

Caligula Unmasked: an Investigation of the Historiography of Rome's Most Notorious  
Emperor

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by

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*Maximas vobis omnibus gratias ago!*

## INTRODUCTION: WHO WAS CALIGULA?

*I have existed from the morning of the world and I shall exist until the last star falls from the night. Although I have taken the form of Gaius Caligula, I am all men as I am no man and therefore I am a god.*<sup>1</sup>

Insane, bloodcurdling, evil, dominating, tyrannical, megalomaniacal, gluttonous, sea-shell collecting, and incestuous: these are just some of the terms that have become associated with the third Roman emperor, Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, better known today as Caligula. Individuals who recognize his name today will without a doubt recall instances of torture and sheer madness; however, they likely will be able neither to recount any of his achievements nor to tell exactly who the originators of such bold, negative stories were. One-dimensional preconceived notions, such as the wicked ones connected to Caligula, are commonly encountered in the simplified way posterity remembers historical figures. If a person, for instance, brings up Adolf Hitler (sometimes thought of as the “Monster”) or Ivan IV Vasilyevich (aka “Ivan the Terrible”), abominable characteristics typically come to mind rather than complete accounts of the person’s life.<sup>2</sup> Of course, Caligula is not unique amongst all the other Roman emperors as one evoking detestable and loathsome thoughts, either. For many people today, Nero

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is spoken by Malcolm McDowell who stars as the deranged and wicked emperor Caligula in the 1979 film *Caligula*. It emphasizes popular culture’s fascination with notorious people from history, like Caligula, whose memories have become legendary, although not completely true. See, *Caligula*. Dir. Tinto Brass. By Gore Vidal. Perf. Malcolm McDowell, Peter O’Toole, Helen Mirren, John Gielgud, John Steiner, and Teresa Ann Savoy. Analysis Film Releasing Corp, 1979. DVD.

<sup>2</sup> Weir, William. *Fifty Military Leaders Who Changed the World*. Franklin Lakes, NJ: New Page, 2007. p. 199-202 for information concerning Hitler and p. 117-119 for information concerning Ivan the Terrible.



instantly conjures up visions pertaining to Christian persecutions, and Commodus is often remembered as bringing shame to his remarkable father, Marcus Aurelius, for his supposed misdeeds (e.g., fighting as a gladiator, supposing himself a god, etc.). Such preconceived notions often impact the historical record and can cause problems when reconstructing the narratives in primary sources, and it is thus imperative to reconstruct these narrative correctly.

### **Insanity Constructs a Despotic Man: Was Caligula Really Mentally Ill?**

Perhaps there is no other quality joined to Caligula's character more than that of insanity. Being mentally unstable certainly could explain why the emperor committed many of the atrocities that the literary authors assert he did. However, determining exactly how mentally or physically "fit for the task" Caligula was is somewhat difficult; however, Suetonius does mention that Augustus was concerned enough about Caligula's health in AD 14 to provide him with two doctors for his epileptic seizures.<sup>3</sup> The sources also claim that he had insomnia, suffered from horrible nightmares, hid under his bed during thunderstorms, had fainting spells, and other ailments.<sup>4</sup> These claims, though, appear in other accounts about the emperors, too, emphasizing that such stories were commonly narrated.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Barrett, Anthony. *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. p. 213. Also, see Suetonius, *Caligula*, 8.4. and 50.2. Many of the literary sources assert that Caligula had mental issues throughout their narratives.

<sup>4</sup> Barrett, p. 213.

<sup>5</sup> Barrett, p. 213-214. Augustus, for instance, had insomnia and "supposedly hid in an underground room during thunderstorms, and Tiberius was said to be so terrified by storms that he wore a laurel wreath in the belief... that it offered protection against lightning."

Scholars during the nineteenth century viewed Caligula purely as a madman, “depraved and cruel”, a view that came from the literary sources themselves.<sup>6</sup> These researchers brought up the fact that the sources describe how Caligula would frequently drink a potion prepared by his wife Caesonia that made him mentally unstable.<sup>7</sup> Barrett suggests that this claim can be ignored, though, as there are other Romans who have supposedly become mad from drinking potions.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, these early scholars continue to influence how modern popular culture views Caligula.<sup>9</sup>

Researchers nowadays tend to move away from the “notion of simple madness”, and rather to diagnose his individual mental disorders.<sup>10</sup> Albert Esser, after a lengthy analysis of Caligula’s behaviors, concluded that the emperor was schizophrenic.<sup>11</sup> According to the DSM-IV<sup>12</sup>, though, a person must meet two<sup>13</sup> out of the five criteria as it lists to be considered clinically schizophrenic, and although Caligula appears to match some of the criteria (as do other emperors), it seems both highly unprofessional and impossible in this day and age to use modern science to label someone from two-thousand years ago as having one of the most potent mental disorders.<sup>14</sup> Another scholar,

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<sup>6</sup> Barrett, p.214. For instance, see L. Quidde’s *Caligula* (1894), in which the emperor’s madness is attributed to external causes.

