


## Figures of Older Individuals and Perceptions of Old Age in Greek and Roman Mythology Antik Yunan ve Roma Mitolojisinde Yaşlı Figürler ve Yaşlılık Algısı

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### ABSTRACT

The contributions of mythical older adult figures to today's vocabulary and literature were studied by assessing the perception of aging in the axis of older adult characters in Greek and Roman mythology. The narratives about older individuals and old age were studied using the "discourse analysis" approach, and the profound effects of ideas and perceptions in mythology today were explored. Aside from those shown as physically collapsed, unhappy, and dirty, as in the Geras example, Greek and Roman mythology is rich in images of aged people; there are also individuals such as Mentor, Silenus, and Chiron who are regarded to be knowledgeable, skilled, and experienced wise men. Furthermore, characters like Tithonus, Proteus, and Mentor, whose traits inspired and contributed terminologically to numerous fields such as medicine, nursing, psychology, and educational sciences, are crucial in illustrating mythology's contributions to the modern age. Older adult characters in Greek and Roman mythology, such as Tiresias and Sbyl, rose to prominence due to their prophetic powers, demonstrating the link between old age and prophetic ability. In Greek and Roman mythology, older adult characters exhibit a wide range of complex qualities. For this reason, the older adults figures and discourse in Greek and Roman mythology contributed significantly to the studies of aging and scientific literature and revealed the origins of the aging perception in several ways. Examining this mythical discourse reveals its contributions to scientific language and the traces left in social memory.

**Keywords:** Aging, Mythology, Older Adults Figures, Perception of Old Age, Scientific Terminology

### ÖZ

Bu çalışmada Antik Yunan ve Roma mitolojisindeki yaşlı figürler ekseninde yaşlılık algısı değerlendirilerek; mitolojik yaşlı figürlerin günümüz terminolojisine ve literatürüne katkıları irdelenmiştir. Yaşlılar ve yaşlılık ile ilgili anlatılanlar "Söylem analizi" yöntemiyle irdelenmiş ve mitolojideki kavramların ve algının günümüze yoğun etkileri tartışılmıştır. Yunan ve Roma mitolojisi yaşlı figürler bakımından oldukça zengin bir kapsama sahiptir. Geras örneğinde görüldüğü gibi fiziksel olarak çökmüş, acınası ve tiksindirici olarak anlatılan figürlerin yanı sıra; bilgili, becerili ve deneyimli birer bilge olarak görülen Mentor, Silenos, Kheiron gibi kişiler de yer almaktadır. Ayrıca kendilerine atfedilen karakteristik özelliklerden dolayı tıp, hemşirelik, psikoloji, eğitim bilimleri gibi birçok bilim dalına ilham vermiş ve terminolojik olarak katkıda bulunmuş olan Tithonos, Proteus, Mentor gibi figürler de mitolojinin modern döneme katkılarını göstermesi bakımından önemlidir. Teiresias, Sibylla gibi yaşlı figürler ise kehanet yetenekleri ile ön plana çıkmışlardır. Bu durum Yunan ve Roma mitolojisinde yaşlılık ile kehanet yeteneği arasında bulunan bağı göstermektedir. Yunan ve Roma mitolojisindeki yaşlı figürler oldukça kapsamlı ve derin karakteristik özelliklere sahiptirler. Bu yüzden Yunan ve Roma mitolojisindeki yaşlı figürler ve söylem, yaşlılık çalışmalarına ve bilimsel literatüre önemli oranda katkı sağlamış ve yaşlılık algısının kökenlerini birçok anlamda gözler önüne sermiştir. Bu mitolojik diskur irdelendiğinde, gerek bilimsel terminolojiye katkıları gerekse de toplumsal bellekte bıraktığı izler gün yüzüne çıkmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Yaşlanma, Mitoloji, Yaşlı Figürler, Yaşlılık Algısı, Bilimsel Literatür

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## INTRODUCTION

Even though gerontology and geriatrics are relatively new sciences, studies, theories, and definitions of ageing have developed significantly, especially in the mid-20th century. In the light of these developments, a consensus was reached on the definition of ageing as “the increase in experience and vitality in life despite the loss of physical functionality, which is paradoxical” (1). A similar conclusion is reached when Greek and Roman mythology are examined for the phenomenon of “old age”. While old age is considered a scary and disgusting phenomenon prone to decomposition when viewed only physically, as in the example of Geras (lat. Senectus), wisdom, intuition, and experience become the main elements when approached spiritually.

