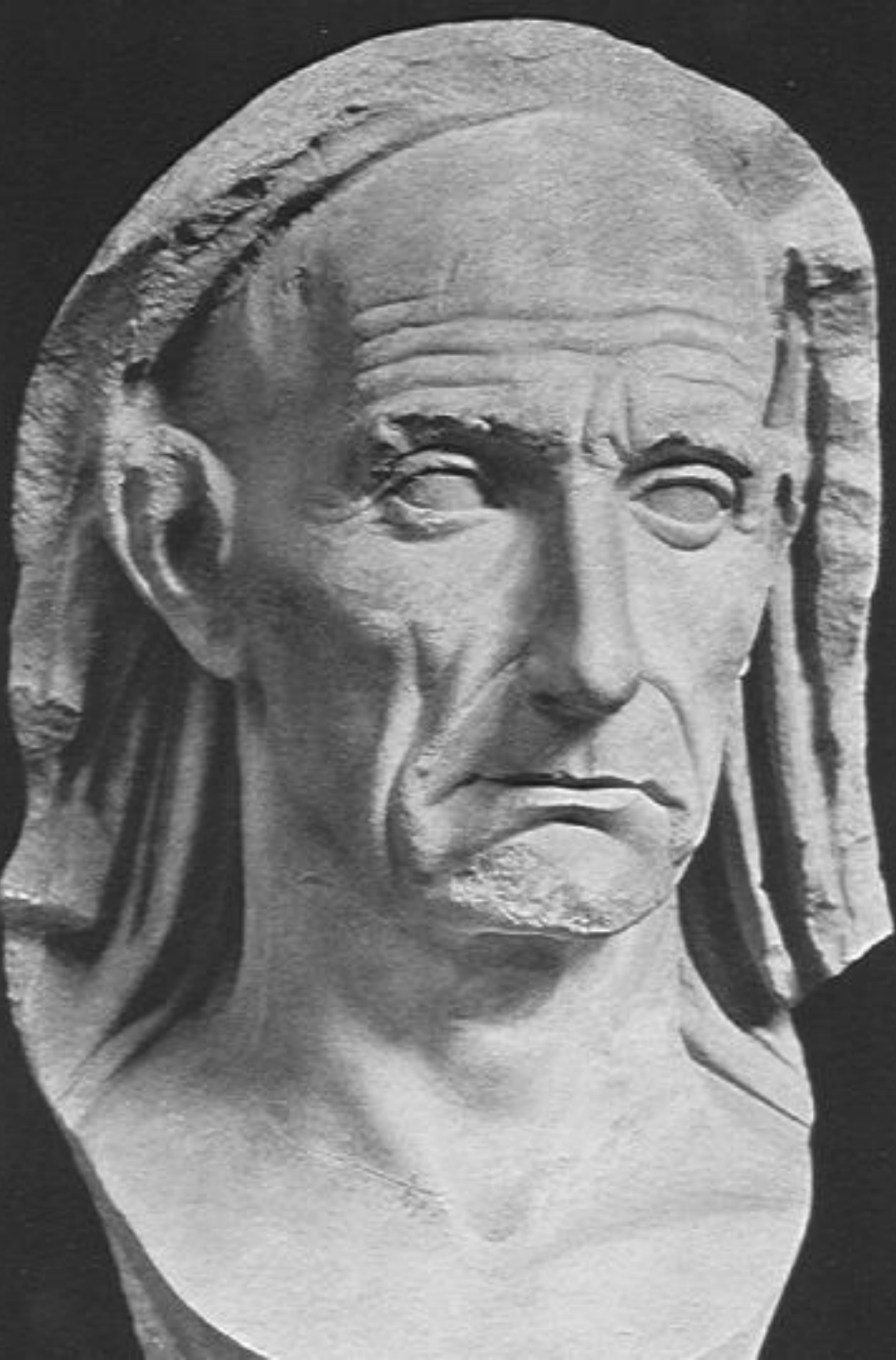


*Solitudo et senectus:*  
were the ancients lonely in old age?