<sup>7</sup> Barrett, p. 214.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 214. Lucretius, for example, is also said to have gone mad when he drank a potion.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 215.

<sup>11</sup> Esser, Albert. *Cäsar Und Die Julisch-Claudischen Kaiser Im Biologisch-ärztlichen Blickfeld*. Leiden: Brill, 1958. p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> The DSM-IV is short for the fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

<sup>13</sup> The person must have two of the following for a prolonged time: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, disorganized/catatonic behavior, “negative symptoms”.

<sup>14</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000. p. 312-313. It is difficult to label someone, as one example, because personal examination is not available.

Joseph Lucas, found Caligula to be “schizoid”, while suffering from psychopathy.<sup>15</sup>

Again, the DSM- IV specifies conditions that a person must meet in order to be classified as having a “Schizoid Personality Disorder”, and Caligula, according to the literary accounts, does not seem to fall under this category well either.<sup>16</sup> As for psychopathy, or antisocial personality disorder, it is possible that Caligula suffered to some extent from the symptoms associated with it; however, he again did not suffer from all of the symptoms, and there are other individuals from antiquity who are remembered more positively that could meet the criteria also.<sup>17</sup> Finally, renowned psychiatrist Elizabeth Ford clinically diagnosed Caligula with bipolar personality disorder, which is characterized by prolonged periods of mania and depression; this diagnosis is very possible, as the supposed events in his life suggest.<sup>18</sup> Bipolar disorder cannot explain, though, why he purportedly was chatting with the gods or bestowing honors to his horse. As Barrett notes, “Their [the scholars] approach is a dubious one and even in the best clinical conditions psychoanalysis is a complex and difficult procedure.”<sup>19</sup> Further, he brings up the idea that it would be very unscientific to “analyze a ‘patient’ through symptoms reported by hearsay, by writers who are in the main several generations separated from the object of study, and, most seriously of all, have an established record

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<sup>15</sup> Lucas, Joseph. *Un Empereur Psychopathe: Contribution À La Psychologie Du Caligula De Suétone*. Bruxelles, 1967. p. 159-189.

<sup>16</sup> *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV-TR*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000. p. 696-697. For instance, “neither desires nor enjoys close relationships, including being part of a family”, “takes pleasure in few, if any, activities”, etc. Caligula does not seem to match up well with some of these requirements.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.703-705. Tiberius, for instance, appears to meet many of the diagnostic criteria as well as (or even better) than Caligula does.

<sup>18</sup> National Geographic. *Rome Revealed: Madness of Caligula*. DVD. National Geographic Video, 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Barrett, p. 215.

of recounting the titillating gossip that would encourage later analysts to assume mental instability.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, modern researchers are diagnosing Caligula based upon the symptoms given in the literary accounts which are themselves possibly tainted with biased and exaggerated details.

There are other obstacles facing researchers who want to attribute Caligula’s hideous actions to his mental health. For instance, Seneca, who knew Caligula personally and was thus writing contemporaneously about him, says absolutely nothing “that could be attributed as mad”, rather opting for words that describe his arrogance and foolish behavior.<sup>21</sup> Another contemporary author of Caligula, Philo, did not hesitate to call Caligula a madman, but Caligula would, of course, appear that way to a religious Jew like Philo.<sup>22</sup> Barrett suggests that Philo is the best source scholars have for Caligula’s true mental health, since he actually met with Caligula shortly before his death in AD 40, and although he continues to label the emperor as crazy, his “final impression is not of a madman, but of a conceited, ill-mannered and rather irresponsible young ruler... with a sharp sense of humor.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, it is essential to mention that there is a problem in calling someone psychotic who is constantly humorous: could Caligula’s sarcastic and ironic nature have influenced the authors’ accounts?<sup>24</sup> For instance, a freedman, Helicon, became friends with Caligula because of his overly sarcastic and witty remarks.<sup>25</sup> Taken

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 216.