As known, the term gerontology comes from the ancient Greek term “geron” (ὁ γέρων), which means “old man”. Due to the distinctive characteristics ascribed to him, Geras has served as a source of inspiration and has made significant contributions to numerous scientific disciplines, including gerontology, geriatrics, and geriatric nursing. Ageing is one of the essential topics in Greek mythology. Like many other diseases and evils, ageing was also sent by the gods in Pandora’s box as a result of Prometheus’ disobedience and giving fire to humans (2). Many older adult figures in Greek and Roman myths are given different characteristics. Both these figures and the discourse related to them significantly influenced the social and scientific perceptions.

### Geras (Lat. Senectus)

The first person who comes to mind when old age is mentioned in Greek mythology is Geras, the personalised spirit (daemons) of old age. Described as a stooped, short, and shriveled old

man, Geras is mentioned by Hesiod as the child of only Nyx (Night) through parthenogenesis (3) and by Hyginus as the child of Nyx and Erebus (4). The term ‘Parthenos’ (παρθένος), meaning ‘Virgin’, and ‘Genesis’ (γένεσις), meaning ‘Creation’, in Ancient Greek, is still used today in the sense of ‘Reproduction without Fertilisation (Parthenogenesis)’. In Hesiodos’ ‘Theogonia’, Geras, the daemon of old age, as well as many characters such as Uranos (Sky) and Pontos (Seas), emerged through parthenogenesis (3).

Geras appeared in the Greek pantheon as a pathetic figure rather than a worthy god to be prayed for and feared, giving the impression of a weak, vulnerable, wrinkled-skinned man with a cane. Different information is given only for the worship of Geras, who is referred to as a hated, disgusting, and ruthless man, in the Greek colony city of Gadeira (Cadiz) in the Strait of Gibraltar. Philostratus (5) stated that the Gadeirans, who were devoted to their religion, built an altar to Geras, and, contrary to other communities, sang hymns in honour of Thanatos (Death). Geras, who has very few representations in ancient Greek art, is generally depicted with the hero Heracles. The scene indicating that Geras, who was physically shriveled and portrayed with a walking stick in his hand, was defeated by Heracles is important in terms of showing that old age is considered a disease to be overcome.

Geras is also called “Senectus” in Roman mythology. In Virgil’s Aeneid, Aeneas depicted Senectus standing powerless in the same place with pain, sadness, revenge, fear, hunger leading to destruction and evil, disgusting poverty, sleep, and war when he descended to Dis (Hades) under the guidance of Sibyl (6). In Seneca’s tragedy called Oedipus (7), the prophet Teiresias contacted the world of the dead to find out the cause of the plague, that brought tremendous destruction to the city of Thebes, and Senectus

was depicted with revenge, anger, disease, fear, and greed in the place where Pestis (the plague) existed. This negative image in Geras' mythological representation tends to appear differently in other figures in ancient Greek and Roman mythology.

Although the concept of old age is often associated with negative connotations, as evidenced by its portrayal in various mythological narratives, it is evident that some elderly mythological figures and heroes occupy the role of highly esteemed mentors.

Apart from Geras, there are many other older adults figures in ancient Greek and Roman mythology. The Sibyl is a female figure in Greek and Roman mythology, depicted as an aged woman with prophetic abilities and wisdom. Prophets such as Sibyl and Teiresias, animal-human beings such as Silenus and Chiron of the Centaurs, heroes such as Nestor and Odysseus, and those with a relatively more ordinary life such as Tithonus and Mentor can be mentioned among the other older adults. However, categorically negative judgements about Geras were not made for other mythological older adults beings and humans. Tithonus and Mentor, among these mythological figures like Geras, have also entered the scientific literature, and their names have been used in many promising studies.

### **Tithonus and Endymion**

One of the most tragic other older adult figures in mythology is Tithonus. Eos (lat. Aurora) fell in love with Tithonus, a mortal from Troy. Eos asked Zeus to grant immortality to her beloved Tithonus, and Zeus accepted this request. However, Tithonus began to age since Eos forgot to ask for anti-aging when she was asking for immortality. While she fed Tithonus

with ambrosia, the food of the gods, in her house when he was young and dressed him wealthily, she began to dislike him when he began to show the signs of ageing, such as his hair turning gray. From that time on, her love and happiness left their place for horror. When Tithonus got weak, and his organs became dysfunctional, Eos closed him in a room, and Tithonus murmured there forever (8). This is described in the lines of Sappho (9) as follows.

