artificially to forefront discussions on the maximum and minimum ages for public services and duties. The age of 70 was generally regarded as grounds for seeking release from public liturgical duties, as well as from *munera privata* (the literary texts are confirmed by papyrological data from Egypt). Even some of the materials on the supposed 'private' sphere treatment tend in the same direction. The chapter on 'old age, sexuality and marriage' (Chapter 7), for example, is in fact a study of the upper age limits set for penalties under the Augustan marriage legislation (50 for women, 60 for men). The problem is that these older ages do not necessarily tell us much about 'old age' as such, much less its perception in the 'private sphere', since one is surely considering the officially recognized reproductive lifespan, especially of women. Although the category 'widow' admittedly does not map perfectly with 'old woman', the links between them are surely sufficient to merit more discussion of the body of evidence that exists on the subject. Jens-Uwe Krause's monumental four-volume work on widows and widowhood in Roman society (*Witwen und Waisen im römischen Reich* [Stuttgart, 1994–5]) is noted in the bibliography, but seems hardly to be used in the text itself—as also the useful analysis of its findings by T. A. J. McGinn, 'Widows, Orphans, and Social History' (*JRA* 12 [1999], 617–32). What one has in sum, then, is barely one page that relates specifically to the problems of women and old age (pp. 246–7).

On the side of values, P. makes good sense of the reciprocal function of *pietas* in Roman society, given the precise lack of the kind of specific legal obligations imposed on children to support their parents that was found, for example, in fifth-century Athens. It might well be argued, however, that his final judgement that the elderly were 'liminal' to their society (pp. 241–2) is far better caught by his other argument that their status was one of a severe and permanent marginalization (pp. 244–5). For the rest, P. does not disguise the cold and brutal fact that for most Romans old age was depressing, brutish, and almost unendurable. He might have added to his assessments the common philosophical judgement that old age, along with chronic illness and extreme poverty, was held to be one of the justifiable grounds for taking one's own life. Set in the balance against the poetic vision of respect to be accorded to the elderly as a generally honorable status, there was the more sordid reality of attempting simply to live from one day to the next in the circumstances of loneliness, illness, failing bodily functions, and the general immiseration that accompanied old age. This had to be done in a society where there was no system of social assistance for the elderly or any 'retirement' in our sense. He argues, rightly I think, that the heavy ideological exaltation of elderly males, and the honor and respect that was granted to some older persons, was a counterweight to the much less honorable and less happy circumstances in which most of the real elderly had to complete their lives.

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DIPLOMATIC RHETORIC

L. R. Cresci, F. Gazzano, D. P. Orsi: *La retorica della diplomazia nella Grecia antica e a Bisanzio*. (Rapporti interstatali nell'antichità, 2.) Pp. 167. Rome: 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider, 2002. Cased. ISBN: 88-8265-205-X.

This volume consists of three papers, and is the second in a series exploring

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diplomacy in antiquity and Byzantium (the first being *L'invenzione della diplomazia nella Grecia antica* by L. Piccirilli). It aims to examine both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication in their own right, assigning a secondary rôle to interstate relations (which appears to be generally the feature of the series so far).

Like the first book in the series, this one is amply documented. An index of the Greek vocabulary employed in diplomatic affairs is provided at the end of each paper except the first.

The first paper, by Gazzano, is a survey of means and themes of diplomatic communication in Herodotus. On the one hand, G. accepts Herodotus' association with the epic tradition and sets his work against the background of the archaic age. She comments on his lack of awareness of the difference between an actual speech delivered by an envoy and its historical reconstruction (a distinction developed later by Thucydides); on the lack of precision in the terminology employed to denote messengers; on the political rôle of the Delphic oracle; on exiles shaping interstate relations; and (at length) on the use of symbolic messages, a means normally devoid of deception, unlike the speeches of envoys, as G. convincingly argues. On the other hand, G. notes that most arguments recurring in Herodotus' work are in principle found in historians of the classical era as well: liberty, justice, common ancestry, interest. It would have added to the paper's substance if the speech of Aristagoras of Miletus had been thoroughly analysed since, as G. herself acknowledges, it encapsulates numerous motifs (p. 66).

Deception figures prominently in Herodotus. In G.'s well-expounded view, this is not solely the product of epic tradition but emanates from his own contempt for the dark side of diplomacy (p. 67).