<sup>21</sup> Barrett, p. 214. Although Seneca uses words and phrases like *dementia* and *furiosa inconstantia*, the actions of the emperor in his accounts do not show him as insane like they would in Suetonius’ account, for example.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 215. Caligula, of course, was intending to take possession of the Temple.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.215.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 216.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 216. Barrett suggests that the stories surrounding his horse, Incitatus, and setting up a house near

further, perhaps Helicon's (and other friends') jokes influenced what Caligula himself said and was thus written down for the future. Finally, it is very challenging to diagnose Caligula as insane since he had been raised with Eastern traditions; he was, after all, a man "obsessed by oriental ideas and customs".<sup>26</sup>

Modern researchers, then, must be extremely careful in labeling someone's eccentric behaviors as psychotic, especially when it is impossible to know both whether he was clinically insane and, more importantly, how unbiased the sources are. Caligula was dealt many difficult blows<sup>27</sup> in his life, and although there are individual differences in how resilient a person is in regard to coping with life's tragedies, Caligula still became a popular and loved emperor (e.g., *ad immensum civium amorem*).<sup>28</sup> And so, Barrett declares, "While Caligula's behavior seems to have caused distress among the sober members of the nobility, it did not meet with general disapproval, and according to Dio, the people actually enjoyed the licentiousness."<sup>29</sup>

Briefly, it is worthwhile to mention some instances in Caligula's life that demonstrate that the emperor could rule rationally and thus raise the question of how accurate the authors were in regard to his mental health. As one example, in AD 38 there was a fire in the Aemilian district, and Caligula offered his assistance, highlighting that

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Jupiter must have arisen from jocular remarks.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 219. As one example, some scholars see Caligula's rule completely as an "adherence to the religious and political traditions of Egypt." The amnesty he gives at the beginning of his ruling could be inspired by the pharaohs.

<sup>27</sup> For instance, his father, a charismatic leader and role model, died while he was young; his two older brothers and mother were tortured at the nod of Tiberius, his own great-uncle; he was sent to live with a deranged Tiberius on Capri, and might have faced torture by him; Drusilla died early in life, while his two living sisters and best friend Lepidus plotted to kill him; etc.

<sup>28</sup> Barrett, p. 229. Also, see Suetonius, *Caligula*, 4.14.3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 229.

he could be caring and sympathetic to other people; both Dio and the *Fasti Ostienses* relate the event.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, in AD 39 Caligula appointed officials to various provinces, such as Galba and Petronius, who were capable of doing their tasks well, proof that he could make important decisions if the need arose.<sup>31</sup> At the persuading of Herod Agrippa, Caligula also decided to change his position of desecrating the Temple at Jerusalem by erecting a statue of himself, showing that he was willing to accept other peoples' ideas on certain important matters.<sup>32</sup> As a final example, he had the financial accounts published and he lifted censorship, deeds that a person who is constantly described as mentally ill and vile likely would not have done if he were not at least somewhat competent and empathetic.<sup>33</sup>

### **Historiography: The Importance of Painting the Truth**

Answering exactly who Caligula was is not an easy task. However, historiography, or the writing of history, is able to help with unmasking him.<sup>34</sup> The various accounts from antiquity are extremely enjoyable to read, but there are many problems facing someone who wants an accurate portrayal of an incident or person's character. As one example, there are sometimes absences and ambiguities in the texts; not everything may be included in the literary sources' accounts.<sup>35</sup> Modern translators may try to amend these issues either by skipping over the events or supplementing their ideas

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p. 240.

<sup>34</sup> Pitcher, Luke. *Writing Ancient History: An Introduction to Classical Historiography*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009. p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Pitcher, p. 5.

where the text is difficult to understand clearly.<sup>36</sup> Also, ancient writers did not always lay out their methodologies as frequently and concisely as contemporary historians do.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the ancient authors typically valued writings more for style and moral content than for perceived objectivity.<sup>38</sup> In general, a writer might take an older narrative and rewrite it in accordance with his own style, while only reading a few parallel narratives of the same incident; he then would place the account in his own version, rarely making use of the original source.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, ancient authors were known to distort or exaggerate the truth, adapt the story to fit their needs, or outright lie about events.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, it is not always easy to come upon independent testimonies that show how accurate the assertions of the ancient authors actually were.<sup>41</sup> Another problem, according to Pitcher (p. 31-32), occurs when the ancient historian's text does not go along with whatever "methodological principles he has stated."<sup>42</sup> While there are other problems in recounting the literary accounts, the overall picture is that believing the accounts as objective truth can be a grave mistake.

With these problems in mind, it is important to approach the ancient sources

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p. 5-6. There are oftentimes, however, commentaries that help readers in understanding the issues.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 28. Pitcher reminds historians to be careful in taking a source as authoritative "simply because there is so little extant to contradict it." Additionally, if methodology appears to be given in any form, it may not be straightforward.