“It is impossible not to age / Eos carried Tithonus with her rose-scented arms / to the end of the world / but old age caught him / his wife is immortal.”

According to some sources, Tithonus, despite his immortality, turned into a cicada that changed its skin every day after praying to get rid of the difficulties caused by ageing (10). Hence, a connection was established between the constant cry of the cicada and this myth. Indeed, it is understood in this myth that immortality is not a good thing for the mortal human species. Furthermore, as can be understood from here, it is clear that the main thing is not to live anyway, but to live in a quality way and to grow old.

In the work entitled A Homeric Hymn for Aphrodite (8), Aphrodite mentioned the love of Eos and Tithonus. After intercourse with the mortal Anchises, the goddess Aphrodite told her lover that she did not want him to be immortal and live like Tithonus. Later, Aphrodite's statements about old age provide important clues in understanding the perception of old age in ancient Greek mythology:

“Because the same cruel old age will also surround you / that relentless, cursed, sinister age falling on people / even the gods hate it.”

Today, researchers are assessing the possibility of an indefinite, if not unlimited, lifespan. Should

this idea become reality? Some researchers who study old age predict that there will be more Tithonuses, who are physically and mentally weak and deficient, and who lack the dignity of being a human (11). The Tithonus myth has also created a dilemma in this sense, and it has entered the literature in the studies on ageing as “the Tithonus Option or the Tithonus Error.” The Tithonus Error emphasizes that prolonging life expectancy refers to “getting older for a longer time and decreasing living standards.” The theory that suggests that living too long leads to deterioration in health and mental faculties, “the Tithonus Error, “has been questioned, and then it has been asserted that the aim is to prolong the lifespan under healthy conditions instead of only prolonging the lifespan. Thus, this is the purpose of the anti-ageing research. Prolonging life in a healthy way will prevent people from making the Tithonus Error (12), because the “the Tithonus Error” emphasizes a long life entirely far from the quality of life.

The story of Endymion, narrated by Apollodorus (13) in Greek mythology, also contains clues to the perception of ageing. Selene, the goddess of the Moon, fell in love with the shepherd Endymion. Zeus, who liked their eternal love, which was constantly renewed, told Endymion that he could fulfill his wish. Endymion said that he wished to remain in a youthful and immortal sleep. Endymion’s desire for immortality, in addition to not growing old, differs from the case of Tithonus in this respect. Hence, Tithonus had immortality but became so old that he lost his vital functions.

### **Proteus and Nereus**

Proteus and Nereus, the prophetic gods of the sea, are also figures depicted as mature adults (3,13). Proteus has influenced many areas such as art and science from ancient times to the present

day and has made significant contributions to the terminology. Old Proteus, son of Poseidon (13), depicted as a shepherd of seals and other sea creatures (14), has a colourful personality and unique characteristics. One of the most exciting stories about this old sea god, who knows everything, including the past and the future, and who continuously changes shape to avoid answering questions, is what he experienced with Menelaus, who came to Egypt with his wife Helene after the Trojan War. Menelaus and his wife Helene, who had come to Egypt after the war, consulted Proteus to find out how to get to Sparta, their country. When Menelaus and the others held Proteus tight to get answers to his questions, Proteus took on many shapes such as a lion, a dragon, a leopard, a pig, water, and a tree with branches. However, when Menelaus and his friends held him tight, Proteus gave up and explained how to return to his homeland (14) Proteus, the strong sea elder, has inspired many scientific disciplines in modern times, from psychology to medicine, and has facilitated the naming of some scientific terms with his unique characteristics. Proteus syndrome, which is used to explain the overgrowth of any organ or limb in the body, Amoeba Proteus, a type of amoeba, Proteus Vulgaris and Proteus Mirabilis as types of bacteria, and the concept of the Proteus Effect used to explain those with a change in behaviors according to the avatars used in the virtual media, indicate how the original characteristics of Proteus have contributed to the scientific terminology. In Plato’s “Dialogues”, the term Proteus was used by Socrates to describe Ion, who avoided arguing with him. Since then, it has also been used for those who “always change their minds and fit into every mold.” Nereus, who can change shape like all the other sea gods, is also considered wise. He is the eldest child of Gaia and Pontus, the husband of Doris, the daughter of Oceanus, and the father of the mermaid Nereids.