Sam Jones and Tim Parkin

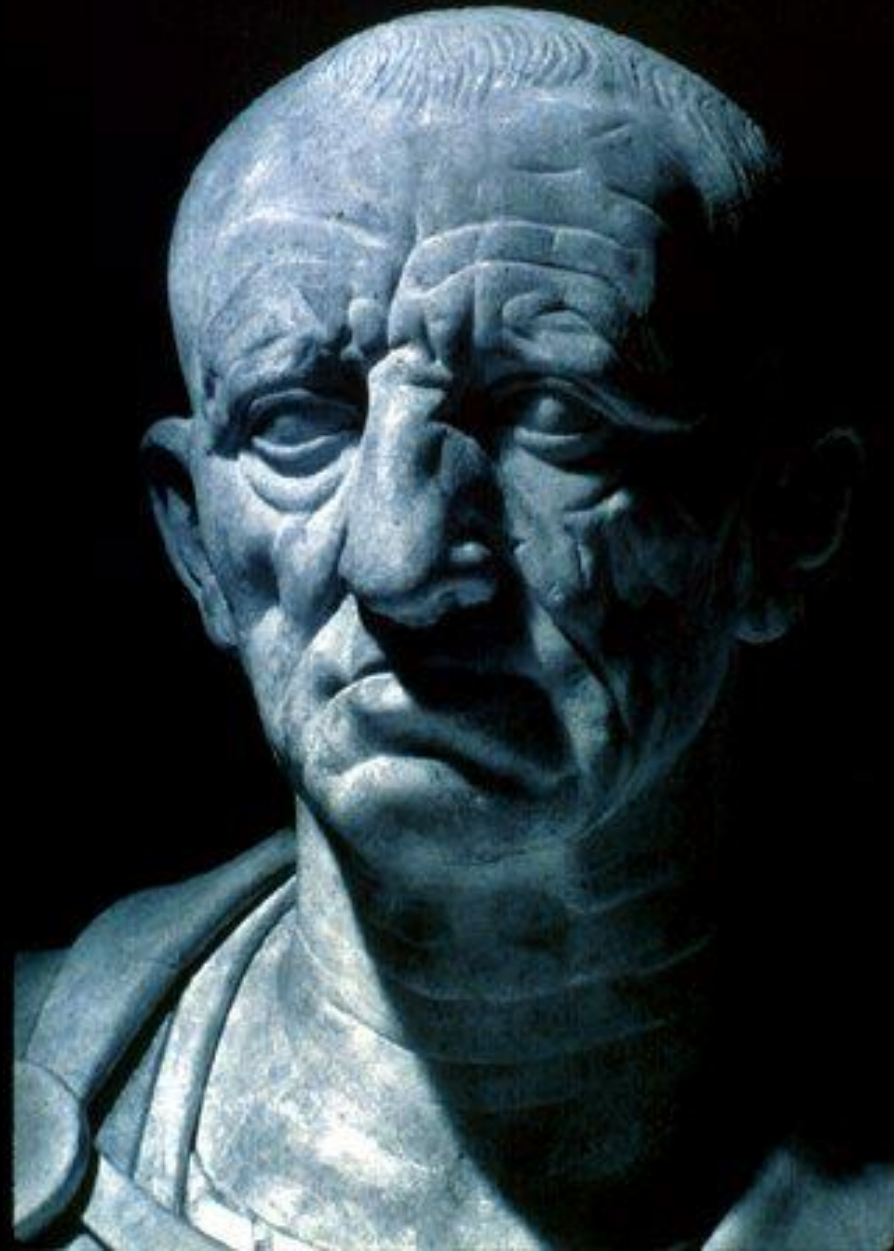






Old age will only be respected if it fights for itself in person, maintains its own rights, avoids dependence on anyone, and asserts control over its own to the very last breath.

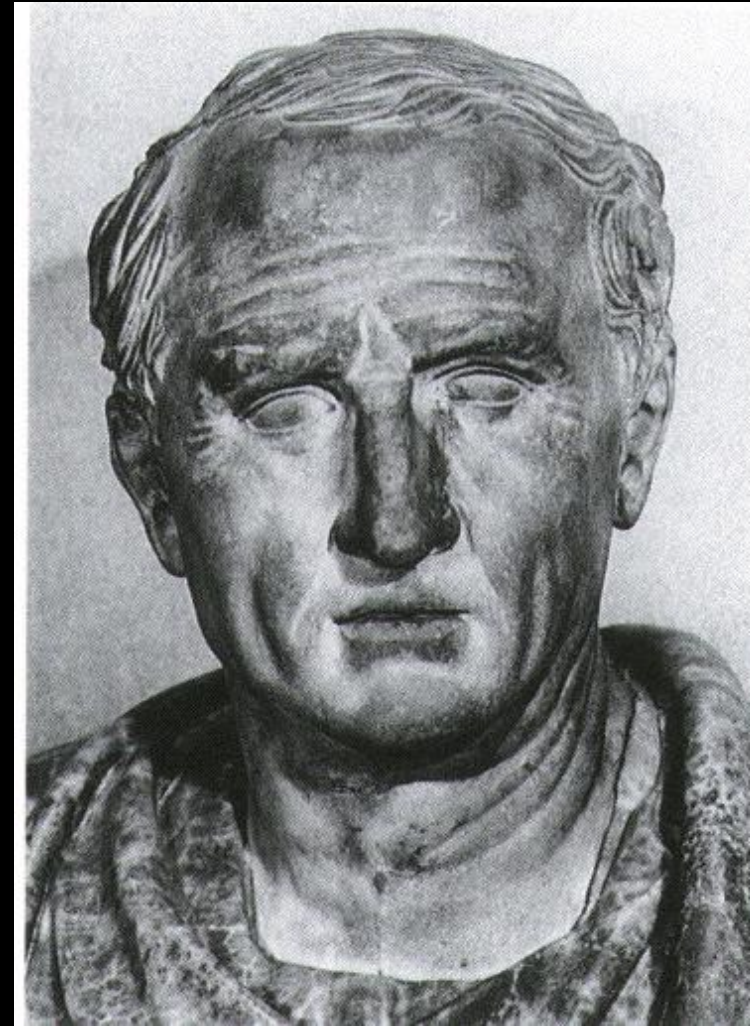
(Cicero, 44 BC)