<sup>38</sup> Mehl, Andreas. *Roman Historiography: An Introduction to Its Basic Aspects and Development*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011. p. 28-29.

<sup>39</sup> Mehl, p. 28-29.

<sup>40</sup> Pitcher, p. 22; 28-30.

<sup>41</sup> Pitcher, p. 28-29. He notes that it can be very difficult to establish when an ancient author is "telling *deliberate* untruths in the full awareness of what he is doing... misinformation by lost sources, excessive credulity or incompetence are usually possible alternatives."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 29-30. I.e., what he says he will do in his writing is different than what actually appears in the text. This tendency to write something different than what the author originally intended may result from the author's mendacity, as Pitcher notes.

critically and not always take what they say at face value. Fortunately, there are strategies for helping to arrive at the historical truth. One important technique involves paying attention to when the ancient authors quote their sources; if an author mentions another source in his work, it is possible to corroborate the two accounts.<sup>43</sup> Going along with this idea, if an author mentions a historian in his work along with that person's deeds in life, it may be possible to compare the author's version with the historian's actual writings.<sup>44</sup>

One of the best tools a researcher can use is investigating parallel accounts: when there is an absence of obvious citation, it is possible to look at other accounts that are very familiar in terms of style, syntax, and/or semantics.<sup>45</sup> The researcher then can compare it with other ancient accounts, showing the unlikelihood that the accounts arose independently of each other.<sup>46</sup> In addition, parallel citation allows researchers to see how the stories have changed over time. Concerning the research of Caligula, parallel citation is extremely useful, although there are very few sources altogether to compare; thus, biographical details about the emperor's life are likely missing.

Scholars sometimes rely on their own instincts, too. For instance, one way he or she can do this is by paying attention to the "details and vividness" that the primary

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 79-80. Of course there are problems with this method, too, e.g.: For how much of an account, as an example, does the author actually draw from another author? With regards to researching Caligula, though, this technique wasn't especially useful because there aren't that many quoted sources one can use to corroborate.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 80-81. For instance, Pitcher brings up the example of Gaius Asinius Pollio who appears in Appian's account of the Roman Civil Wars; Pollio wrote a history on the civil wars, too, and comparisons can be drawn from both of their versions.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 83-84.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 83-84. There are obviously problems involved with this method, too, such as: it can be difficult sometimes to know whether "text A is using text B or the other way around", which leads to a tactic called skeptical criticism.



source uses in his account; in this way, it is thought that the author is describing an event that he himself witnessed.<sup>47</sup> Finally, modern historians sometimes look at claims of autopsy: when the ancient author himself physically witnesses the matter he is writing about.<sup>48</sup> Using a combination of these methods, though, may prove to be most accurate and useful, but it is still imperative to realize that the literary sources cannot always be taken completely at face value.

### **Which Ancient Authors wrote about Caligula?**

The ancient accounts of the reign of Caligula agree that he was a man full of detestable qualities.<sup>49</sup> There are, however, two sources above all others who seem to give the most in-depth depiction of his life's accomplishments and crimes: Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus ("Suetonius") and Claudius Cassius Dio ("Cassius Dio" or "Dio Cassius"). Because both Suetonius and Dio Cassius discuss Caligula's life in greater detail than the other literary sources, a brief biographical sketch of the two authors (as far as is known) will be presented in order to show how their accounts might not be as accurate as one would hope, especially in regard to Caligula.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 84-85. There are limitations with this method as well, as Pitcher points out: Authors may make up stories that are highly detailed and vivid. Additionally, the idea behind this technique "rests on the assumption that detail and vividness are reliable indications of an eyewitness account." Pitcher recommends using vividness and detail with caution unless other evidence can be given to help go along with it.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p. 64-66. If an author is an eyewitness of the event about which he is writing, it is often thought to be more reliable. For instance, Seneca and Philo write contemporaneously with Caligula, and it is thought that they themselves experienced some of Caligula's actions.

<sup>49</sup> Although several literary sources discuss Caligula's character, the following are seen frequently in this paper: Philo, Josephus, Suetonius, Dio Cassius, Aurelius Victor, and Orosius.

<sup>50</sup> Briggs, Ward W. *Ancient Roman Writers*. Detroit: Gale Group, 1999. p. 299-305. Sources for Suetonius stem from: Suetonius himself; letters between himself and Pliny the Younger; a contemporary inscription near Hippo Regius (now Algeria); and the 4<sup>th</sup> century *Historia Augusta*.

