soldier, the Ghost, the Persian, ed. and transl. by Wolfgang De Melo,), Cambridge, Mass. 2011 (The Loeb Classical Library 163), pp. 1–128, at ll. 546–549.

57 Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 115–133, in particular pp. 119–120.

58 Harlow / Laurence, Growing Up (see note 1), pp. 92–103.

own apparent disapproval for such out-of-step unions.[59] Cato the Elder, for all the words Cicero put into his mouth about the lessening of both sexual desire and appetite, and being held up as a model of Roman austerity and *virtus*, remarried at the age of seventy-four. After the death of his wife, Cato shared a house with his son and daughter-in-law. Here, Cato consoled himself with a young slave girl. His son, however, expressed disgust at his elderly father's behaviour. This prompted Cato to offer himself in marriage to the young daughter of one of his clients. The client was hardly in a position to oppose the match, so Cato remarried at the age of seventy-four and fathered another son.[60]

Cicero himself was not above breaking normal social codes. At the age of sixty, he divorced his wife, Terentia, after thirty-three years of marriage, and promptly married his young ward, Publilia. Publilia was about fifteen at the time of her marriage and much younger than her new stepchildren. Cicero was accused by his ex-wife of being swept off his feet by Publilia's youth and charm. Despite their moral stands, both these men broke the social codes surrounding the behaviour of older men. Cicero, however, did respond by saying he married Publilia because he needed new political alliances and money (these are much more acceptable reasons for a marriage in the Roman mind).[61] These examples, from the lives of real rather than fictional characters, show that the double standard was alive and well in upper-class Roman culture. Sexual activity in old age, particularly between disparate age groups might have been disapproved of in high-flown intellectual texts and in comic writing, but the social reality appears to reflect a different set of values.

As stated above, our views of Roman social life are seen through the dominant prism of literate, upper class males. This very small group of the Roman population reflect the preoccupations of their own class and gender, and their own anxieties about growing old. They were not particularly interested in the lives of elderly women. As

59 Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus, Pompey, in: id., Vitae parallelae (Parallel Lives), vol. 5, ed. and transl. by Bernadotte Perrin, London et al. 1967 (The Loeb Classical Library 87), pp. 115–325, at 53.1 on Pompey's devotion to Julia, and Plutarch's comment that Pompey "at his age, scarcely seemed a fit object for such devotion"; on Pompey's marriage to Cornelia: ibid., 55. 2. For Plutarch's "Lives" cf., for example, the following edition: Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus (Plutarch), Vitae parallelae (Parallel Lives), 11 vols., ed. and transl. by Bernadotte Perrin, London et al. 1959–1971 (The Loeb Classical Library 46–47, 65, 80, 87, 98–103). Cf. also Harlow / Laurence, Growing Up (see note 1), p. 96; Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), p. 126; Shelley P. Haley, Five Wives of Pompey the Great, in: Greece and Rome 32 (1985), pp. 49–59.

60 Plutarchus, Cato Maior, in: id., Parallel Lives, vol. 2, ed. by Perrin (see note 59), pp. 301–385, at 24, 27.

61 Plutarchus, Cicero, in: id., Parallel Lives, vol. 7, ed. by Perrin (see note 59), pp. 81–209, at 41; Harlow / Laurence, Growing Up (see note 1), pp. 98–99.

Roman *matronae* did not write their own histories, the lives of older Roman women are even more invisible than those of their younger counterparts.[62]

For women in Roman society marriage and motherhood was the accepted life path. For respectable women there were very few other options available. A father's status was reflected in the marriage partner he could achieve for his daughter, and the prospective bride often had little choice over whom she married.[63] Once married, a woman's status improved if she became a mother of legitimate offspring, a *materfamilias*.[64] Within the family, a woman could gain authority as she aged and the number of people within her sphere of influence increased. Thus, as a mother, aunt and grandmother she might have an extensive group of individuals tied to her through *pietas* and respect. Latin history writers often used women as *exempla*, as models of good behaviour to be emulated. One such was Veturia, the elderly (as her name implies) mother of Coriolanus who, together with his wife, Volumnia, confronted her son and demand he chose between Rome and his mother and family, or the Volscians.[65] Veturia is presented as reflection of Republican values, embodied in a woman – prepared to put the state and her family before herself. The speeches given to Veturia by Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Livy both stress Roman ideals of the Augustan period: Veturia points out to her son that if he goes to war with Rome he will be guilty of matricide as well a traitor to his country. Her speech emphasises her role as a mother who chose not to remarry and have more children who would care for her in her old age, but instead she dedicated herself to Coriolanus' upbringing, in the expectation of reciprocal care as she grew older. In Livy's version, Veturia refers to

62 Suzanne Dixon's book remains one of the best texts on the problems of locating women in Roman life and literature (Suzanne Dixon, Reading Roman Women. Sources, Genres and Real Life, London 2001).

