

2015 March Madness Ancient Author Bios

Apuleius

The 2nd century writer published, among other works, the *Metamorphoses*, the *Apologia*, and the *Florida*. He was acquitted of accusations that he used magic to induce his wife Pudentilla to marry him.

Augustine

Born in the 4th century at Thagaste, this philosopher, author of the autobiographical masterpiece the *Confessions*, viewed Catholicism as the “Divine Philosophy.” He is the only Latin philosopher to fail to master Greek.

Bede

Born in the late 7th century, Bede is best known as a monk and the author of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. He also wrote several school treatises, including one on Latin meter that was popular until the Renaissance.

Boethius

Arriving in this world at the close of the 5th century, Boethius authored several commentaries and treatises, translations of Aristotle, and musical writings. He was executed after his arrest for implications in a senatorial conspiracy.

Caesar

Born in 100 BCE and assassinated in 44, Caesar recorded his own adventures of crossing the Rubicon and conquering the Gauls, among many others. He is often depicted wearing a garland to cover his receding hair line.

Cato the Elder

This dominant political figure hails from the 3rd century BCE. He has been called the “virtual founder of Latin prose literature,” and he expressed great hostility toward all things Greek. He found himself in court frequently, playing the role of prosecutor, defendant, and witness.

Catullus

The neoteric poet, living near the end of the Roman Republic, was at the center of radical social change. At the end of his brief life he left behind a corpus of 114 poems of varying lengths and meters. Owing to his embrace of Hellenistic culture, his language acquired a facility previously unknown to Rome.

Cicero

Cicero, born at the close of the 2nd century BCE, was a famous orator with several collections of rhetoric, poems, philosophical works, and speeches. He built an immediate reputation at 25 when he conducted his first case, successfully, in defense of sex.

Erasmus

Born in the middle of the 15th century CE, Erasmus published 60 editions of a book of Latin quotes, letters, and most notably the *Encomium Moriae*. Though facts about his life are uncertain, he is believed to be the illegitimate son of a priest.

Horace

Born at the end of the Republic and brought up through the beginning of the Empire, Horace wrote many epodes, odes, and satires, as well as several volumes of epistles. While in Athens he joined the army of Brutus as a *tribunus*.

Hrotswitha

Hailing from the 10th century CE, Hrotswitha wrote eight legends in verse, two historical epics, and six plays in rhythmic prose. She goes by the nickname “the German Sappho.”

Juvenal

Though debated, Juvenal is believed to have been alive and writing his *Satires* at the early part of the 2nd century CE. He exhausted the possibilities of angry satire by his second book, so he had to try a new approach in the latter three books, assuming a calmer persona.

Lactantius

Hailing from North Africa, the 3rd century CE Christian apologist wrote numerous works on various topics, though only his religious writings survive. He came to be known as the Christian Cicero.

Livy

Living in the middle of the 1st century BCE and through the reign of Augustus, the historian covered the history of Rome from its foundation to 9 BCE in 142 books. Though he was no spokesman for Augustus’s regime, and even though he only regarded the rule as necessary, he and the emperor were great friends.

Lucan

Though he lived a brief life in the middle of the 1st century CE, Lucan established himself as a prolific writer, authoring many titles, epigrams, and the epic *De bello civili*. Lucan’s epic continuously alludes to the *Aeneid* so that he might construct his work as an “anti-*Aeneid*.”

Lucilius

Born in the early 2nd century BCE, Lucilius wrote a collection of satirical verse that exists now only in fragments. Often he attacked his enemies by name, parodied Stoicism, and denounced gluttony. Some consider him the archetypal master of the genre.

Lucretius

The details of the Epicurean poet's life are limited, though many place him in the early 1st century BCE. He authored the six-book epic *De rerum natura*. He is praised for his innate ability to ally philosophy with poetry.

Martial

Born on the Spanish peninsula in the 1st century CE, the Roman poet published several books of epigrams and poems. Meeting little financial reward for his success, he was the exemplary starving artist of ancient Rome.

Nepos

The early Latin biographer hails from the late 2nd and early 1st century BCE. He aimed to bring the historical figures of Rome to a wider audience. Some considered him to be an "intellectual pygmy."

Ovid

The Roman poet brought to elegy what Vergil brought to epic with his many works, among them the *Metamorphoses* and *Ars Amatoria*. *Carmen* and *error* led to his banishment to an island on the Black Sea of wretched climate during the rule of Augustus.

Persius

Persius lived a brief life in the mid-1st century CE. He wrote six concentrated satires concerned with inner, philosophical freedom that provoked mixed reactions, from violence to praise. All Romans, he reveals, have asses' ears.

Petronius

Author of the *Satyricon*, a collection of lubricious stories and societal parodies, he was not widely celebrated for his work in antiquity. He was forced to suicide in 66 CE.

Plautus

Of the 130 works attributed to him, 21 are agreed to be by this comic playwright, who hails from the late 3rd to the early 2nd century BCE. His plays contained prostitutes and transvestites, puns and music, and continued to be performed long after his death. Having lost the money he earned in some theatrical employment in a business venture, he picked up work on a mill.