Suetonius' father and grandfather were somewhat distinguished characters in Roman history, so it was fitting that he himself should rise to importance as well.<sup>51</sup> His fame grew as he aged, and he eventually befriended Pliny the Younger, who became one of his chief sponsors.<sup>52</sup> As an equestrian, Suetonius held three very important titles: *a studiis*, *a bibliothecis*, and *ab epistulis*; the latter position meant that he was "chief of the imperial secretariat under Trajan's successor Hadrian."<sup>53</sup> The *Historia Augusta* mentions that Hadrian dismissed Suetonius from this position, though, possibly because Suetonius was getting too intimate with Hadrian's own wife, Sabina.<sup>54</sup> Of his later political life (if he were even active), nothing is known.<sup>55</sup>

In regard to all of Suetonius' writings, no exact dates of composition are known<sup>56</sup>, and many only survive in epitomes, citations, and fragments.<sup>57</sup> Scholars continue to question whether what has been claimed as Suetonius' authentic works are really just paraphrases, possibly even contaminated ones.<sup>58</sup> Of all his writings, though, *De vita Caesarum* has survived in the best shape, but even it is not entirely intact.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, scholars have pondered why Suetonius chose to not discuss all the emperors in equal

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<sup>51</sup> Briggs, p. 299-305. His grandfather was close to the imperial household during the reign of Caligula and his father was likely an important staff member of Otho. Suetonius himself was born around AD 69.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 300.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 300. This was a very important position, including duties such as drafting and composing official edicts of the emperor himself.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 301. Also see *Historia Augusta, Hadrian*, 11.3.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 301. Modern authors continue to speculate about his later political career.

<sup>56</sup> Edwards, Catherine. *Lives of the Caesars*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. p. viii- ix. The *De vita Caesarum*, Suetonius' most famous work to modern readers, can be safely attributed to Hadrian's reign (i.e. between AD 117 and 138) according to Edwards, since, for instance, Suetonius dedicated the work to Septicius Clarus who held his post between AD 119 and 122. Briggs (p. 302) notes further that Septicius himself was also dismissed by Hadrian when Suetonius was.

<sup>57</sup> Briggs, p. 302.

<sup>58</sup> Briggs, p. 302.

<sup>59</sup> Briggs, p. 302. For instance, the preface for the work is missing.

length, and most believe that his alleged disgraceful conduct excluded him from other writings and sources as *ab epistulis*.<sup>60</sup> In addition, he chose to write from documents, not employing autopsy or personal interview, and the texts he chose to utilize were often “odd, quirky, and not the sort of thing that historians would use.”<sup>61</sup> All the emperors are discussed in the same three ways, although the details are different: life before becoming an emperor; the emperor’s reign; and the emperor’s death.<sup>62</sup> Finally, Suetonius categorizes the details about the emperors in terms of their virtues and vices.<sup>63</sup>

The reliability of his biographies, of course, must be questioned heavily. For instance, Suetonius wrote his biographies (such as Caligula’s) at a later date than the emperors themselves were ruling while relying on written sources that may not have been reliable.<sup>64</sup> It is possible that he added guesswork and imagination to his sections pertaining to the earlier emperors.<sup>65</sup> Also, he often does not cite his sources, making it difficult to compare his credibility with other writers; he simply wanted to “write accessibly, as his clear and concise prose style shows.”<sup>66</sup> Finally, his inclusion of vivid details help to persuade the modern reader to believe the events in the biography more easily, even if it is not entirely factual.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 302. Julius Caesar and Augustus take up the majority of the text. Also, the quality of the documentation diminishes in the later emperors’ lives, perhaps because it reflects the time after he was removed as *ab epistulis*.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p. 302.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p. 302.

<sup>63</sup> Edwards, p. vii.

<sup>64</sup> Osgood, Josiah. *A Suetonius Reader: Selections from The Lives of the Caesars and The Life of Horace*. Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci, 2011. p. xxviii. Osgood brings up a quote from Tacitus himself (*Ann.* 1.1.) who said that contemporary authors “tended to flattery and those written afterwards to falsification, out of hatred.”

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. xxviii.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. xxviii.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. xxviii- xxix. For instance, Osgood notes specifically that the dinner parties, costumes, shows, etc.