63 On Roman marriage, cf. Susan Treggiari, Roman Marriage (see note 10); on marriage in the life course, cf. Harlow / Laurence, Growing Up (see note 1), pp. 79–91.

64 For brief discussion of the female life course, cf. Harlow / Laurence, Growing Up (see note 1); Harlow, Blurred visions (see note 3), pp. 197–201; Suzanne Dixon, The Roman Mother, London 1988; Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 159–164.

65 Titus Livius (Livy), Ab urbe condita (History of Rome), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by Benjamin O. Foster, Cambridge, Mass. 2014 (Loeb Classical Library 114), 2.40; Dionysius Halicarnassensis (Dionysius of Halicarnassus), Antiquitates Romanae (The Roman Antiquities), vol. 5, ed. and transl. by Earnest Cary, Cambridge, Mass. 2014 (Loeb Classical Library 372), 8.40–54; Valerius Maximus, Factorum ac dictorum memorabilium libri (Memorable Doings and Sayings), vol. 1, ed. and transl. by David R. Shackleton Bailey, Cambridge, Mass. 2014 (Loeb Classical Library 492), 5. 4.1; Katariina Mustakallio, Representing Older Women. Hersilia, Veturia, Virgo Vestalis Maxima, in: Christian Krötzl / Katariina Mustakallio (Eds.), On Old Age. Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, Turnhout 2011 (The History of Daily Life 2), pp. 40–56.

herself as *senecta*, as part of her emotional appeal to her son. Both historians attribute very emotive speeches to a woman which play on the duties expected of sons towards their mothers, and the authority a mother could expect to command as she grew older.[66]

Another famous mother whose attempt to exert influence over her son was less successful, was Livia, the wife of Augustus and mother of Tiberius. The relationship between the elderly Livia and her adult son is a complex story, related to us through the eyes of partisan historians. Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio all report negatively on her behaviour during and following her husband's last days. According to Tacitus and Cassius Dio she controlled news of Augustus's death until her son could be recalled from Illyricum, and having been instrumental in his accession to power, expected some role for herself.[67] Livia was seventy-two when she became a widow; her long marriage to Augustus and the influence and patronage she had accrued during his reign put her in a position comparable to the one of Plutarch's elder statesman not wishing to be side-lined. The Roman male world view did not include women in positions of power and any attempt by Livia to exert her influence was met by resistance from Tiberius and disparagement by the recorders of the period. Suetonius reports that Tiberius avoided meeting his mother as he did not want to give the appearance of being guided by her. Accordingly, he refused her any conspicuous honours and warned her not to meddle with affairs of importance which he considered to be unbecoming to a woman. Suetonius and Tacitus both assert that Tiberius's 'retirement' to Capri was a result of his frustration with Livia's constant interfering.[68] Like many elder statesmen, Livia did not wish to withdraw but there was no established role for a dowager empress to slip into. She became a role model for the imperial women who came after her. Livia, like Ummidia Quadratilla is a bit of a 'special case' due to her unique position in Roman history, and because she lived to a great age, dying at her late eighties in 29 CE.

66 Judith P. Hallett, Absent Roman Fathers in the Writings of their Daughters. Cornelia and Sulpicia, in: Sabine R. Hübner / David M. Ratzan (Eds.), Growing Up Fatherless in Antiquity, Cambridge 2009, pp. 175–191, at p. 184.

67 Publius Cornelius Tacitus, Annales (Annals) I–III, in: id., The Histories, vol. 2: Histories, books IV–V. Annals, books I–III, ed. and transl. by John Jackson, London-New York 1931 (The Loeb Classical Library 249), pp. 242–643, at 1. 5.5–6; Lucius Cassius Dio, Historia Romana (Roman History), vol. 8, ed. and transl. by Earnest Cary, Cambridge, Mass. 2005 (The Loeb Classical Library 176), 57.12.

