

F. Curta provides a wealth of detail about sites of the sixth to seventh centuries A.D., although the dating of material culture to the seventh century is rather optimistic and there is a common tendency not to appreciate the tenuous nature of ‘conclusions’ published in archaeological reports.

For the ‘East’ J Howard-Johnston’s article on Armenia in Late Antiquity is a good introduction to the eastern frontier in the late Roman period, worth comparing with the paper on the region presented in the first volume (Haldon). As one of the most fully explored fortresses in the East, C. Whately’s description of El-Lejjun justifies its inclusion. Finally, the volume concludes with a much-neglected topic, ‘Civil War’, with C. on warfare within the empire and M. Kouroumali on the Justinianic conquest of Italy.

There is inevitably a variety of contributions, ranging from site-specific studies to wide general themes – but that is to be expected in any publication which springs from a conference. One particular difficulty emerges clearly from the debate: the worrying misuse of archaeology by ancient historians, bending the ‘evidence’ to build arguments which too readily take up the tentative explanations of archaeologists, without appreciating, and perhaps not understanding, the soft foundations upon which theories are based. But then, though here in high relief, this is a feature of the subject, familiar in much of the literature.

Despite their drawbacks, the intention of these volumes, as the editors affirm, is to bring together evidence and bibliographies along with thematic debates. In this they have succeeded brilliantly. The papers present an abundance of evidence and debate which will remain for many years on the bookshelves of scholars interested in the late Roman period and especially military affairs. The editors are to be congratulated for the result of what must have been an onerous task but one which has provided a key resource for all students of Late Antiquity.

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## OLD AGE

KRÖTZL (C.), MUSTAKALLIO (K.) (ed.) *On Old Age. Approaching Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*. (The History of Daily Life 2.) Pp. xx + 346, figs, ills, map. Turnhout: Brepols, 2011. Cased, €80. ISBN: 978-2-503-53216-5.

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The objective of these collected papers from a 2005 conference is to examine ageing, old age and death from a comparative perspective; like others in the same series, the volume’s purpose is to span the disciplinary boundaries between study of the Graeco-Roman world and of the Middle Ages. For readers of this journal its principal interest will lie in the seven papers on the Graeco-Roman world. The other nine consider Europe between the ninth and the sixteenth centuries, mostly after 1200. For the ancient world the sources exploited are literary and epigraphic; for later periods they diversify to include historical, medical and literary works as well as legal and ecclesiastical documents, in two cases complemented by visual material. While the three thematic headings by which the book is organised evoke its general preoccupations – ‘Coping with Old Age and Death: Views and Values’, ‘Social Meaning of Old Age and Death’, ‘Coping with Death: Remembrance and Oblivion’ – they are less useful in elucidating connections between papers. Only a

minority of papers discuss ageing and death in tandem, qualifying the editors' claim to be the first to combine treatment of these themes.

There is a notable bias by period in the subjects of analysis; most contributions on the ancient world consider advanced age and its cultural representations in a Roman setting. Harlow and Laurence evaluate old age as a transitional (and strongly gendered) process rather than a static category, linking demographic characteristics such as age at marriage and life expectancy to cultural attitudes in order to explore living to an advanced age by those who experienced or witnessed it. They reveal regional variability in the values attributed to age with an analysis of commemoration at Dougga (Tunisia), whose 1,500+ epitaphs reveal a remarkable number of individuals dying at over 50 years of age, and demonstrate 'a value to the old and their longevity' (p. 19). Parkin explores the adage (attested in more than 50 instances in antiquity) of old age as a second childhood. He finds in it a wholly negative connotation of mental and physical degeneration and concomitant dependency, a verbal equivalent to the scorn for the aged epitomised in a scapegoat figure at the Capitoline games, an ancient dressed in a *toga praetextata* and a gold *bullā*, mocked with shouts of 'Sardi venales', a likely reference to the reported practice of senicide on Sardinia. M. and Kopytev discuss stories from early Rome respectively involving elderly matrons (Hersilia in the conflicts between Romans and Sabines and Coriolanus' mother, Veturia, confronting her son on his return to Rome at the head of the Volscian army) and the elderly men who deliberately exposed themselves to death at the hands of the besieging Gauls in 390 B.C. These are taken as exemplary episodes of self-sacrifice, potential or realised; they embody the *mores maiorum* rather than represent typical attitudes to the aged. Bauer argues for the key political role of the *gerousiai* of urban Roman Asia Minor, evidenced epigraphically by their receipt of donations and of status-related distributions of food and money by benefactors, as well as their involvement in honorific dedications. This role explains this body's apparent importance rather than any generalised respect for the elderly (or at least for elderly males). Rantala and Csepregi focus on death though otherwise have very different concerns. The former sets the *Ludi Saeculares* of 17 B.C. in the context of purificatory rituals conducted during May for the household and city, including the *Lemuria*. The latter finds parallels in the extension of the capacities of both pagan healing deities and Christian 'physician-saints' from power over illness to power over death, as attested in the experience of petitioners for therapeutic intervention.

