



Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History (Ancient Society and History)

Tim G. Parkin

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Classical authors such as Cicero and Plutarch would have us believe that the elderly were revered, active citizens of ancient Rome. But upon closer inspection, it appears that older people may not have enjoyed as respected or as powerful a place in Roman society as has been supposed.

In this highly original work, Tim Parkin considers the many issues related to aging and the aged in the classical Roman world. Drawing on both his expertise in demography and his knowledge of ancient history and literature, he coaxes new insights from a variety of sources, including legal documents on the "rules of age," representations of old age in classical literature, epigraphic evidence from tombstones, Greco-Roman medical texts, and papyri from Roman Egypt. Analyzing such diverse sources, he offers valuable new views of old age?not only of men in public life but of men and women in marriage, sexual relationships, and the family.

Parkin detects a general lack of interest in old age per se in the early empire, which in itself may provide clues regarding the treatment of older people in the Roman world. Noting that privileges granted to the aged generally took the form of exemptions from duties rather than positive benefits, he argues that the elderly were granted no privileged status or ongoing social roles. At the same time they were both permitted?and expected?to continue to participate actively in society for as long as they were able. An innovative and ambitious work, *Old Age in the Roman World* paints a compelling, heretofore unseen picture of what it meant to grow old in antiquity. As a work of both social and cultural history, it broadens our knowledge of the ancient world and encourages us to reexamine our treatment of older people today.

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