Dio's family originated from Nicaea in Bithynia, a province in the north of modern Turkey, in the Greek east; Nicaea was one of the most important cities of Bithynia and was highly distinguished since at least the days of Nero.<sup>68</sup> Dio's father, Marcus Cassius Apronius, was said to have been a senator in the reign of Commodus and he held posts as a proconsul of Lycia and Pamphylia and as an imperial legate of both Cilicia and Dalmatia.<sup>69</sup> Dio also was a senator in Rome during the tumultuous period of the late second to early third centuries AD. He was praetor in AD 194 or 195 and a governor of an eastern province sometime during the reigns of Septimius Severus and Caracalla, acting as an *amicus principis*.<sup>70</sup> During the later portion of his life, Macrinus appointed Dio, who was an ex-consul of more than ten years' experience, as *curator* of Pergamum and Smyrna.<sup>71</sup> He continued to fill proconsular posts as he aged, and when he served as governor of Dalmatia in AD 224-226, it is recorded that his soldiers retaliated against him for being too "strict a disciplinarian."<sup>72</sup> Finally, in AD 229 he held the prestigious ordinary consulship at the beginning of the year jointly with Alexander Severus, an event marking the end of his political career. Afterwards, he retired and returned to his native Bithynia.

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make the reader want to believe it's all genuine, but it is very entertaining, too.

<sup>68</sup> Barnes, T. D. "The Composition of Cassius Dio's "Roman History"" *Phoenix* 38.3 (1984): 240-55. *JSTOR*. Web. 13 Mar. 2013. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1088277>. p. 241-242. His full name supposedly was Claudius Cassius Dio Cocceianus, and his family could date back as far as when Brutus and Cassius gave Roman citizenship to one of his ancestors at the Battle of Philippi.

<sup>69</sup> Barnes, p. 242. Dio Cassius himself seems to have been born at around AD 165.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 243-244. He also enjoyed considerable patronage from the Severans, and, as an *amicus principis*, was a member of the emperor's inner cabinet

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p. 244.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p. 244-245.

Dio's work, *Roman History*, gives detailed information about people and events from the founding of Rome to AD 229.<sup>73</sup> It is not quite clear exactly who Dio's sources were, but it is likely that he drew from a similar source as Suetonius.<sup>74</sup> There are, though, problems with taking Dio Cassius' writings on Caligula at face value. One extremely important characteristic found in Dio's accounts is his tendency to use retrospective projection: he tends to make mistakes in detail in which he anachronistically describes the past in light of his own time.<sup>75</sup> As Boyd notes (p. 184), this bias alone makes it difficult for modern scholars to accurately understand the gradual transition from Augustus to the third century. Also, there are clearly places in his text that his knowledge is lacking, e.g. the Roman republican institutions.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, he was fascinated with astrology and dream interpretation, utilizing these devices as "departments of science" for composing his works.<sup>77</sup> Dio is also known to sometimes exaggerate the accounts in his

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 245. Also, Boyd, Kelly. *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*. Vol. 2. London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999. p. 184. Dio supposedly began his composition with a dream he received from Septimius Severus who instructed him to "learn accurately and write an account of all that is said and done".

<sup>74</sup> Swan, Peter M. *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Romischen Welt*. Vol. 34. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972. p. 2533. Boyd p. 184 notes that his sources might have included: Livy, Suetonius, Tacitus, Seneca and Cremutius Cordus.

<sup>75</sup> Kelly, p. 184. For instance, he created a conversation between Augustus and Agrippa that is too similar to the "monarchical institutions" of his own time.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 184.

<sup>77</sup> Swan, Peter Michael. *Augustan Succession an Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 55-56*. New York: Oxford Univ, 2004. p. 8-9.

works in some detail.<sup>78</sup> Finally, the preservation of the text is not too good; many of the accounts survive in fragments and epitomes.<sup>79</sup>

### **The Task and Methodological Approach Undertaken: Understanding Caligula**

The main goal of historiography is the need to discover the historical truth.<sup>80</sup> The extant primary historical sources, instead of presenting historical truth, relate serious quandaries concerning the truth about Caligula's life, and it is imperative for historians to strive to uncover the truth so that future students and educators can shed light on all aspects of the emperor's life rather than only his debaucheries. Although there are several episodes of Caligula's life that can be investigated further, I chose to look at and discuss these three instances of the emperor's life specifically: the invasion of Britain; incest with his three sisters, and especially Drusilla; and, finally, his divine honors and godlike delusions. This paper will show that there is far too much evidence indicating that the accounts of these aspects of Caligula's life are inaccurately described by the primary sources, and the study of these three sources can thus serve as a case study of how ancient authors treated a negative subject such as Caligula.

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<sup>78</sup> Forman, Mark. *The Politics of Inheritance in Romans*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. p. 40. As one example of his tendency towards exaggeration, Dio discusses the Simon Bar Kochba revolt that occurred during the reign of Hadrian, claiming that five-hundred and eighty-thousand men were slain, and modern historians see that number as possibly somewhat high, e.g. see: Pickard, John. *Behind the Myths: The Foundations of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. [S.l.]: Authorhouse, 2013. p. 140-141, and Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 69, 14.