In *Faust* (1808 - 1809), Goethe describes him as headstrong, obnoxious, and disgusting and expresses that he is respected for his outstanding ability of prophecy (15). However, Hesiod (3) refers to Nereus as a benevolent, honest, and mild-mannered “Fatherly God.” Heracles consulted Nereus to find the Hesperides’ garden. On the other hand, Nereus took different animal shapes not to answer, but Heracles did not leave him and reached the information he wanted.

### **Mentor**

The origin of the word “mentor”, which is used in many languages to mean “guiding - guidance,” is also based on Greek mythology. The character of Mentor, who is mentioned several times in Homer’s “*Odyssey*”, is Odysseus’ an old and loyal friend. While Odysseus went to the Trojan War, he entrusted him with his house in Ithaca and asked him to guide his son Telemachus (14). Originally used as a name, the word was later used in the literature as “a person who guides people with little experience and knowledge”.

### **Silenus**

Another important older adult figure in ancient Greek mythology is Silenus, the rural god of drunkenness and wine-making. Older satyrs are called Silenus, whereas an intelligent and wise character is also named Silenus. Silenus, a flat-nosed, big-belly, and drunk, is shown as a wise elder who brought up the god Dionysus. The old Silenus, whose cleverness and wisdom are legendary, even attracted the attention of the Phrygian King Midas. King Midas got Silenus drunk, thinking he knew the secrets of the universe, and asked him what was best for man. Silenus answered this question: “The best thing for man is never to be born. The second best thing is to die immediately!” (16). Referring to this tirade, Nietzsche said that the masters of

the arts of appearance turned pale and paled in ecstasy in the face of art that tells the truth and that the wisdom of Silenus reacted against the cheerful Olympians as “What a pity!” (17). The last words of Socrates, who is often compared with Silenus, are similar to the statements of Silenus. Socrates told his friend Crito: “We owe Asclepius a cock, do not forget to pay this debt” (18). As Silenus told Midas, Socrates interpreted death as “the healing of life.” Plato found a resemblance between Socrates and the Silenes, both physically and in terms of inner wisdom. He said that when the Silenes’ sculptures in the sculpture shops were divided into two, there were small statues of gods in them, and he stressed that Socrates also had inner wisdom like the Silenes (19). Rabelais (20) also expressed many ridiculous creatures such as harpies and satyrs on the Silene boxes, which contained many rare medicines such as balsam, amber, musk, and cardamom. He emphasized the resemblance between Silenus and Socrates. He asserted that if Socrates, an ugly, mad-faced, bull-eyed, rude peasant disguised and a drunk person with a pointed nose, were opened up like the Silene boxes, a superhuman understanding, unseen virtues, endless self-confidence, unbelievable disdain, people struggled for would appear.

### **Prophets: Tiresias and Sibyl**

Teiresias and the Cumaean Sibyl, who are prophets in mythology, are also among the characters usually portrayed as older adults. It is emphasized that Teiresias of Thebes, the most famous blind prophet in Greek mythology, had seven lives. If human life is calculated as seventy years, Teiresias lived an average of five hundred years. There are various legends about his blindness and knowledge. According to one of these legends, Zeus and Hera asked Teiresias, who lived as both a man and a woman, whether

a woman or a man enjoyed sexual intercourse more. When Teiresias said that the woman enjoyed it nine times more than the man, Hera got angry and punished him with blindness. Zeus granted him an infallible knowing ability and seven lifetimes (21). Even after his death, Teiresias was stated as a figure whom Odysseus consulted about his journey by descending into Hades on the advice of the sorceress Circe. Teiresias' advice made it easier for Odysseus to reach Ithaca, his homeland (14). Sophocles' tragedies entitled *Antigone* and *King Oedipus*, Euripides' *Bacchae*, and *Phoenician Women* are among the most important works in which Teiresias stands out for his knowledge.

