

Both died violent deaths—one by her own hand, the other by being buried alive, the prescribed punishment in such cases. The young man who caused Floronia to stray, Lucius Cantilius, a pontifical secretary, was so brutally flogged that he died as a result (Livy 22.57).

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## 11

### Retirement

Retirement was a roll of the dice for many older Romans. In an era in which private pensions were rare and government assistance nonexistent, many were unable to live out their golden years with gold enough to match in their savings.

#### SOME LONGEVITY RECORDS

Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* 7.48) provides some remarkable examples of very long-lived Romans:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Place of Residence</i>	<i>Age</i>
Lucius Terentius	Bononia	135
Marcus Aponius	Rimini	140
Tertulla	Rimini	137
Marcus Minucius Felix	Veleia	150
Marcus Perperna	Rome	98
Marcus Valerius Corvinus	Rome	100
Livia (not Augustus's wife)	Rome	97
Statilia	Rome	99
Terentia (wife of Cicero)	Rome	103
Galeria Copiola	Rome	104

Sammula	Rome	110
Clodia (wife of Ofilius)	Rome	115
Titus Fullonius	Bononia	150

### THE ROMANS AT THE END OF THEIR WORKING LIVES

Most Romans could not look forward to a lavish retirement lifestyle. Social Security was unknown: pension plans were rare, and those that did exist were generally inadequate. Yet the concept of a time of leisure at the end of a work-filled life appealed to many.

The kinds of questions that nag modern prospective retirees—When can I retire? Where will I retire? Can I afford it? How will I spend my time?—also confronted the ancient Romans. Then, as now, a variety of answers emerged.

Interestingly, the age of 60 was something of a milestone, the time when many Romans, especially public servants, began to shed their official duties and obligations. At that age Roman senators were permitted to retire, and citizens in general were excused, or perhaps prohibited, from voting. There was even a proverb—*sexagenarios de ponte*, “60-year-olds off the bridge!”—that referred to preventing sexagenarians from passing across the walkway (or “bridge”) that led to the polling place. (A more literal, although less likely, interpretation: throw 60-year-olds off a Tiber bridge and into the river, to drown them!)

Few Romans could look forward to an early retirement replete with a pension. Soldiers, however, were one notable exception. Under the emperor Augustus, legionnaires could retire after twenty years of service and receive a lump sum payment of 12,000 sesterces. Members of the praetorian guard—soldiers who served as imperial bodyguards and orderlies—fared better. They could retire after sixteen years and receive a payment of 20,000 sesterces.

Land was frequently given to retiring soldiers instead of money, and it is likely that many former soldiers found second careers as farmers after leaving the army.

**An Unusual Pension Plan** In the summer of 70 B.C. a remarkable trial took place in ancient Rome. Had daily newspapers existed in those days, this trial would have made headlines; it would have been accorded prime-time coverage had there been television and radio.

It seems that a certain Gaius Verres had behaved most abominably while serving as the Roman provincial governor of Sicily in the years 73 to 71. He had extorted money, stolen precious artworks, absconded with fabrics and tapestries, and taken large amounts of grain, honey, and household furnishings; in short, he had plundered the province. Upon his return to Rome, he was tried for these crimes.

The prosecutor was Marcus Tullius Cicero. For his defense, Verres hired the best known attorney of the time, Quintus Hortensius. Verres and Hortensius undoubtedly anticipated a favorable outcome, especially because the Roman government often winked at evidence of fraud and abuse in its provincial governors.

However, they had not foreseen the degree of skill and energy that Cicero would bring to the proceedings. In the opening arguments he built such a damning case against Verres that the corrupt bureaucrat skipped town before the conclusion of the trial. Verres fled to Massilia (modern Marseilles), where, it is said, he lived in comfortable retirement for some twenty-seven years, until his death in 43. His golden years were no doubt financed by his ill-gotten Sicilian wealth (Cicero *Against Verres* passim).