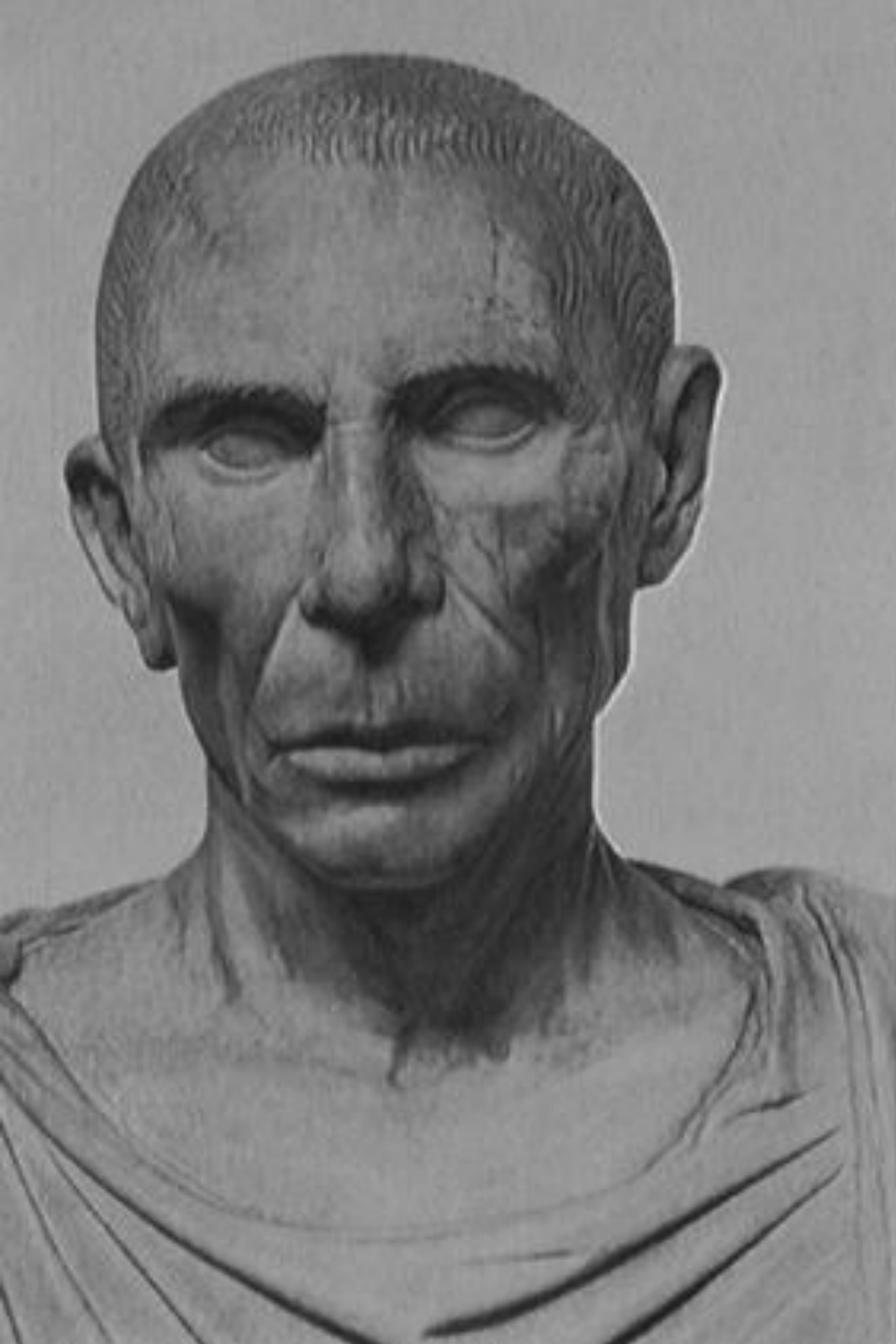
Cicero, *On Old Age (de Senectute)*, 44 BC  
4 complaints (*vituperationes*) against old age:

- old age takes you away from public activities
- old age weakens the body
- old age deprives you of pleasures
- old age is not far from death