Pliny the Younger

The writer, brought up by his uncle, lived most of his life in the 1st century CE. He published nine books of letters covering social, domestic, judicial, and political events. His plays contain both comedic and musical elements. His are the earliest Roman records to survive complete.

Propertius

Best known as a love poet, Propertius, hailing from the mid-1st century BCE, published four books in his lifetime. Much of the content follows an affair with a mistress named Cynthia. Some Romans considered him to be the most refined and elegant elegist.

Quintilian

The Roman rhetorician lived and died in the 1st century CE. He published several volumes on rhetoric, oration, and speeches and a piece on the corruption of eloquence. In his 20 years teaching and tutoring, he numbered Pliny the Younger and the great-nephews of Domitian among his pupils.

Sallust

The Roman historian hails from the 1st century BCE. His works consist of two historiographical monographs and an annalistic work. He was expelled from the senate for immorality and later, as a praetor, was charged with malpractice.

Seneca

Seneca was a talented orator, statesman, diplomat, financier, and writer, among other roles, who lived through the start of the 1st century CE. He has five surviving works of dialogues, philosophical works, satires, and poetic tragedies. He was forced to commit suicide for alleged participation in an unsuccessful conspiracy.

Stattius

A 1st century CE Roman poet, he is the author of the epic the *Thebaid*, concerning the war between the sons of Oedipus over Thebes; the incomplete *Achilleid*, a biography of Achilles; and 32 poems, mostly dealing with social concerns. Though a popular poet since his youth, he suffered a mortifying defeat at the Capitoline games in 90 CE.

Suetonius

Known for writing “truthful” biographies (as opposed to the eloquent style of other known biographers), Suetonius comes from the late 1st century CE. He could quote, verbatim, his sources for biography in both Greek and Latin.

Sulpicia

One of only two women represented on the Latin side of the bracket, Sulpicia is best known for one surviving fragment, a rare example of married eroticism. The Latin poet Martial compares her to the Greek poet Sappho.

Tacitus

The Latin historian, born in 56 CE, did not publish his first work, a biography of his father-in-law, until 98. The rest of his corpus includes other historical pieces and dialogues.

Terence

The early Roman playwright lived a short life in the mid-2nd century BCE. All six of his plays survive. His works remained prominent in the European curriculum until the 19th century.

Tibullus

The 1st century BCE poet had three volumes of elegies in his corpus. His works covered love and rustic charms, honored his patron Messalla, and avoided mythology. He is considered the most refined and elegant of the elegists by some, a handsome dandy by others.

Vergil

Born in 70 BCE, Vergil is most known for his epic, the *Aeneid*, though he also authored the *Georgics* and the *Eclogues*. In his later years he set out on a journey to Greece where he planned to make final edits on his epic and retire to philosophize, only to turn back, fall ill, and die shortly after in 19 BCE. He wanted to have the *Aeneid* burned upon his death.

Aeschylus

Born in the 6th century BCE, Aeschylus wrote some 70–90 plays, of which only seven survive. His extant works display much variety in the way they were written and often focus on situations and events, rather than character.

Apollodorus

The 2nd century BCE Athenian published works covering periods of history and philosophical schools, rational accounts of Greek religion, and a commentary on the Homeric *Catalogue of Ships*. He is considered the last of the intellectual giants in Alexandria.

Appian

The Greek historian came out of the 1st century CE, just before the Jewish uprising. His books, 24 in all, cover history ethnographically, dealing with the peoples as Rome conquered them. Due to his interest in administration and finance, he provides more social and economic details than most of his contemporary historians.

Aristophanes

Living most of his life in the 5th century BCE, this Attic playwright left behind eleven extant plays, though the titles of an additional 32 lost works are known. No class, age group, or profession was safe from his satirizing parody. He is considered the greatest poet of Old Attic Comedy.

Aristotle

With his parents having died when he was still young, the 4th century BCE philosopher moved to Athens and studied at Plato's academy until the time of his mentor's death. His works cover logic, nature, ethics, art, politics, and just about everything in between. He married his adopted daughter, Pythias.

Callimachus

Callimachus comes from the early 3rd century BCE. A poet and a scholar, he published four books of elegies, several iambics, epigrams, and other poetic works, as well as several works of prose, amounting to a total of 800 works. Preferring shorter works, he wrote, "A big book equals a big evil."

Demosthenes

Considered the greatest Athenian orator, the 4th century BCE speaker studied rhetoric and legal process at a young age. Subject matter for his speeches includes guardianship, maritime loans, and trespass. Demosthenes has been seen as both the solitary champion of liberty and the opponent of progress.

Dio Cassius

Born in the mid-2nd century CE, this Greek senator also composed an 80-book history of Rome from the city's foundation until his death in 229. He worked for a short while with dreams and portents presaging the accession of Septimius Severus.

Euclid

The Greek mathematician, believed to have lived from the late 4th to the mid-3rd century BCE, published works on many mathematical subjects, including numerical theory, geometry, and irrational numbers. Nothing is known of his life aside from some useless inferences from antiquity.