In Greek and Roman mythology, wise women are generally called Sibyls, but the most famous Sibyl in ancient history is the Cumaean Sibyl in the Campania region in Italy. The Cumaean Sibyl is often depicted as an older woman with unflinching prophecy and wisdom. The belief that the best prophets emerge from older women is an ancient one (22). In particular, Michelangelo's description of the Sistine Chapel shows how Sibyl is perceived as an older adult figure. The most important evidence that she was considered wise is what she experienced with Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. According to the legend, Sibyl offered to sell him a nine-volume compilation of prophecies to Tarquinius Superbus. When the king found the price too high and rejected it, Sibyl burned the three volumes of the books and set the same price for the rest. After being rejected by Tarquinius once more, she burned three more volumes and asked for the same price for the last three volumes. Then, the king bought the books (23). Edward Young emphasized Sibyl and her books while talking about worldly wisdom, and expressed that as the number of days a person will live decreases, the value of his remaining days increases (24).

“As earthly orders resemble the leaves of Sibyl,  
The days of the good man meet Sibyl's books,  
The price increases continuously, as the number  
decreases.”

Regardless of how they were obtained, the books of Sibyl were consulted from the early history of Rome for prophecy and to calm the anger of the gods during earthquakes and epidemics. Under the influence of these books, the Roman people were able to cope with a series of disasters and wars (25).

Owing to the additions specific to the Christian additions to the Sibyl's books, the Cumaean Sibyl and Sibyls were equated with the Old Testament prophets and are often shown side by side with these prophets in the Christian art. The Cumaean Sibyl also held an important position in Christianity, as she was seen by some Christians as the person who heralded the prophet Jesus (26). In another legend about the Cumaean Sibyl, the god Apollo told Sibyl that he would fulfill all her wishes if she became his lover. Sibyl then replied that she wanted to live as much as the amount of sand in a dustpan. However, just as in the myth of Eos and Tithonus, she forgot to ask for perpetual youth. It is said that the Cumaean Sibyl, who grew very old, lived in a bottle hanging from the ceiling of her cave and answered those who asked her what she wanted as “I want to die” (27). This occurrence truly brings up a predicament similar to the “Tithonus Error,” and it is also significant in demonstrating the legendary view that getting old brings sadness and a longing for death. Pausanias (10.12.8) narrated that a jar containing her bones was shown to the people of Cumae in the Second Century AD (28).

### **Heroes (Laertes, Nestor, Priam, Anchises)**

The heroic myths and epics of a society serve as an important pedagogical tool for the members

of that culture. These narratives not only provide thrilling narratives but also impart invaluable insights into the appropriate attitudes, behaviours, and values espoused by the society in question. The heroes of these myths serve as exemplars for the people, exhibiting the virtuous qualities that are esteemed and valued within their culture. By undertaking great deeds that benefit their society, these heroes achieve a kind of immortality, becoming eternal symbols of heroism for others to emulate. The concept of hero worship, which is unique to Greek mythology, refers to the reverence given to heroes and demigods who are seen as intermediaries between gods and humans. Mythology and hero worship are closely intertwined, with heroic narratives acting as the embodiment of cultural beliefs and ideas, making them everlasting (29).

Among the heroes in ancient Greek mythology, some live for a long time according to different traditions and are depicted as older adults. Laertes and Nestor can be stated among these heroes. When Odysseus, who went to the Trojan War, did not return, his father, the old Laertes, was in great sorrow and left his palace in Ithaca and began to live in poverty. While coming back from Troy, Odysseus came across his mother Anticlea on his journey to Tartaros (the land of the dead), and she explained to her son the great pain suffered by Laertes due to his longing for his child. Laertes' grief is so tremendous that he completely loses the power to resist the rude attitudes, disrespect, and consumption of his property by the pretenders in the Ithaca Palace. When Odysseus arrived at Ithaca, he could not stop crying when he observed his father's condition, which had collapsed from old age and was in deep anguish. Laertes became halder when he saw his son Odysseus (14). This situation is significant in terms of demonstrating the extraordinary life energy provided to the Older

adults by knowing that their children are healthy, or in other words, meeting their children in the semiological sense.

The most original and most comprehensive ancient archetype of the heroes in Greek mythology is Nestor, the king of Pylos. The profile of Nestor drawn in the epics of Iliad and Odyssey is so impressive that the term "Nestor" is still used today as a name meaning both "wise teacher, counsellor" and "wise and old counsellor" (30). Nestor was an elderly man who lived a very long life and reached an advanced age along with his good mental and physical strength. Due to his vast knowledge, experience, and personal charisma, he is listened to and respected by everyone; therefore, he plays a crucial role in organizing other kings after abduction of Helene, resolving internal conflicts during the Trojan War, and mediating in many events. Even Agamemnon, the commander of the Achaeans during the Trojan War, admired Nestor so much that he uttered the following words (31).