<sup>79</sup> Foster, Herbert Baldwin, and Joannes Zonaras. *Dio's Rome: An Historical Narrative Originally Composed in Greek during the Reigns of Septimius Severus, Geta and Caracalla, Macrinus, Elagabalus and Alexander Severus: And Now Presented in English Form*. Troy, N. Y.: Pafraets Book, 1905. p. 6. Although Dio composed eighty books, only books thirty-six to sixty are complete, comprising the events of 68 BC to AD 47. The final twenty books (sixty-one to eighty), appear in excerpts and epitomes, but as for the first thirty-five books, researchers must rely on "scraps and fragments."

<sup>80</sup> Baets, Antoon De. *Responsible History*. New York: Berghahn, 2009.

The three chapters are all structured similarly: each chapter (dealing with its own incident<sup>81</sup>) has passages presented from the primary sources in English and perspectives are suggested in a more modern fashion with the ultimate goal, again, being to construct authentic historical data about Caligula's life. First, I present the primary sources relevant for each incident, paying special attention to the words used to describe the emperor while also looking at how the previous and following material in the narrative describe his character.<sup>82</sup> After investigating other primary sources outside the literary accounts (e.g., archaeology, numismatics, and epigraphy) in the hopes of coming across evidence that would support my beliefs and assertions about Caligula's true nature, I present many of them as data for my analysis about the incidents.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, I relate modern historians' research and analyses on the various incidents. In each chapter, I contextualize the incident within a broader social or political issue that bears upon the incident.<sup>84</sup> Finally, I present a hypothesis attempting to reconstruct the historical truth of the incident based on both the primary and secondary sources.

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<sup>81</sup> Chapter one deals with Caligula's supposed British invasion; chapter two deals with Caligula's supposed incestuous relationships with his three sisters; and chapter 3 deals with the accounts of his supposed monarchical and divine tendencies.

<sup>82</sup> Originally, I wanted to present Caligula as the monster that Suetonius describes; however, as I investigated the topic in greater detail, I was somewhat demystified and in shock when I realized that he was not as deranged, psychotic, and vindictive as the sources want us to believe.

<sup>83</sup> For example, inscriptions, the Arval records, coins, archaeological remains, etc.

<sup>84</sup> For example, I researched Britain during the Roman Empire and military victories in general for the chapter pertaining to Caligula's supposed invasion across the ocean.

## CHAPTER 1: THE TRUTH BEHIND CALIGULA'S BRITISH INVASION

*And assuredly it was not the case, because Britain was only one name, that its loss was such a trifling one for the State, a land so abundant in crops, so rich in the number of its pastures, so overflowing with veins of ore, so lucrative in revenues, so girt with harbours, so vast in circumference. When that Caesar to whom you owe your name landed in Britain, first of Romans to do so, he wrote that he had discovered another world, judging it to be of such a large size that it seemed to be not surrounded by the Ocean, but enclosing the Ocean itself. For at that time Britain was not armed with any vessels for naval warfare, and the Roman state, already proficient from the time of the Punic Wars and the wars in Asia, and also recently from the war against the pirates, and the Second Mithridatic War, was as strong in the practice of naval warfare as in that on land.*<sup>85</sup>

Warfare and expansion have always been characteristics of human nature. Being no different, the Romans generally chose to invade an enemy's borders for political and monetary gains while simultaneously displaying warlike virtues, gaining glory, and increasing prestige. The domination of Britain was different for the Romans, though: it required sailing on the sea and enduring the many dangers of *Oceanus* rather than simply traveling by foot. Several details about the Romans' early British invasions by Julius Caesar and Claudius are well-known today.<sup>86</sup> The Roman emperor Caligula, according to several ancient historians' writings, was also eager to declare war on Britain; other authors state that he not only made an attack on the island, but that he achieved grand success by capturing one of the island's princes. While the statements of the varying sources are difficult to assess accurately, it is paramount to note that neither Augustus nor

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<sup>85</sup> This quote is from a panegyric to the emperor Constantius for his recovery of Britain. It provides vivid details about scenery and importance of the island. Translation by: Nixon, C. E. V., and Barbara Saylor Rodgers. *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini: Introduction, Translation, and Historical Commentary, with the Latin Text of R.A.B. Mynors*. Berkeley: University of California, 1994, p. 104-144.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico* (5.4-25), and Suetonius (5.17; 5.24.6; 5.28.1).