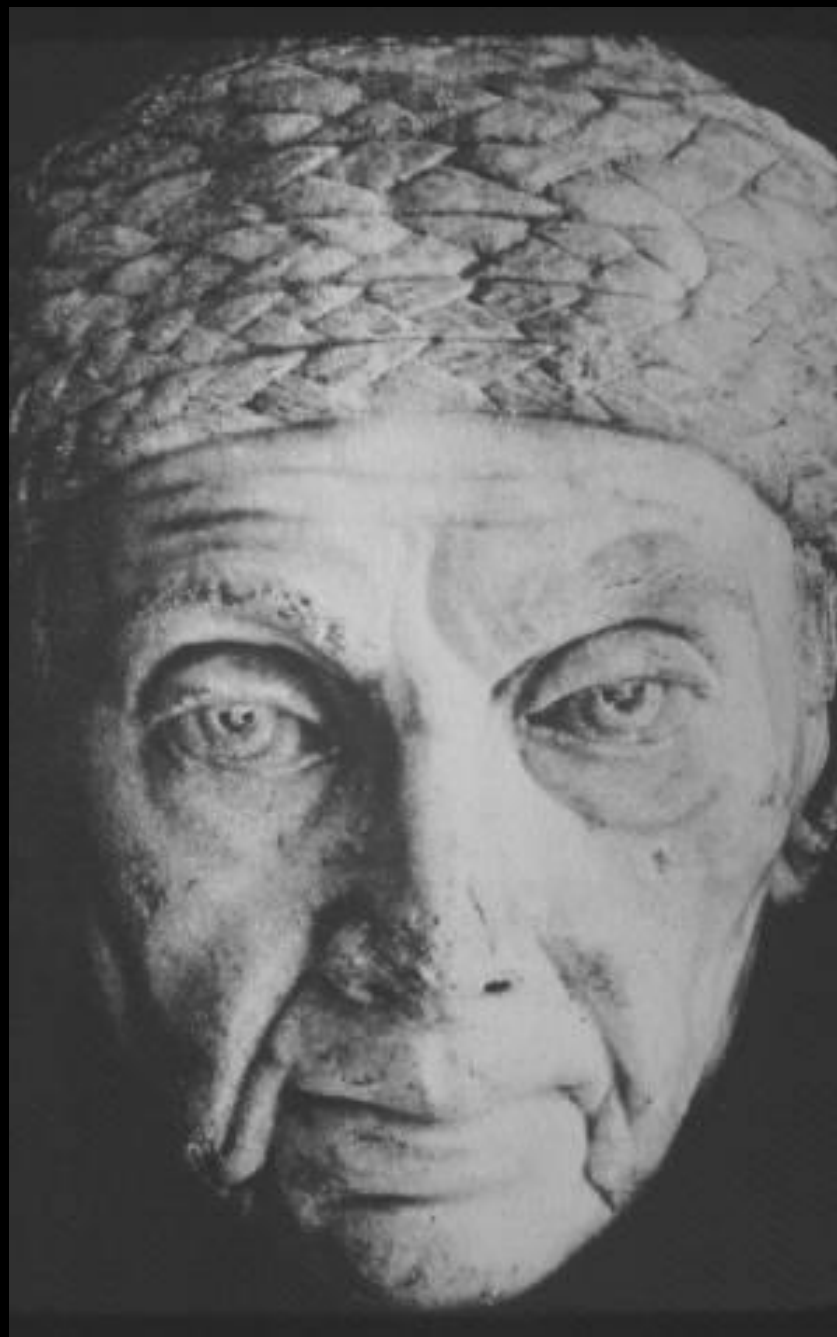


Old age & power



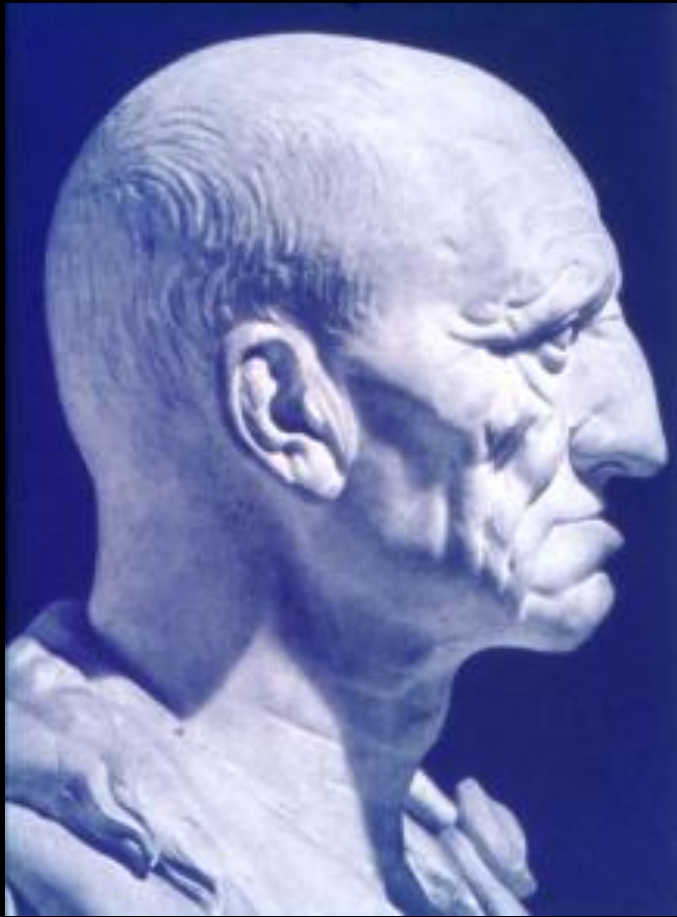










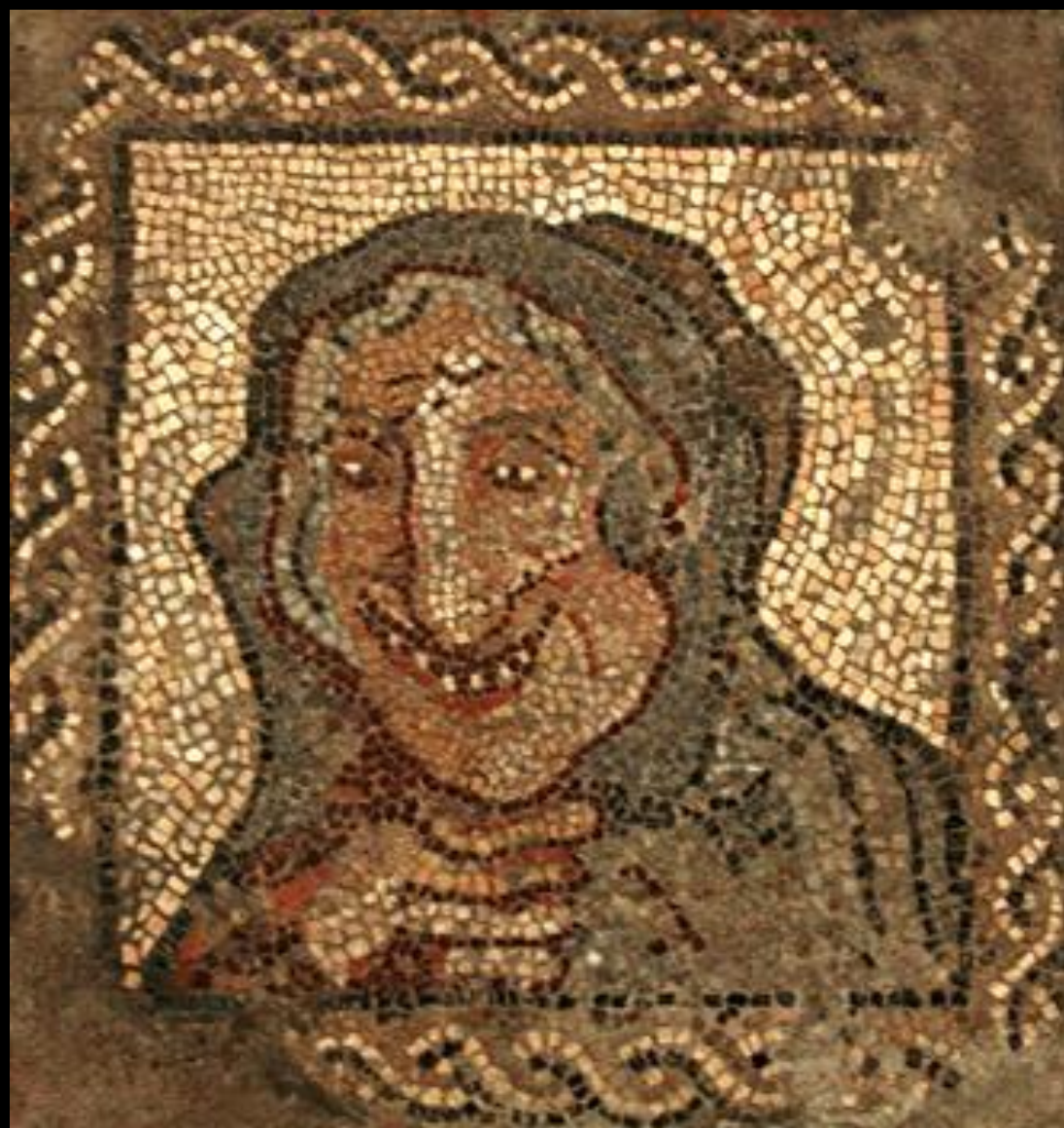


Older people:  
wise or a burden?









*“He used to be somebody,  
but now he’s grown old...”*





*“He used to be somebody,  
but now he’s grown old...”*

(Herondas, *Mimes* 6.54 [3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BC])