"Old man, how brave you are, if only this strength was in your legs, if only your knees kept up with your bravery. However, the inevitable old age gnaws you. I wish there were another old man in your shoes, and you could mingle with the boys."

After the Trojan War Nestor returned to his country Pylos without any issues. Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, came to Pylos to find out what had happened to his father, who had not returned from Troy. Nestor, who had grown very old, had the same characteristics. He told Telemachus his Trojan memories and guided him on the path he would follow (14).

The portrait drawn by Priam, the old king of Troy, during the Trojan War is important in indicating the father-son love of the period, the importance

of funerals, and the sacrifice that could be made for the child. In the Iliad, the association of elderly, who could not participate in the war due to their age, led by Priam, is described as follows:

“They founded the association of elders around Priam / Old age restrained them from the war / But they were men speaking very well / In the forest, just like cicadas singing around the trees / The Trojan Noble were sitting in the tower like this.” (31).

Priam exhibits a very virtuous, wise, and mature attitude towards Helene, who caused the beginning of the Trojan War, and during the war. After his son, Hector, was killed by Achilles and his body was detained, he came to Achaia at the cost of losing his life and asked for his son’s body. Priam told Achilles that he had brought up fifty children, lost them one by one, and told him to think of his father, who was on the brink of ominous old age. Priam told Achilles that his father (Peleus) was also on the brink of ominous old age, but at least he had a living son. Achilles said that he was distant from his country and could not look after his father, who was in his forties. This tirade was so passionate that Achilles’ warrior tears welled up in his eyes, and his heart melted; she addressed Priam as “the godly old man” and returned Hector’s body after washing it (31). The name Priam also turned into an aphorism describing the person who experienced the peaks of both pain and happiness. Another incident that shows how tragic the loss of a child and grandchild can be in mythology is the cry of Peleus after losing his grandson Neoptolemus (son of Achilles):

“How do you force the poor me as I approach the end of my life, the fate! How could you separate my only son’s only son from me!”(32).

The hero Aeneas, who was the ancestor of the Romans according to various sources, but his

father, old Anchises, who was lame or blind, set out on his back from Troy in flames to the lands promised to him, to Italy, after the war was lost (33,34). After the death of his father, Anchises, Aeneas met him in Hades. His father showed Aeneas the souls of the Roman kings and made predictions about Rome, which indicates the bond between wisdom and old age (6).

Aeneas, the son of Aphrodite and the Trojan prince Anchises, played a significant role in Homer’s Iliad and served as an inspiration to the renowned classical Latin poet Virgil. Aeneas is regarded as a seminal figure in Roman mythology, acquiring particular prominence during the Augustan era. Portrayed as one of the heroes of the Trojan War, he plays a crucial role in the founding myths of Rome. Following the conclusion of the Trojan War, Aeneas, accompanied by his father, son, and a select group of Trojan allies, departed from Troy with the Palladium, a sacred relic of great significance. Similarly, Aeneas and the Trojans undertake a lengthy and perilous maritime journey, ultimately reaching the Italian peninsula. Subsequently, they establish the city of Lavinium, having overcome a series of challenges. In the account provided by the Roman historian Livy, following Aeneas’s demise in the Numicus River, he is worshipped as Jupiter Indiges at the behest of his mother Venus. Aeneas’s son Iulus (Ascanius) proceeded to found the city of Alba Longa. From this point onwards, the city is ruled by twelve kings until its legendary founder, Romulus. Aeneas, an important figure from the Trojan War, has become a symbol in the formation of the collective consciousness of societies throughout history. He holds a special significance within Roman society, representing its shared historical and cultural identity. Homer’s narration of Aeneas’s destiny in the Iliad shaped the perception of Aeneas among the Romans (6, 33, 34).



