

BOOK REVIEW

The Death of Caligula. By T. P. WISEMAN. Liverpool and Oxford: Liverpool University Press, 2013. Pp. xxi + 121. Paperback, \$19.95. ISBN 978-1-84631-963-1.

Since he published *New Men in the Roman Senate* in 1971, Peter Wiseman has been one of our leading Roman historians. The lush translation of Caesar's *Gallic War, The Battle for Gaul*, which he and his wife Anne produced in 1980, will have gotten a second life, so to speak, with the recent change of the Advanced Placement examination. The present slender volume, it must be emphasized, is not a narrative of the end of the emperor's life. It is a translation, with commentary, of Josephus *Antiquitates Iudaicae*, XIX 1-273, a total of thirty-seven pages.

Tacitus in the *Annals* gives us only a little information about Caligula's life, and that during the last years of Augustus and under Tiberius. But, alas, his narratives of the next ten years of Caligula's and Claudius' reigns have not survived. Josephus thus becomes the source closest in time to the events he describes, earlier than Suetonius and Dio Cassius. His prime Roman source was probably Cluvius Rufus, to whom Wiseman devotes a brief appendix. This translation of Josephus is smooth and flowing; the commentary which follows is very informative. We learn more about the emperor than perhaps we wish to know.

Some scholars believe that Caligula has been the victim of a bad press, and could not have been as bad as he is generally said to have been. The present reviewer is not among them. Nor is Wiseman. I still think that Caligula was a lunatic (make a horse a member of the senate?) and an abomination (his sexual relations with his sisters.) All this comes out very clearly in this edition.¹

Perhaps the most important part of the book is the appendix on the topography of the Palatine Hill and the attempt to pinpoint where Caligula died. Recent excavations on the Hill have now made it possible to come to such a conclusion. But, of course, it cannot be considered certain. In the blurb by Mary

¹ The best modern studies of Caligula to which one can turn are J.P.V.D Balsdon, *The Emperor Gaius (Caligula)*, Oxford 1934, Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: the Corruption of Power*, New Haven 1989, and Arthur Ferrill, *Caligula: Emperor of Rome*, London 1991.

Beard on the back cover we read “Wiseman knows the layout of the Julio-Claudian Palatine better than anyone else in the world.” That may be a bit extravagant.

The book is a handsome volume, beautifully produced, almost perfectly proofread. It is a pleasure to handle and to read. I heartily recommend it.

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