Marginalisation:  
women, young, old,  
slaves, poor

Ideal: adult male  
citizen



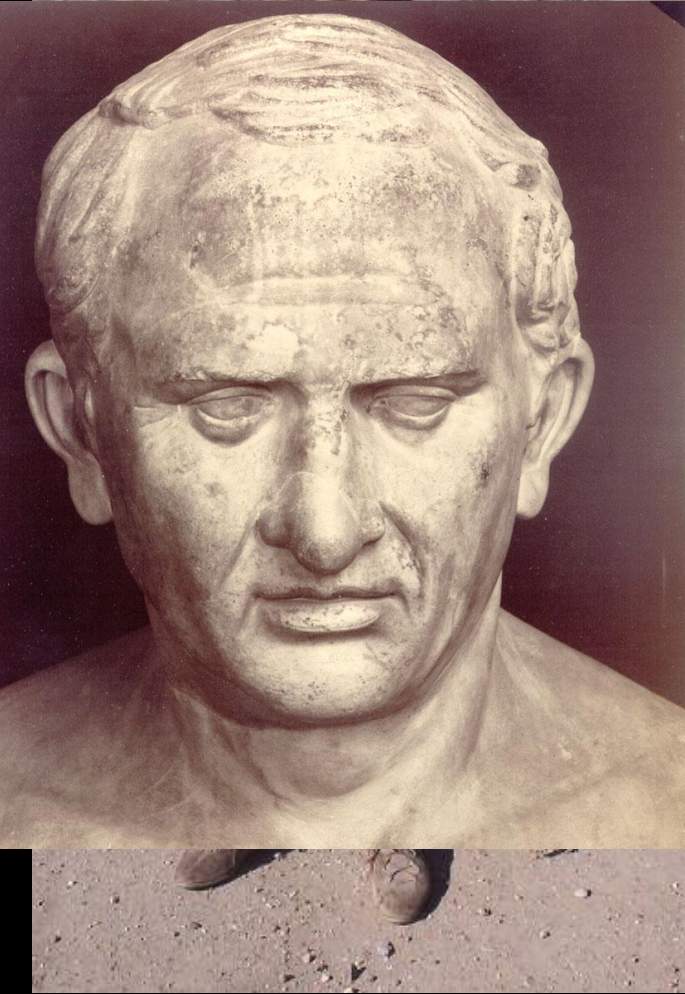




Hannibal at age 44: *senex*

Cicero at age 44: *adulescens*

Cicero at age 62: almost *senex*



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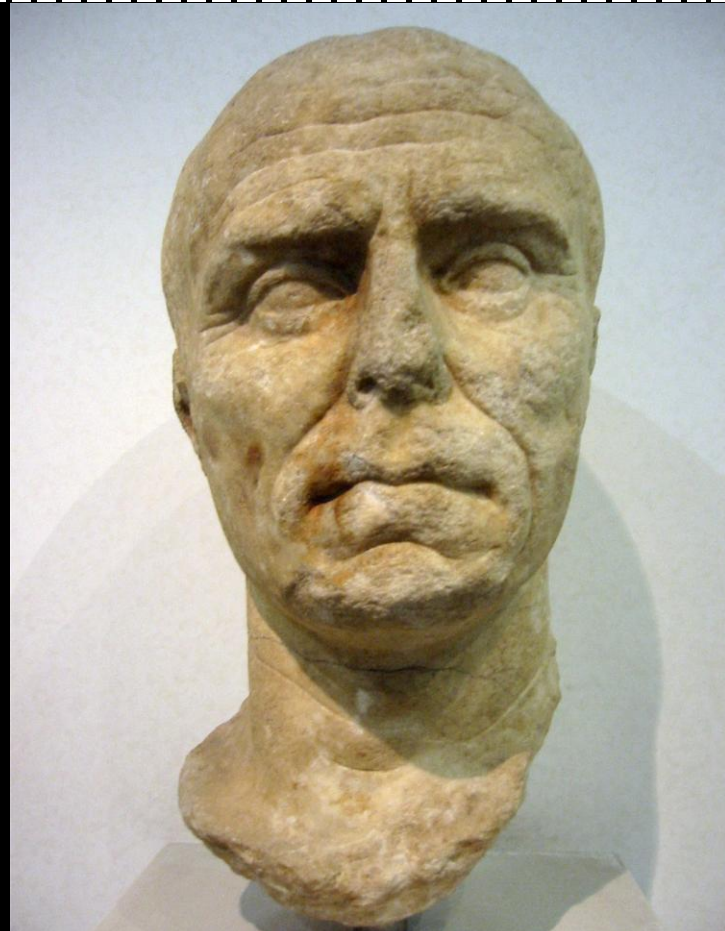
	<u>&lt;15 years</u>	<u>15-59 years</u>	<u>&gt;59 years</u>
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Ancient population	33%	60%	7%
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Modern population	19%	60%	21%
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What %  
of the population?



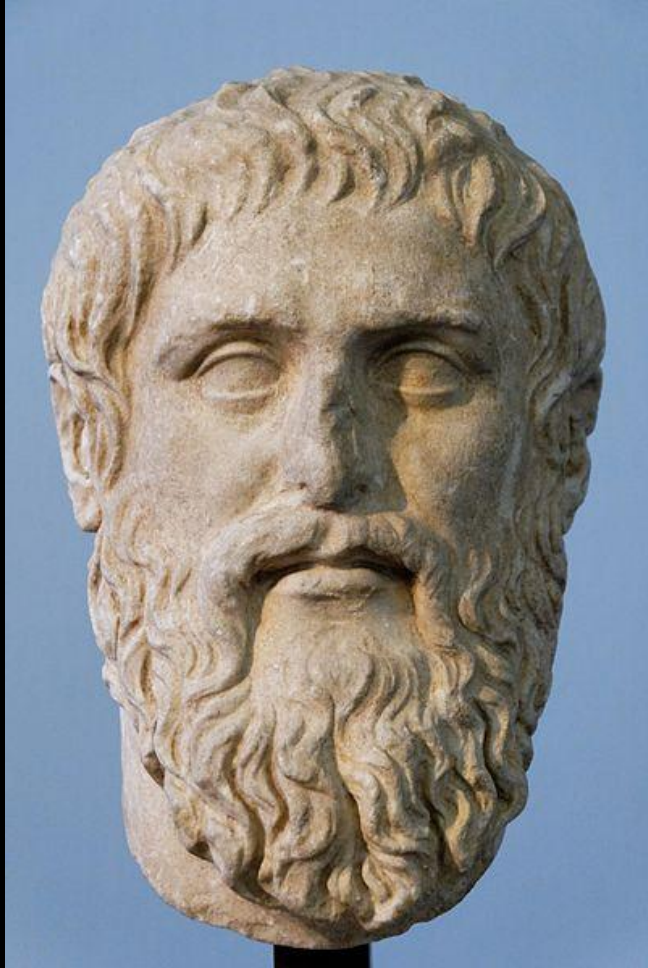
## Ancient Mediterranean societies:

- warm climates affect housing and heating needs
- small communities
- outdoor living, contact with people
- lots of children





Plato, *Hippias Maior* 291d-e:  
to be happy



For everyone and everywhere  
it is finest  
to be rich and healthy,  
and honoured by others,  
to reach old age,  
and, after providing a fine funeral  
for your deceased parents,  
to be finely and splendidly buried  
by your own children.

