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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played by women in ushering an individual out of one life and into the next constituted an inversion of women's rôle in giving birth. C.'s case here is rather tenuous—the clearest piece of evidence is a sentence from Servius' fourth-century commentary on Virgil. Still his model offers us the attractive possibility that women's involvement in Roman mourning ritual could be construed as life-affirming rather than a means of chanelling the pollution of death.

C.'s discussion of the demeanour of late Republican politicians in Chapter 4 (except insofar as 'nature' legitimates approved standards of behaviour) departs from the issue of relations between the human and the 'more-than-human' which dominated earlier chapters. C.'s claim that Roman politicians who sought to appeal to a wider audience may have adopted a different form of self-presentation from those who drew their support primarily from the élite (bigger gestures, for instance, to be visible to those at the back of the crowd) has something to recommend it. Whether this can be mapped exactly onto the kind of demeanour labelled effeminate remains unclear, and the figure of Hortensius, famously attacked for his deviant self-presentation but hardly to be labelled *popularis*, is problematic for C.'s theory. Still, C.'s suggestion that we read Julius Caesar as adopting aspects of deviant demeanour precisely to parade his own power to break the rules is an appealing one.

C.'s final chapter promises another way of looking at 'spectacle' under the empire (he refers to but does not systematically engage with important recent studies on this topic). Under the principate, C. seems to be arguing, individuals are no longer referred to as looking 'like themselves' (it is a pity no consideration is given here to the philosophical context of Seneca's comments self-consistency in particular). C. focuses on Tacitus' treatment of Tiberius, especially his refusal to subject himself to scrutiny and his insistent misreading of other people's facial expressions, as an index of a collapsing metaphysical order. It is not made altogether clear whether the focus here is on metaphysical collapse as a trope within the *Annals* or as a real event in the world this text seeks to represent. Tacitus reworks a key sentence from Sallust's *Catiline*, substituting Tiberius for Sallust's Fortuna; the divine aspect of the emperor was an issue which, in a profound sense, could not be accommodated in Republican historiographic practice. One might read this as heralding new cosmic order in which the relationship between sign and meaning has been irredeemably subverted. Yet this surely oversimplifies the shifting ironies of the *Annals* in which the Roman state is always already corrupt. If it is the case that the relationship between gesture and meaning was corrupted only under the principate, what sense are we to make of, for instance, Sallust's complaints about the increasing tendency toward dissimulation in the aftermath of Roman victory over Carthage (*Cat*. 10.5)?

While the first three case studies offer a static picture of the Roman world in which gestures retain their meanings over hundreds of years, Chapters 4 and 5, concerned with gestures in the political sphere, are preoccupied with the issue of change over time. Indeed, C. seems torn between a model of gestures as virtually unchanging features of a society which may long outlast any particular mode of political organization (the form and meaning attached to gestures in modern Italy are used as evidence for the gestures made in the Roman arena) and a potentially more dynamic and fluid model of gesture, such as that offered by Pierre Bourdieu, in which 'the body languages of different social and political classes are in a constant state of mutual determination' (p. 120).

C. seems to subscribe to the notion—which can certainly be found in Roman texts—that there was a point at which Romans enjoyed a harmonious relationship between nature and the body, when dissimulation was alien. C. concedes that the model

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of élite personal bearing advocated by Cicero is implicated in the maintenance of social hierarchy (indeed, in places C. makes effective use of Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*), and notes that such Ciceronian texts elide nature *natura* and culture. Yet C. himself often treats 'nature'—a term to which another notion of Bourdieu's, 'the cultural arbitrary', might readily be applied—as both self-evident and unproblematic. The final sentence of C.'s introduction is disconcerting: 'I cannot help but share with these sources a feeling that something vital in the relationship between bodies and their external environment has been, and continues to be, lost.' I for one am intrigued to know just where C. locates that moment when we—or the Romans—were at one with nature.

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LITERATE CULTURE

H. YUNIS (ed.): *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece*. Pp. x + 262. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Cased, £40, US$55. ISBN: 0-521-80930-4.

This volume is the product of two conferences held at Rice University in 2000 and 2001. The editor describes its aim as 'understanding how specific cultural practices in Greece were affected when the people engaged in those practices began to use written texts' (p. 11). A number of contributions use written texts and/or literate practices as explanatory factors in the development of Hellenic culture, treating oral practices as not merely primitive survivals, but as centrally involved in the practices of literacy themselves. Andrew Ford treats literate education as a factor in the development of 'literature' and as the basis for Aristotle's construction of formalist pleasures derived from reading texts. The gradual displacement of the full materiality and meaning of song in written texts make possible Aristotelian poetics and our own. Michael Gagarin posits the origin of law in the inscription of true, retroactive legislation before exploring the orality of the legal process as a bulwark against the rise of experts, who form barriers between the people and the law; orality insures an authoritative rôle for the *demos* in the adjudication and enforcement of the laws. Leslie Dean-Jones imagines the rise of the medical charlatan and the decline of doctors' reputations in the fourth century as by-products of medical texts among whose rhetorical aims is the attraction of students to the face-to-face, oral instruction required of a doctor. Albert Henrichs surveys the increasing use of writing in religious practice while noting that the 'performative core' of Greek religion resisted inscription. Harvey Yunis conceptualizes the interpretation of written texts as a problem of an 'absent author' and a 'critical reader' who asks 'what does he mean?' Thucydides and Plato, he claims, conduct dialogues with their 'critical readers' in different ways. Rosalind Thomas analyzes the *epideixis*, an oral exhibition variably based upon a written text with a unique set of stylistic features, as a primary mode for publication among Sophists, medical writers, and others, and as a turning point between the orality of early classical culture and the literate practices of the fourth century.

Different in argumentative form are the contributions of Charles Kahn, who pieces together a genealogy of scientific literary texts, and Geoffrey Lloyd, who compares the functions of texts in Chinese philosophy/mathematics with those in the Greek

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