Seneca (4 B.C.–A.D. 65) recounts the story of one Sextus Turannius, who had worked for many years as the head of the corn supply (*praefectus annonae*), up to the age of 90; and even then, he would have stayed on the job had he not been forced into retirement by the emperor Caligula. So closely did Turannius identify life with work that he went home, laid down on his bed, and ordered his entire household to mourn him as if he had died. He kept up this odd behavior until finally the emperor rescinded his retirement orders and allowed Turannius to return to work (Seneca *On the Shortness of Life* 20; Tacitus *Annals* 11.31; Tacitus records his *praenomen* as Gaius).

A semi-legendary character with the imposing Roman name of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus underwent a rather startling metamorphosis from soldier to farmer to soldier and back to farmer. This Cincinnatus had retired to a small farm near Rome. One day (in 458 B.C.), while he was in the midst of digging a ditch, a delegation of handsomely attired Roman senators made their way across his dusty fields with a message and a request for the old man. The Roman army was under siege; no capable military leaders could be found in Rome to deal with the impending disaster. Would he, Cincinnatus, come out of retirement to organize an attempt to rescue the trapped men?

Cincinnatus dropped his spade, donned his toga, and accompanied the senators to the city, where he assumed the office of dictator. He quickly marshaled a force, marched to the scene of the entrapment, extricated the army, and returned to Rome in triumph. Sixteen days after becoming dictator, he resigned his office and retired (a second time!) to his farm (Livy *From the Founding of the City* 3.26).

In the second century A.D. the charioteer Appuleius Diocles retired from the track at age 42 after an outstanding 24-year career in which he won 1,462 races. An inscription bearing his name turned up at the fashionable little town of Praeneste (about 20 miles southeast of Rome); apparently

What Age Retirement?

Retired . . .  
Unretired . . .  
Retired Again

A Charioteer's Retirement

Diocles selected Praeneste as the place for his retirement, which was made financially secure by the millions of sesterces he had earned as a chariot driver. Presumably other successful charioteers also retired in their forties, or even their thirties, and used their often substantial winnings as their pension fund (*CIL* 14.2884).

**Gladiatorial Retirees** Gladiators who performed creditably over an unspecified period of years were given a *rudis*, a wooden sword symbolizing the completion of their service. After retiring from gladiatorial combat, some found jobs as trainers or coaches.

Others sometimes hired themselves out for special occasions. Early in his reign, the emperor Tiberius (ruled A.D. 14–37) sponsored gladiatorial shows to commemorate his father and grandfather; he induced several retired gladiators to perform. The lavish stipend that Tiberius offered these gladiators—100,000 sesterces—probably had something to do with their decision to return to the arena.

Other gladiators, however, had no interest in staging comebacks once they had retired. The poet Horace (*Epistles* 1.1.) tells of a gladiator by the name of Veianius who, upon his retirement, hung up his equipment in a shrine of Hercules, thereby rendering it inaccessible when his friends urged him to resume his career.

**He Stayed Past His Prime** Stories abound in the modern world of professional athletes who continue to try to play competitively long after their skills have declined. Quintilian relates the story of Domitius Afer, an orator who displayed the same

kind of stubbornness. Quintilian considered Afer to have been the best orator that he ever knew; and yet; in his later years Afer continued to speak in court although his eloquence had significantly diminished, a sad fact of life obvious to everyone except Afer himself. Thus, when Afer gave public speeches, some of his listeners snickered and smirked, while others blushed with embarrassment over the once great orator's verbal missteps.

Quintilian suggests that this was the point at which Afer—or any orator, for that matter—ought to retire. In retirement, he could still remain mentally active by reading, writing, and advising and instructing younger colleagues who might wish to consult him. "For what is more worthwhile than to teach that which you know well?" (*Quintilian Institutes of Oratory* 12.11).

**Not the Retirement He Expected** In his younger days, the poet Ovid (43 B.C.–A.D. 17) envisioned retiring to his familial estate, tending the house and fields, enjoying the company of his wife and friends. Even worn-out ships "retire" to the peace and quiet of the harbor, he notes, and as for old chariot race horses?

They find themselves "retired" too, in pastures, leisurely dining on meadow grass.

But pleasant days such as these did not await Ovid in his later years, which saw him exiled to the Black Sea area. He notes the irony: when young, he expected to work and struggle, thus earning a comfortable span of retirement years when he was old. But his life unfolded in precisely the opposite manner (*Ovid Tristia* 4.8).