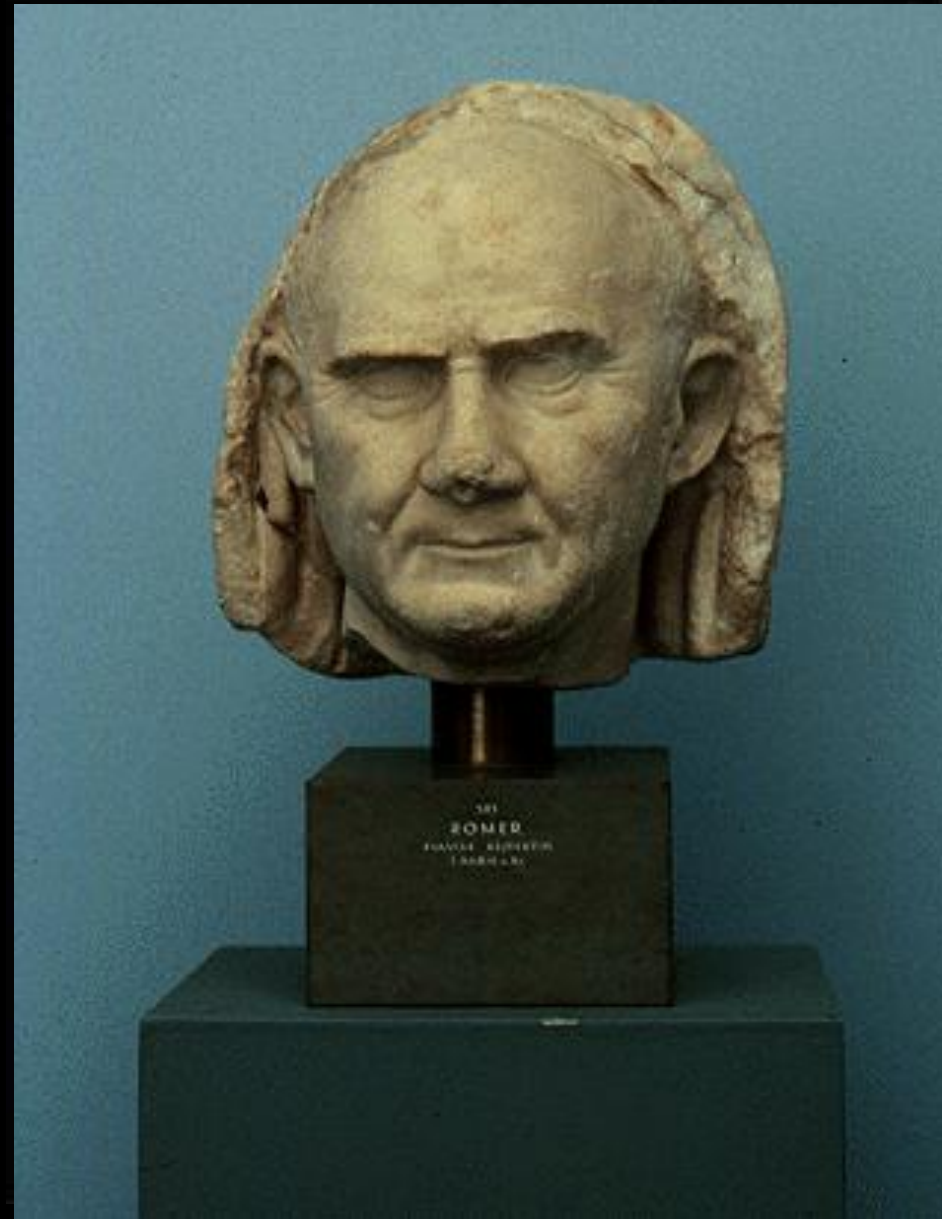
Baucis and Philemon  
Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 8.618-724

The ultimate reward:

“Since we have lived out harmonious years together,  
let the same hour take the two of us, so that I never  
have to see my wife’s grave, nor she have to bury me.”



Juvenal  
*Satire 10*  
On the vanity  
of human  
wishes  
*mens sana*  
*in corpore sano*



GREEK TERRACOTTA HEAD  
OF AN ELDERLY MAN  
ca. 3rd-1st century BC.  
1.7 inches



## Juvenal, *Satires* 10 on bereavement

If he keeps his wits intact, though, a further ordeal awaits  
The old man: he'll have to bury his sons, he'll witness  
His dear wife's end, and his brother's, he'll see the urns  
Filled with his sister's ashes. Such are the penalties  
If you live to a ripe old age..



*CIL* 8.7156 = *ILAlg.* 2.1.820 = *CLE* 512 = *CLEAfrique* 121

Numidia : Constantine / Cirta

Hic ego qui taceo versibus mea(m) vita(m) demonstro lucem clara(m) frui-  
tus et tempora summa Praecilius Cirtensi Lare argentari-  
am exhibui artem Fydes(!) in me mira fuit semper et veritas omnis om-  
ni{s}bus communis ego <c=Q>ui non misertus ubique risus luxuria(m) semper fruitus cu<m=N>  
caris amicis talem post obitum dominae Valeriae non inveni pudicae vitam cum potui  
gratam habui cu<m=N> coniuge sancta{m} natales honeste meos centum celebravi felices  
at venit postrema dies ut spiritus inania mem<b=P>ra reli(n)quat titulos quos legis vivus me(a)e  
morti paravi ut voluit Fortuna numquam me deseruit ipsa sequimini tales hic vos ex<s=O>pecto venit{a}e  
H(oc) L(ucius) P(raecilius) Fortunatus





*CIL* 8.7156 = *ILAlg.* 2.1.820 = *CLE* 512 = *CLEAfrique* 121

Numidia : Constantine / Cirta

Here I am silent, describing my life in verse.

I enjoyed a bright reputation and the height of prosperity. Praecilius by name, a native of Cirta, I was a skilled banker. My honesty was wonderful, and I always adhered to the truth; I was courteous to all men, and whose distress did I not succour? I was always happy and hospitable to my friends.