By contrast papers on later periods mainly consider death and mortuary rituals, though they range widely in time, space and perspective. Bradley identifies changes in the personification of death in illustrations for Psalters from the ninth and late tenth–eleventh centuries from England and the Continent ('Ottonian' rather than 'Ottoman' as the preface [p. xiv] would have it). Tamminen assesses the conditions under which crusaders could achieve martyrdom, as debated by Jacques de Vitry, a participant and preacher of crusade in the early 1200s. Four papers examine the social and political context of death and commemoration. Majorossy explores instructions concerning funerals and burial location in wills from fifteenth-century Pressburg (Bratislava), a significant corpus derived from testators of varied socio-economic class; the bequeathing of substantial funds for funeral expenses goes well beyond the mercantile elites. Katajala-Peltoma uses depositions related to canonisation from fourteenth-century England and Italy to interpret expectations related to gender and status in the expression of grief and involvement in funerary rituals. In Renaissance Florence commissioning of pulpits as tomb monuments represents a further encroachment of elite familial display on liturgical space (Ben-Aryeh Debby). Jamroziak explores political manipulation of burial at two Cistercian abbeys, Melrose in Scotland and Kollbacz in Poland, associated respectively with Scottish kings and Anglo-Scottish border aristocrats

and with the dukes of Stettin. Only two papers address old age. In medieval urban Hungary Szende finds neither advanced age nor the elderly to be easily detectable categories of experience or person. Less physically demanding labour meant town dwellers worked to an advanced age and remained less likely to require care; they were also rarely recipients of charitable benefaction or help from guilds whose regulations were more concerned with members' burials than physical well-being. Where infirmity compromised independence, wills suggest that family and neighbours were the usual carers, sometimes remunerated. Salonen's paper is narrower in focus, exploring circumstances under which elderly priests might retire in the late medieval period, as stipulated by canon law and documented in the papal chancery; the pension paid by those who took over their benefice staved off penury. McCleery's review of scholarship in four areas of research, theories of ageing, prognostication, the Black Death and dissection, finds the study of death and of medicine to be more closely linked than is currently acknowledged for the medieval world.

Despite the editorial intentions of a *longue durée* approach to mentalities and practices, there is limited integration or dialogue between papers and periods; most readers will use chapters which relate directly to their own research interests, although discussions of ageing in classical antiquity collectively extend earlier work in this area (K. Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome* [2003]; T.G. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: a Cultural and Social History* [2003]). The papers which connect the subject areas of the book's title, for example Harlow and Laurence's use of epitaphs to illuminate attitudes to ageing, McCleery's recasting of the relationship between death and medical practice and theory in pre-modern Europe, or Szende's model for attitudes and behaviour towards the elderly, living and dead, in small scale urban societies in the same setting will likely have the widest impact. What emerges most clearly is that views of ageing in the times and places under study depend almost entirely on the source used. The editors' collective impression of the 'elderly as an integral part of the community' (p. xvi) (undermined in several papers, notably by Parkin's) is also a function of the focus on individuals or groups of high socio-economic status in the majority of papers, engendered by dependence on textual evidence. Archaeological evidence is largely overlooked, although cemetery excavations, for example, offer the opportunity to examine more diverse samples. Human osteology and associated evidence for burial ritual bear on demography, including age at death, experience of disease and injury among those who reached advanced years (including emerging evidence for elder abuse) and the cultural constructions of old age and the elderly by the living (R. Gowland, 'Age, Ageism, and Osteological Bias: the Evidence from Late Roman Britain', in M. Harlow and R. Laurence [edd.], *Age and Ageing in the Roman Empire* [2007], pp. 153–69; R. Redfern, 'A Bioarchaeological Study of Violence in the Roman World', in C. Knüsel and M.J. Smith [edd.], *The Routledge Handbook of the Bioarchaeology of Human Conflict* [2014], pp. 203–12). In short there are many stimulating papers presented here, but they provide a starting point for the task set by the editors rather than its definitive realisation.

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