Euripides

The Athenian tragic playwright hails from the 5th century BCE. His corpus includes some 90 plays, among them *Medea*, *Electra*, and *Iphigenia at Aulis*. His last theatrical victory was won posthumously.

Galen

In addition to having an eclectic philosophical career, he was also productive as an anatomist and physiologist, and even rose from gladiator physician to a court physician to Marcus Aurelius. He was driven out of Rome by hostile competitors, or by fear of the plague.

Herodotus

There is little known about the ancient Greek historian though his long historical narrative was well known by 425 BCE. Most of his information is derived from a local, or familial, oral tradition. Considered a storyteller by some, and a liar by others.

Hesiod

He is one of the oldest known Greek poets and is often coupled with Homer. Three epics of his survived complete, including the *Theogony*, though there are other lost poems attributed to him. He once won a tripod for a song at a funeral.

Hippocrates

A famous physician of ancient Greece, he is believed to be a contemporary of Socrates. With speculation surrounding his contributions to medicine, he is often considered “a name without a work.”

Homer

The epic poems attributed to him, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, are dated to about the second half of the 8th century BCE. Many scholars believe the bard to have been illiterate.

Isocrates

Born in the latter part of the 5th century BCE, Isocrates was an Athenian orator of central importance. He published many of his speeches and treatises. He lacked the confidence necessary to address a large audience.

Longus

The Greek writer, to whom the four books of the *Pastoral Story of Daphnis and Chloe* are attributed, miniaturized and rusticated the standard novel with his work. For his vivid and convincing detail, he is considered among the top Greek novelists.

Lucian

The 2nd century CE writer produced varying works in Greek, from comic dialogues to philosophy, from essays to racy novellas. He was known to the philosopher Galen for writing fabricated sayings and expressions to expose the ignorance of contemporary sophists and grammarians.

Lysias

An orator of Attic Greek, he is believed to have been born in the 5th century and to have died in the 4th century BCE. Of some 130 titles, 34 published speeches survive. He and his brother were arrested by the Thirty Tyrants to confiscate their property, and though he escaped, his brother was executed.

Meleager

Born at the start of the 1st century BCE, the poet and philosopher wrote many satires, prose, and verse no longer extant. He also published his *Garland*, a collection of epigrams from poets of the preceding two centuries. His own works were mostly erotic and were addressed to both boys and girls.

Pausanias

The periegetic writer, born in the middle of the 2nd century CE, has an extant piece of travel literature, *Description of Greece*. He had an affinity for monuments.

Philostratus

Works such as the *Lives of the Sophists*; the *Heroics*, a dialogue on the heroes of the Trojan War; *On Athletic Training*; and “Erotic Epistles” are attributed to the 3rd century CE sophist writer. He is an index of sophistic shortcomings.

Pindar

The lyric poet, born late in the 6th century BCE, has a collection of works consisting of 17 books. His books include hymns, processional songs, paeans, and dance songs. Many regard him as the greatest of the nine poets of the lyric canon.

Plato

An Athenian from the 5th century BCE, Plato pursued a philosophical career after leaving politics. All his works are in the form of dialogues from which he is purposefully detached.

Plutarch

This philosopher and biographer hails from the mid-1st century CE. He wrote many dialogues, philosophical treatises, and works on rhetoric. He spent the last 30 years of his life as a priest at Delphi.

Polybius

The Greek historian, born at the start of the 2nd century BCE, sought to tell the story of Rome’s rise to dominion over the Mediterranean. After a Roman victory at Pydna, he was detained without trial for being insufficiently friendly to Rome.

Quintus Smyrnaeus

Assumed to be of the 3rd century CE, this poet wrote the epic *Posthomerica* with the intentions of filling the gap between Homer’s epic works. The poem echoes Homer, with some modest innovations. His style, neither sublime nor pedestrian, parallels his claim to have been inspired by the Muses while tending his flock on a mountain neither too high nor too low.

Sappho

Born in the second half of the 2nd century BCE, this lyric poet only has one extant poem, though many fragments exist. Her subject matter includes homoerotic affairs, hymns to deities, and wedding songs. She was hailed in antiquity as the “tenth Muse.”

Sophocles

The Athenian tragic playwright was a competitor in the theater from 468 to 406 BCE. He wrote more than 120 plays. He won at least 20 victories, came in second often, and was never third.

Strabo

Born in the middle of the 1st century BCE, Strabo wrote, in 17 books, the most important source for ancient geography. He likens himself to a statue with a detailing less significant than the overall effect.

Theocritus

From the early 3rd century BCE, Theocritus created the bucolic genre, though he drew inspiration from his predecessors. There are 30 poems, 24 epigrams, and several fragments attributed to him. He offers three beacons by which life may be oriented: love, determination, and art.

Thucydides

The Athenian historian from the 5th century BCE authored an incomplete history of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta in eight books. He caught the plague late in the 5th century but recovered.

Xenophon

Born around 430 BCE, the Athenian produced a large output, including historical narratives, Socratic texts, and technical treatises. He was most famous in antiquity for being a philosopher and a mercenary leader.