68 Suetonius, Tiberius, in: id., Lives of the Caesars, ed. Rolfe (see note 50), pp. 291–401, at 50–51; Tacitus, Annals. Books 4–6, 11–12, ed. and transl. by John Jackson, Cambridge, Mass. 2006 (Loeb Classical Library 312), 4.57; Cassius Dio, Roman History, ed. by Cary (see note 67), 57.12; Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 162–163.

Women of wealth and status could have some bargaining positions with their offspring who might expect to inherit from them. They also had moral tradition on their side and could insist on the duty of children to at least support their elderly parents and at best obey their wishes. It appears that older women, as well as men, knew how to play on the stereotypes of ageing to establish or maintain their status. Within the family and wider society respectable women seem to gain authority and *gravitas* as they aged. They might also become independent to a certain extent, particularly if wealthy in their own right, and be able to live their lives as they pleased, like Ummidia Quadratilla.

However, not every woman was a *matrona* and there is a group of women who have practically a whole genre of literature which focuses on them – this is the ageing courtesan and prostitute.[69] All the tropes concerning the ageing body that men worried about were exaggerated when they were addressed to women. Roman poetry is full of love stories between young poets and their young courtesans; youth and beauty walked hand-in-hand in the elegiac and satirical *mentalité*. Young courtesans who depended on their charm and looks to captivate lovers, are presented as having an understandable fear of growing older, when whatever seductive power they may have wielded over their lovers would wane. Propertius writes to Cynthia warning her to make the most of her charms while they last: "May old age oppress you with the burden of the years, and may ugly wrinkles come upon your beauty. Then you may wish to tear at the white hairs by the roots and now the mirror chides you with wrinkles".[70]

The threat of ageing means the death of beauty to Propertius. It is the final insult to the cast aside mistress, that despite their natural beauty or clever use of cosmetics, age cannot be denied or hidden. Like men, women also attempted to hide the visible ravages of ageing. Martial gives a vivid description of an ageing prostitute, Galla, and how she takes off her street *persona* at night: "You are at home yourself Galla, but you are made up in the middle of the Subura. Your hair is manufactured in your absence. You lay your teeth aside at night, as you do your silks, and lie stored in a hundred caskets. Your face does not sleep with you ...".[71]

69 Cokayne, Experiencing Old Age (see note 1), pp. 135–152. Vincent Rosivach presents a series of negative stereotypes including witches, drunks and whores (Vincent Rosivach, *Anus*. Some Older Women in Latin Literature, in: Classical World 88,2 [1994], pp. 107–117).

70 Sextus Aurelius Propertius, Elegiae (Elegies), ed. and transl. by George P. Goold, Cambridge, Mass. 1990 (Loeb Classical Library 18), 3.25.11–16.

71 Marcus Valerius Martialis, Epigrammata (Epigrams), ed. and transl. by D. R. Shackleton Bailey, vol. 2: Books 6–10, Cambridge, Mass. 1993 (Loeb Classical Library 95), 9.37.

The failing body of the elderly women is also targeted by the satirists – here is just one example by Horace, and not by any means the most 'disgusting':

> "I'm not a hard young man, nor do I have an insensitive nose; for whether it's a stinking cuttlefish or a goat that lurks in your hairy armpits, I can smell it out more keenly than a sharp-scented hound detects where a female boar is hiding. What a sweat and what a nasty smell comes from her withered limbs when, finding my penis limp, she presses on to satisfy her wild lust, her chalk make-up grows damp, and, along with the rosy colour produced from crocodiles' dung, begins to run, and now in her animal heat she breaks the thongs of the bedstead and its canopy".[72]

While Roman authors were not particularly interested (or perhaps too delicate to address) the sexual desires of respectable women – when it came to women they viewed as over-sexed or demanding, it upset their sensibilities about the gendered natural order in which men were virile, masculine and dominant, whereas women were weak, feminine and subordinate. Beautiful young courtesans could cross this boundary by virtue of their allure and, in the poetic world at least, they could rule over their young lovers. Older, uglier, 'smellier' women were not permitted this licence – they lost their power and should 'retire' gracefully assuming the values and behaviour of respectable women. The reality was probably that such a choice was simply not available to lower class women, whatever their professions.

This attitude towards women was also reflected in some art: the grotesque and pathos of these images of drunken or elderly working women – shows the visible effects of ageing in a very different way from the earlier portraits – but they may, for all their stylistic contrivances, reflect the reality for poor women without resources (fig. 3). In the poorer classes, the elderly, both men and women, had to rely on family support once they reached the stage of dependency – if they reached that stage. The reality of life for the poor elderly with failing health and no resources was stark. There was no such thing as state support and most elderly individuals in the Roman world probably worked until they 'dropped'.

