

D. Wardle (trans. with introduction and historical commentary) *Suetonius: Life of Augustus*. Pp. x + 603. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. ISBN 978-0-19-968645-2. £100.

Suetonius' *Life of Augustus* is not only the longest of the lives of the Caesars, but also the most important for the details preserved in the biography. Wardle has it done full justice with a 40 page introduction and nearly 500 pages of small print commentary that detail parallel accounts in the likes of Velleius, Tacitus, Appian, and Dio and elucidate historical and archaeological details. The bibliography occupies 25 pages, the index 10 more. Suffice it to say that this is a work of reference that is likely to be the first port of call on the subject for many years to come.

While, in line with the volume's inclusion in the Clarendon Ancient History series, Wardle concentrates on the *Life's* historical aspects, his introduction indicates clearly Suetonius' literary and cultural interests that shaped his accumulation and distribution of material. This is not history: 'the curious and the personal are the very fabric of biography' (p.30). It might also be noted that this style of recording Augustus' life is often oddly synchronic: for instance the description of his physical health (80) is devoted to the ailments of the emperor in old age. Suetonius delights in collecting lists, for example cities named Caesarea (60) or conspiracies against the emperor (19), as well as previously unreported details that may, in fact, turn out to be mistaken, as in the case of a bronze statuette that he thought was labelled Thurinus (7.1). These are then incorporated into topics, but the categories are not followed systematically, instead being arranged indifferently according to chronological or hierarchical principles. Some aspects of Augustus' career are treated as typical for his successors and not repeated in later *Lives* (for example, the details of the imperial funeral in 100.2). Wardle, from his earlier work on divination, is particularly good in explicating the unusual section on signs of Augustus' greatness and good fortune (94-96). At the same time, following Hanslik but with critical exceptions, Wardle shows how Suetonius is able to create an artistic depiction of the emperor who created the beneficial system of the principate and earned his divinisation in return.

The included translation (based on Ihm's Teubner text with exceptions indicated in the commentary) seeks to maximize clarity and reflects Suetonius' own plain style. Still, the heart of the work is the detailed commentary. This is so rich that the index often fails to do it justice. For instance, there is no entry for *congiaria* or *frumentatio*, although the entry under *liberalitas* gets the reader to the vicinity of the appropriate passages. An index locorum would have increased the length of the volume, but would also have been useful for those referring back from other authors' depiction of Augustus to the appropriate Suetonian passage, or for comparison with the biographer's other *Lives*. It will pay to have a Latin text at hand, since, in line with the Clarendon Ancient History Series, there is only an English translation. Wardle often comments on specific terms or textual issues, but this should not present problems to ancient history students who have taken an introductory Latin course. For each topic, Wardle's regular practice is to refer to previous discussions, then often weigh up the evidence and give his own decision. In many cases this is admirably succinct, as in the summary of the Murena and Caepio conspiracy (19.1); occasionally Wardle is generous to a fault, when he details alternative explanations only to conclude that, for instance, linguistic arguments make these impossible. Each reader will judge the parts of the commentary consulted according to their own specialist interests, but there can be no doubt that Wardle's work provides a valuable entry point to the numerous topics that Suetonius touches upon.

While Wardle often seeks to place material within a Trajanic/Hadrianic context, it is striking on reflection how apolitical Suetonius appears in this *Life*. It is difficult, for instance, to deduce Suetonius' attitude towards Hadrian's foreign policy by a comparison with Augustus' military accomplishments or diplomatic initiatives. Apparent topical references may turn out to be coincidence, as in the contributions by allied kings to the temple of Olympian Jupiter at Athens (60). The temple was finally completed by Hadrian in AD 132, but that event is almost certainly too late to have influenced Suetonius (even allowing that it may have been an intended imperial project). Nor need the biographer's remark (63.1) that Livia produced no children be a nod to the adoption strategies of Trajan and Hadrian (p.409). Best to say, as Wardle does when trying to date the *Augustus* in response to the arguments of Townend, Wallace-Hadrill, and Power (pp. 3-6), that the evidence is quite flimsy and open to wide interpretation. Perhaps an *eques* did not feel entitled to voice opinions on contemporary concerns; equally, it may be that Suetonius' working method of compiling a detailed account of his topic, seen in his other works, obviates reflection on the significance of his material.

Again, the relationship between Suetonius' position as *ab epistulis* and the material used in his *Lives* remains unclear. Although Wardle highlights the use of archival material (for instance, the use of Augustus' seal by later emperors [50] or his handwriting style and orthography [86-87]), the question remains why Suetonius was never again as well informed as in this particular biography. The traditional explanation, that he was denied further access to such material when dismissed from his position ca. AD 122, would suggest that he had only made a record of Augustan material, although his official position clearly involved examining the records of later emperors as well. Perhaps Augustan material had been made more readily available (the words of the emperor were, after all, a powerful precedent for his successors); alternately, actual quotation of imperial archives was discouraged and Suetonius, out of imperial favour, did not wish to take the risk. What Wardle makes clear is that the biographer draws from annalistic sources, documentary sources (for example, the *acta senatus*), and archival material, apparently in random fashion and without preference for any type of evidence.

The volume has been carefully proof-edited. The errors I have detected have been trivial (for example, 'flow' for 'flew', p.239) and unlikely to confuse any reader. At a reasonable price in paperback (£35), it will be an essential addition to the Roman historian's bookshelf.

Arthur J Pomeroy,  
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.