A great change came over my life after the death of the virtuous Valeria. As long as I could, I enjoyed the sweets of holy matrimony; I celebrated one hundred happy birthdays in virtue and happiness.

But the last day has arrived, as the spirit leaves my exhausted limbs. Alive I earned the titles which you read, as Fortune willed it. She never deserted me.

Follow me in like manner; here I await you. Come!

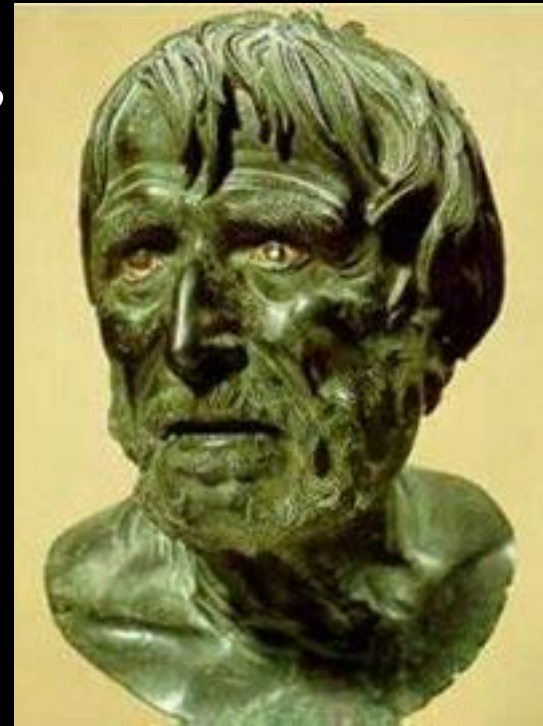
Here lies Lucius Praecilius Fortunatus.





## Seneca the Younger, *Consolation to Marcia* 19.2

In our state childlessness now confers more influence than it snatches away, and **loneliness, which used to make old age such a curse,** now makes older people so powerful that they actually feign hatred for their sons and disown their children - and thus make themselves childless by their own act.



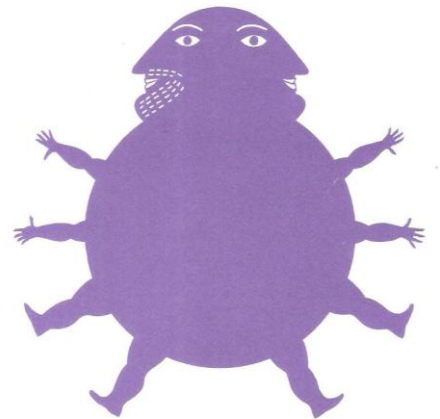
# Loneliness

- Three aspects of loneliness
  - Social deficiency
  - Subjective
  - Unpleasant



# Did the ancients experience loneliness in old age?

- Anyone can experience loneliness
- Loneliness: Multidimensional concept
  - e.g. existential loneliness
    - Aristophanes' speech in Plato's *Symposium*





# Social Isolation

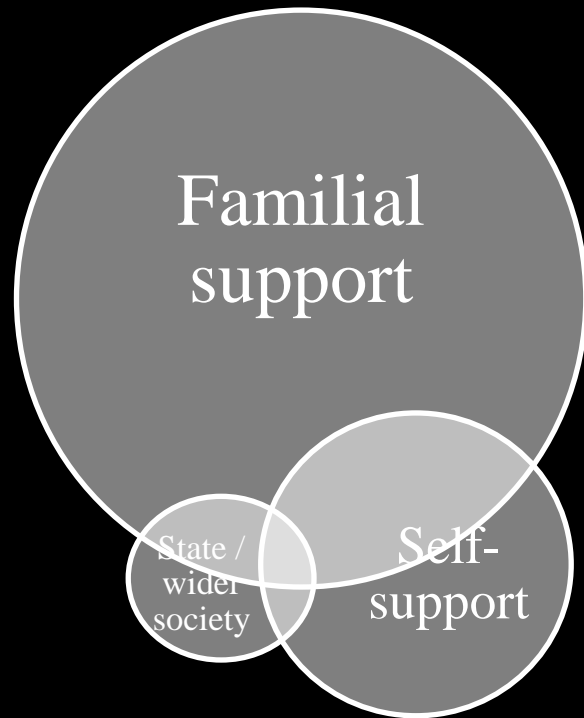
- Isolation not associated with old age
  - Juvenal
  - Aristotle
- Older Romans retained links with community
  - *Popinae*
  - Gradual nature of ‘retirement’

# Retirement in the ancient world

- What was retirement in the ancient world?
  - Gradual
  - Incomplete
  - Personal



# Support in retirement



- Support required:
  - Financial
  - Emotional / social
  - Other (e.g. medical)



# Social and Emotional Support



- Family
  - Children
    - Artemidorus on the interpretation of dreams
    - ‘Cornelia’ to Paullus
- Spouses
  - Domitius Tullus and his wife

# Friends and Peers

- *collegia funeraticia*
  - not just ‘insurance’ equivalent  
‘Benedictus’  
Christians
- Informal groups e.g. Ursus the juggler
  - Ball-players, assemble rejoicing and affectionately load the statue of your friend with flowers, violets and roses .... and with my permission pour out my dark Falernian or Setian and Caecuban wine from my proprietaral cellar to me while I am alive, and with united voice celebrate Ursus, the merry, witty, ball-playing old fellow.



# Conclusion: Were the ancients lonely in old age?



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