Circumstances conspired to prevent many well-known Romans from ever enjoying a peaceful retirement, even though most of them had enough money to live out their final years in comfort and security. One of the most influential politicians in Roman history, Cato the Elder, continued to harangue the Roman senate with his thunderous oratory well after he had marked his eightieth birthday. Julius Caesar was in the midst of drafting and proposing a series of government reforms when he was struck down by assassins. Cicero's distinguished career ended ignominiously in the proscriptions of 43 B.C. Augustus long dreamt of retirement, a dream that was never to be realized; he was still on the job when he died at the age of 76.

Sometimes, the selection of a suitable place for retirement caused marital friction. The first century A.D. poet Statius addressed his wife, Claudia, in a lengthy poem in which he praised the virtues of Naples as a retirement community: a temperate climate, an unhurried lifestyle, easy access to Mediterranean resort towns, ready availability of cultural and recreational activities. Claudia, it seemed, preferred the hustle and bustle of life in Rome; a move to the more sedate Naples did not appeal to her (*Statius Forests* 3.5).

**"No" to a Neapolitan Retirement**

## ENJOYING RETIREMENT

Seneca wryly notes that people caught up in the hustle and bustle of their careers think in only vague terms of retirement. "I'll hang it up when I turn 50," they might say, or "When I'm 60, that's when I pay my last visit to the office." Living life to the fullest, he suggests, should be of greater concern (*Seneca On the Shortness of Life* 3).

Pliny the Younger recounted a typical day in the life of a former statesman named Spurrinna. This Spurrinna customarily arose early in the morning and took a 3-mile walk. He then relaxed, and occasionally did some reading, before boarding his chariot for a brisk, 7-mile ride. After that invigorating experience he walked another mile and then rested again or turned his attention to writing. According to Pliny, Spurrinna penned excellent poetry, in both Greek and Latin.

**Perambulation, Play, Poetry, Parties**

In the afternoon a swim was followed by a rigorous game of handball, activities that Spurrinna thought helped him to ward off the infirmities

that often come with old age. After bathing, he relaxed for a time before consuming a nourishing but modest dinner. He particularly enjoyed the company of dinner guests, and he frequently socialized with them far into the night.

His retirement lifestyle must have served him well, for when Pliny wrote about him, Spurrinna was in his seventy-eighth year and still going strong.

In another letter, addressed to a retired friend by the name of Pomponius Bassus, Pliny recounted the pleasant routine that Bassus enjoyed: living in an agreeable place, swimming and exercising at any time the spirit moved him, entertaining friends, reading. It seemed to Pliny entirely appropriate that a sexagenarian like Bassus, who had devoted the prime of his life to civic affairs, should in his later life rightly deserve a period of peace and quiet (Pliny the Younger *Letters* 4.23).

**Living Off the Fat of the Villa** Seneca reminisces about a retired millionaire named Servilius Vatia, who retreated to his sumptuous country villa to pass his golden years in luxurious self-absorption. Those still active in the political arena would, after suffering some setback or catastrophe, exclaim: "Oh, Vatia, you're the only one who knows how to live!" Seneca, however, claims that Vatia was better at hiding than living, and that there is a world of difference between *otium* ("retirement") and *ignavia* ("laziness"). Seneca himself would never pass by Vatia's estate without thinking *Vatia hic situs est*, "Vatia lies here" (Seneca *Moral Epistles* 55).

**A Literary Retirement** In a short letter to Atticus, Cicero implores him to prepare certain unnamed things for his (Cicero's) anticipated retirement. But Cicero does specify one pleasure to which he looked forward in retirement: a personal library.

Interestingly, this letter is dated 67 B.C. (when Cicero was 39 years of age), at least twenty years before he might be expected to consider retiring. So it appears that the prudent Cicero was planning well in advance for his hoped-for years of leisure (Cicero *Letters to Atticus* 1.7).