In the second (shorter) paper, Orsi gives a list of the verbs employed in interstate relations in Xenophon's *Hellenica*, commenting on variations in their meaning. A substantial part of the paper concerns request and persuasion, focusing particularly on the verbs *axioô* and *peithô*. According to O.'s reasoning, the former usually assumes the meaning 'I request and consider this to be just'; the firmness of the request directly depends on the power of the state that the speaker represents. O. discusses various passages in order to prove that *peithô* is found almost exclusively in informal discussions; whether it means 'urge' or 'command' again depends on power, which seems only natural. As to the verbs denoting accusation and memory, it would have been well worth expanding on the nature of accusations expressed and on the function of memory.

In the final and particularly dense and concise paper, Cresci examines diplomacy 'between rhetoric and ideology' in the works of Anna Comnena, John Cinnamus, and Nicetas Choniates, the most representative Byzantine historiographers of the twelfth century. To support her views, C. most frequently cites passages in Greek in the footnotes.

C. stresses that the preference for a monograph instead of a chronography, the interest in diplomacy and especially the inclusion of speeches, and the use of *topoi* present in official documents as well—like the appeal to *dikaion* and to *sympheron* (less prominent), or the formulation of a universally accepted *gnômê*—align the historiographers under examination with early Byzantine historians, especially Procopius, and, most importantly, with their classical predecessors. Of the three historians, Cinnamus is the one using Procopius as his model, as C. underlines.

Throughout her paper, C. demonstrates the ways in which several aspects—speeches (reported directly, indirectly, or in a more complicated manner—by Comnena, Choniates, and Cinnamus respectively); letters; the emphasis on ceremonial aspects of

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diplomacy, a non-verbal 'language' that reflects hierarchy between states and/or sovereigns; the choice of particular themes as well as the vocabulary; and the various techniques employed—are all interwoven with the ideology and attitude of each author towards the Byzantine emperor and the empire. Comnena and Cinnamus are systematically opposed to Choniates. The former exalt the Byzantine sovereign; the last, living in a different era, knocks him off his pedestal and shows the rhetoric of diplomacy to be void of meaning.

The choice of authors and periods in this volume gives rise to certain questions. One obvious problem is the omission of Thucydides, who admittedly had his share in the previous volume in the series. The other, perhaps more puzzling, concerns the grounds on which historians of the early Byzantine period were excluded. The similarities between Byzantine historiographers of the twelfth century and classical historians, underlined by C., partly justify the choice; but Procopius, at least, should have been included since, presumably, the volume aims to establish a line of continuity in historical monographs dealing with diplomacy, starting from the classical and going down to the late Byzantine period.

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ROMAN GESTURES

A. Corbeill: *Nature Embodied. Gesture in Ancient Rome*. Pp. xvi + 202, ills. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004. Cased, £24.95. ISBN: 0-691-07494-1.

The gestures of the ancient Romans, glimpsed through the medium of allusive texts or hesitantly identified in visual representations, are a tantalizing subject. In this ambitious book, helpfully informed by sociological and anthropological work on gesture in more recent societies, Corbeill seeks to establish a model for understanding the Roman language of gesture through a series of case studies.

The arguments set out in individual chapters are erudite and often ingenious. Chapter 1 explores the functions of gesture in the context of medical and religious practice. C. makes suggestive observations, for instance about the rôle of performative gestures in Roman law. In a range of different contexts, in his view, Romans sought 'to learn and participate in the workings of nature through the use of bodily gesture' (p. 15). Underlying these features of Roman social and religious practice, he argues, was thought to lie a sympathetic understanding of nature and the environment. While this may be plausible in relation to the work of the Elder Pliny, C.'s attempt to present this as a universal Roman belief elides the tensions between different discourses (magic, for instance, is relegated to the footnotes).

Chapter 2 offers a new approach to a hoary issue—the gestures used by the audience in the arena to indicate whether a defeated gladiator should live or die. C. draws on literary texts, visual images, and possible modern parallels to argue with some plausibility that a closed fist with thumb toward the sky meant death, while a gesture resembling a closed fist was a sign that the gladiator should be spared (though a rather different gesture is shown in the gladiatorial relief from Munich, one of the two visual images on which he bases his argument for the latter). In Chapter 3, C. argues that, in ancient Roman culture, the action of women beating their breasts in mourning was thought to produce milk to aid the transition of the dead to the afterlife. The part

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