

Suetonius. The Scholar and his Caesars by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, and: Suetonius by Barry Baldwin.

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Suetonius. The Scholar and his Caesars by Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, and: Suetonius by Barry Baldwin (review)

Edward Champlin

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTEs RENDUS 469 ANDREW WALLACE-HADRILL. Suetonius. The Scholar and his Caesars. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983. Pp.VIII, 216, T5l'ffi"() 300 03000 2. BARRY BALDWIN. Suetonius. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1983. Pp.viii, 579, US \$55~90 256 0857 4. The author behind the Lives of the Caesars is a difficult figure to grasp. This is partly a matter of fact, that is, we know little about the man himself, and that little is hard to understand. Personal remarks and overt opinions are rare in the Lives. The retiring young scholar of Pliny's letters and the busy antiquary of the Suda are difficult to reconcile with the high imperial official of the Hippo inscription (~1953.73) dismissed in a court scandal (~. Hadr. 11. 3). New information has naturally led to hopeful hypothesis, soon to be dashed (on the supposed Ostian pontificate,

see now F. Zevi, *MEFR* 82 [1970] 302f.; on a supposed date of retirement considerably later than the traditional 122, see G. Alföldy, *ZPE* 36 [1979] 233ff.). But the difficulty with Suetonius is a problem much more of interpretation than of fact. Why did he write such a strange book? What lies behind the vivid succession of characters and anecdotes, the strong antiquarian flavour, and the sometimes mechanical structure? Andrew Wallace-Hadrill and Barry Baldwin adopt radically different approaches to the problem, in the first books on Suetonius to appear in English. Wallace-Hadrill insists on relating the author and his works to their literary and political background, whereas Baldwin resorts to close analysis and comparison of texts. I must admit at the outset to a strong prejudice: while both books have much to offer, I find Baldwin's approach fundamentally sterile, a long succession of observations, some acute, some less so, which in the end add up to no clear picture of Suetonius, and certainly not to one which marks any significant advance. Wallace-Hadrill, on the other hand, has produced a clear and coherent portrait which must be the benchmark for all future assessment of "The Scholar and his Caesars." Wallace-Hadrill begins (1. "The Man and the Style") with a brisk survey, not of the scholar's life, but of the sources for it, acutely

471 BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTE RENDUS observing that the central task is precisely the reconciliation of the public and the literary personae shown by the various sources, thereby sounding a major theme of the book. The decks are cleared by the round affirmation that Suetonius wrote not history but "scholarship" (an inelegant term, for which it is hard to think of a better). What is new here is the subsequent demonstration that in structure, in subject matter, and in style, Suetonius' biographies have little in common with ancient historiography, being much closer to the technical literature of a Celsus or a Frontinus in all three. The importance of this for understanding Suetonius, for understanding what he put in, what he left out, and why, cannot be overstated. We are then shown how Suetonius' major interests in culture and administration well reflect those of contemporary elite society where life and letters were tightly intermeshed (2. "The Scholar and Society"): not a novel observation in the last twenty years, but well done. The theme of Suetonius' *De Grammaticis et Rhetoribus* is seen to be the rise in prestige and status of the professor down to the late 1st c., and his own roots in the tradition of *grammatici* are clearly traced in the method common to all of his surviving works, that is, the posing and answering of a problem, the assembling and classifying of evidence with illustrative quotation, and the continuing interest in a range of particular subjects, even into the *Caesares*. The community of interests which binds the *De Viris Illustribus* with the *Caesares* is considered next (3. "The Scholarly Biographer"). Suetonius' illustres were of course men of letters. Drawing on the surviving pieces and on Jerome, Wallace-Hadrill demonstrates, validly, that the biographer had a particular period of scholarly expertise, the age of Cicero and Augustus, showing how Suetonius will return to a certain range of...

ANDREW WALLACE-HADRILL, *Suetonius, The Scholar and his Caesars*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993. Pp. xii. + 16. ISBN 0 300 03883 2.

BARRY BALDWIN, *Suetonius*. Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1982. Pp. viii. 319. US 555.00. ISBN 90 259 0657 4.

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