72 "mittis nec firmo iuveni neque naris obesae? namque sagacius unus odoror, polypus an gravis hirsutis cubet hircus in alis, quam canis acer ubi lateat sus. qui sudor vietis et quam malus undique membris crescit odor, cum pene soluto indomitam properat rabiem sedare, neque illi iam manet umida creta colorque stercore fucatus crocodili, iamque subando tenta cubilia tectaque rumpit!" For the text and translation, cf. Quintus Horatius Flaccus (Horace), Epodi liber (Epodes), in: id., Odes and Epodes, ed. and transl. by Niall Rudd, Cambridge, Mass. 2004 (Loeb Classical Library 33), pp. 22–261, epode 12, ll. 3–12.

Fig. 3: Marble statue of an old woman, 14–68 AD, Rogers Fund, 1909, Acc. No. 09.39, Metropolitan Museum of Art. URL: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/248132?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=Marble+statue+of+an+old+woman&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=); 7.6.2022.

2 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a rather eclectic 'taster' lecture of a selection of Roman attitudes towards old age. Despite the limitations of the source material, it is possible to review the range of, often contradictory, images of growing older in Roman society. One theme that runs through all the examples is that of vulnerability, or the fear of it, be it physical or mental. The physical aspects of ageing seen on the body (wrinkles, loss of musculature, thinning, greying hair, stooped postures etc.) could only be disguised so far. Coupled with mental incapacity (loss of memory, inability to communicate, dementia etc.) old age could make the individual very vulnerable to the vicissitudes of life. Elderly relatives would fare better if they had family support and the wealthy could perhaps rely on their slaves to care for them if they lacked family. The reciprocal behaviour owed by children to parents, embodied in the virtue of *pietas*, might offer an ageing parent support and protection but several legal rulings suggest this might not be an automatic presumption.[73] We have seen above how some mothers could pull emotional strings by stressing the duty owed to them, but also that some sons resented such pressure and assumptions.[74]

Latin authors could use several tropes and stereotypes of ageing across many different genres because they reflected a form of reality even if grossly exaggerated. For wealthy men the best way to prepare for the inevitable decline was to follow certain regimens, and to hope you might be Spurinna rather than the old man in Juvenal's tenth satire. Elderly women might hope to emulate Ummidia Quadratilla perhaps. Some, however, chose not to face a painful decline. Despite the advice Cicero offered his great friend Atticus in "De Senectute", at the age of seventy-eight and in pain from an intestinal illness, Atticus refused food in order to bring about his death. A similar approach was taken by Pliny's guardian, Corellius Rufus, who suffered terrible pains in his feet.[75] Such deaths were considered an honourable exit from life. The dignity of such a death might not be possible for the vast majority of the population of the Roman world.

One of the great limitations of the source material is that it is rarely interested in the poor or working classes except in what survives in comic interludes and satire

73 Digesta seu pandectae Iustiniani Augusti, vol. 1, ed. by Theodor Mommsen, Berlin 1870, 25. 3.5; Parkin, Old Age (see note 1), pp. 205–216.

74 On intergenerational conflicts, cf. Parkin, Old Age (see note 1), pp. 226–228; Isayev, Unruly Youth? (see note 44).

75 Cornelius Nepos, De excellentibus ducibus exterarum gentium (On Great Generals. On Historians), ed. and transl. by John C. Rolfe, Cambridge, Mass. 1929 (Loeb Classical Library 467), Atticus, 21–22; Pliny the Younger, Letters, vol. 1, ed. by Radice (see note 1), ep. 1.12.

(written primarily by the upper classes). Horace and Martial's prostitutes fit into this category, their sexual grotesqueness further exasperated by their poverty or potential poverty once they can no longer earn a living from their bodies. Like much of the world population in the 21st century, large numbers of people in the Roman world would either not live long enough to enjoy an old age, or if they did, would simply work until they 'dropped'. It is to be hoped that readers who have got this far will follow the regimen of Romilius Pollio – who lived to be a hundred – take honeyed wine within and oil without.[76]

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76 Gaius Plinius Secundus, Naturalis historia (Natural History), vol. 6, ed. and transl. by William H. S. Jones, Cambridge, Mass. 1969 (Loeb Classical Library 392), 22.53.114.