### Other Characters Depicted as Older adults

Besides the characters mentioned above and who have left great traces until today, the wise centaur Chiron and Charon, known as the boatman of the dead in the underworld, are also depicted as the older adults. Chiron (Lat.), shown as the wisest and fairest centaur by Homer” (29), is also depicted as an older adults person in many mythological sources. Chiron has an entirely different profile even though centaurs (horses below the waist and humans on the upper portion) are traditionally associated with animalistic impulses and barbarism. Centaurs are mentioned as the children of Ixion and Nephele, and differently, Chiron is written in sources as the son of Cronus and Philyra (13). Chiron, trained by Apollo and Artemis, was assumed as a unique healer, a prophet, and a wise person; he taught important mythological characters such as the god of health and medicine, Asclepius, Achilles, Jason, and Aristaeus. Additionally, he treated the eye of the bird named Phoenix, which appeared in many mythologies, blinded by his father (13). Chiron was shown as the oldest centaur and given the rank of a wise man who was dominant in many sciences, which embodies an important detail in showing the parallelism between old age and wisdom.

In Roman mythology, Hades is the god of the underworld. Hades is depicted as invisible, wearing a helmet and a bident. He is not evil, but rather capricious, true to his word, and altruistic. In the underworld, the journey of the dead begins with boarding a boat on the river Styx, guided by the boatman Kharon (35).

Charon, the boatman of the River Acheron in the Underworld country, is also one of the mythological figures depicted among the older adults. Charon, who is stingy, rude, uncompromising, and harsh-tempered, takes

the souls brought by Hermes Psychopompos (Hermes the Spirit Bearing) to the other side of the River Acheron. Charon would get obols (coins) for this transport. Therefore, an obol (coin) was put in the mouth of the deceased (6). The depiction of the boatman as old in the misty, dark, and scary environment of the underworld exhibits the relationship between old age and death.

The relief of Kharon the Hell Boatman is regarded as one of the most ancient and aesthetically pleasing examples of figurative art in Anatolia. The monument is situated 200 metres to the north of the Cave Church of Saint Pier and was constructed during the Seleucid period. The relief of Kharon was erected with the intention of combating the plague that had spread to the city of Antioch. However, the bust, which was constructed on Mount Silpius, was left unfinished following the conclusion of the epidemic. The bust was carved into the bedrock and adorned with a headdress known as a ‘crown’. Although the figure’s face is damaged, it is thought to be bearded and is depicted with a lily-shaped basket on its right side. Additionally, two figures are visible on his left shoulder, believed to be a woman and a child. Notably, Kharon’s face is oriented northward, offering a comprehensive view of the city of Antioch (35, 36).

### CONCLUSION

When the Older adults figures and the discourse on old age in Ancient Greek and Roman mythology are examined, unique information that has left important traces today becomes prominent. Old age is considered a hated and disgusting process in these myths when evaluated in a purely physical framework. This perception can be seen especially in the descriptions of Geras and Tithonus. However, there are completely different perceptions and arguments

in the examples where aging is evaluated as a whole.

Skills such as wisdom, the ability of prophecy, mentoring, intuition, and experience were signs of old age. A critical examination of this mythological discourse reveals the significant contributions of the mentor figure to the advancement of the nursing discipline in the field of health and the positive outcomes of patient care. Additionally, it elucidates the impact of this figure on the evolution of scientific terminology and the imprint it has left on social memory. The implementation of mentoring programmes within hospital settings is contingent upon the establishment of a dynamic relationship between an experienced nurse and a less experienced nurse. The global shortage of nurses represents a significant challenge for healthcare systems worldwide. One of the significant contributing factors to the shortage of nurses is the high rate of attrition from the nursing workforce. The training and adaptation of new hires to replace employees who leave the institution is a time-consuming process, and significant job losses occur in the interim. It is estimated that the financial loss to the institution of nurses leaving their posts is between 90% and 200% of the employee's annual salary. Consequently, it is the responsibility of managers to ensure that talented employees remain in their posts. One strategy for achieving this is the implementation of a mentoring programme (37).

Moreover, the figures and their characteristics in Greek and Roman mythology have made important etymological contributions to modern period science. Many older adult figures, such as Geras, Mentor, Tithonus, Nestor, and Proteus, Aeneas are shown with very comprehensive and unique attributes, and as a consequence, many disciplines of science and diseases have been named after them in modern times. Their names

inspire some of the terms used in social life. Aeneas' journey after the Trojan War and his arrival in Italy played an important role in shaping Rome's historical and cultural awareness, and Aeneas was depicted as the ancestor of Romulus and Augustus. In this scope, an in-depth analysis of the older adults figures in Greek and Roman mythology is of great significance when their effects on modern periods are considered.

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