**Work Is Existing; Retirement Is Living!** Gaius Sulpicius Similis, a centurion whom the emperor Hadrian promoted to praetorian prefect, felt honored by that exalted rank but also a bit uneasy, as he was near retirement age. So, after holding the post for a short time, he resigned even though Hadrian wanted him to stay on. Similis, it is said, retired to a quiet life in the country. When he died seven years later, this epitaph was carved on his tombstone: "Similis lies here. He existed for a number of years; he lived for seven years" (Dio Cassius *Roman History* 69.19).

**Surprises from a Retired Soldier** In a letter to his friend Caninius Rufus, Pliny the Younger writes about Terentius Junior, a retired soldier. Pliny hints that Terentius could have enjoyed additional career advancement but instead chose to

withdraw to his country estates and a slower lifestyle. This Terentius invited Pliny to dinner; Pliny prepared for the inevitable mealtime conversation by thinking about and rehearsing the topics that he thought might interest a soldier-turned-gentleman-farmer. But he was surprised when his host initiated a scholarly exchange on Greek and Roman literary topics. Pliny was so impressed by the range and scope of Terentius's knowledge that it almost seemed that the man lived in Athens, not in an Italian country farmhouse. Pliny came away from the evening with a newfound respect for retirees of Terentius's background and breeding (Pliny the Younger *Letters* 7.25).

Tiberius Catius Silius Italicus enjoyed a distinguished career as a lawyer and provincial governor, and he also held the consulship (in A.D. 68). When he retired from public life a rich man, he devoted himself to two pursuits: acquiring property, and writing. He bought several homes in Campania and liberally furnished them with books and works of art. He also devoted much of his retirement to writing, eventually producing the longest poem (over 12,000 lines) in the Latin language: *Punica*, an epic about the Second Punic War. **A Politician's Retirement**

Plagued by ill health, he committed suicide in A.D. 101 at the age of 75 (Pliny the Younger *Letters* 3.7; cf. Martial *Epigrams* 7.63 and 11.48).

Long before his ascension to the emperorship in A.D. 14, Tiberius unexpectedly decided to withdraw from public life; the date was 6 B.C., when he was only about 35 years of age. This move was especially unusual because Tiberius was, as Suetonius puts it, "at the flood-tide of success . . . in the prime of life and health." Speculation ran rampant in Rome about the reason for Tiberius's sudden retirement; he himself said that he made the move to avoid seeming to be a threat to more direct claimants to succeed Augustus as emperor. **Early Retirement**

In any event Tiberius journeyed to Ostia, where he boarded a ship and sailed along the coast of Campania; from there he went to the island of Rhodes, where he followed an unpretentious lifestyle. Included in his routine were strolls through the local gymnasium and visits with philosophers and their students.

He remained in Rhodes for eight years until returning to Rome in A.D. 2, and "unretiring" (Suetonius *Life of Tiberius* 10-14; tr. J. C. Rolfe LCL).

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Suetonius: *Life of Tiberius*.

Tacitus: *Annals*.

## Appendix: Roman Authors

This section contains brief biographies of all ancient authors whose works were consulted in the preparation of the text. The general format: common name; formal Roman name; the author's major works, along with brief synopses; a short and perhaps little known "factoid" about the author.

### Appian (Appianus, ca. A.D. 95–ca. 165)

Place of birth: Alexandria, in Egypt.

Major work: *Roman History*, which includes accounts of the Punic wars, the second century B.C. wars in Spain, the Mithridatic wars, the Syrian wars, and the first century B.C. Roman civil wars.

Factoid: Appian's friend Marcus Cornelius Fronto wrote a (still extant) letter of recommendation on his behalf to the emperor Antoninus Pius (reigned A.D. 138–161), regarding Appian's appointment to a government administrative post (procurator). The effort succeeded.

### Apuleius (ca. A.D. 123–?)

Place of birth: Madaurus, in Africa.

Major work: *Metamorphoses*, also known as *The Golden Ass*, in which the protagonist, Lucius, is transformed into a donkey; as such, he undergoes many adventures, before ultimately being restored to human form.

Factoid: The youthful Apuleius married Pudentilla, a wealthy old widow, which laid him open to charges of using magic to induce the old woman to agree to the marriage. He defended his behavior in a still extant speech, *Apologia*.