Tiberius officially attacked the Britons<sup>87</sup>, so Caligula would have been the first Roman to launch a raid on the territory since Julius Caesar. In this chapter, I will show how the ancient authors distort Caligula's invasion of Britain, and I will present an alternative explanation of what likely happened in AD 40. I will accomplish this through a detailed analysis of the ancient evidence for Caligula's invasion. Additionally, I will contextualize the sources by looking at the invasion of Julius Caesar and Claudius.

### **Background to the British Conquest: The Narrative Accounts**

It is appropriate first to briefly discuss the political and military situation prior to Caligula's presumed invasion of the island in AD 40. In the middle of AD 39, a conspiracy was brewing against the emperor; to make matters more complicated, this conspiracy had support from some of the members of the senatorial order, as well as Caligula's two surviving sisters, Agrippina the Younger and Julia Livilla.<sup>88</sup> Also, Agrippina was a very ambitious woman, and Barrett (p.109-110,) suggests that it was highly possible that she was championing her own son, Nero, at this time to be a potential successor upon her brother's demise. This conspiracy, however, did not go according to

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<sup>87</sup> Barrett, Anthony. *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990, p. 125-128. Barrett (p. 127) does note, though, that Augustus wanted to launch an attack on Britain, but he "postponed the plans". He further states (p. 127-128) that Tiberius would likely have followed in Augustus' "policy of accommodation", but would have "considered an expedition against Britain a reckless venture."

<sup>88</sup> Winterling, Aloys. *Caligula: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California, 2011, p. 107-109. According to Winterling, Lepidus was the "emperor's most important senatorial confidant"; Gaetulicus was the commander of Germania Superior; Agrippina and Livilla were Caligula's two sisters, individuals who were "rewarded the highest honors" in the previous years. Because aristocrats were involved in the plot, the conspirators could rely on military backing; additionally, they could put a new emperor and empress on the throne with Caligula's assassination. Winterling (p. 107) notes that this future emperor and empress would possibly have been Agrippina and Lepidus, as Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.2.2) describes their affair quite vividly, and Agrippina was desirous of power.

plan. When Caligula discovered the plot, he moved quickly against the consuls and Lentulus Gaetulicus, the figurehead of the conspiracy. He immediately removed the consuls and broke their *fasces*.<sup>89</sup> He then put a new official in power of Lower Germany.<sup>90</sup> Dio Cassius (*Rom. Hist.*, 59.22.5-7) recounts the information:<sup>91</sup>

*In the first place, then, he put to death Lentulus Gaetulicus, who had an excellent reputation in every way and had been governor of Germany for ten years, for the reason that he was endeared to the soldiers. Another of his victims was Lepidus, that lover and favourite of his, the husband of Drusilla, the man who had together with Gaius maintained improper relations with the emperor's other sisters, Agrippina and Julia, the man whom he had allowed to stand for office five years earlier than was permitted by law and whom he kept declaring he would leave as his successor to the throne.*

In addition to the execution of Gaetulicus and Lepidus, Caligula banished Agrippina and Livilla to the Pontine Islands<sup>92</sup>; first, though, he compelled Agrippina to carry her lover's ashes in an urn all the way back to Rome.<sup>93</sup>

Towards the end of the fall of AD 39, Caligula and his men, as Dio relates, campaigned across the Rhine, near the area in which Galba (Gaetulicus' replacement) was waging war with the Germans.<sup>94</sup> Caligula's own army bestowed imperial salutations

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<sup>89</sup> Winterling, p. 108. As Winterling states, the *fasces* were the "bundle of rods that symbolized their office and the power connected with it." Caligula also traveled to Germany with the likely intention of removing Gaetulicus from his governorship of Lower Germany.

<sup>90</sup> Winterling, p. 110. Galba, whom Caligula valued as a "capable general", would become not only the new governor of Germany, but also one of the emperors during the "year of the four emperors" in about thirty years.

<sup>91</sup> Cary, Earnest, and Herbert Baldwin. Foster. *Dio's Roman History: In Nine Volumes*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924, p. 329-331.

<sup>92</sup> Winterling (p.110) posits that Gaetulicus revealed the names of the other conspirators to Caligula in order to "save his own skin."

<sup>93</sup> Winterling, p. 110. Also see Barrett, p. 109, who additionally states that because Suetonius tells us that Agrippina was required to carry back the ashes of Lepidus to Rome, more evidence is added to Caligula's northern trip as being genuine: Lepidus was executed outside the city.

<sup>94</sup> Barrett, p. 131. The literary sources give varying details on this incident, but Galba seems to have done well before Caligula even arrived.

upon him seven times; this indicates that the Romans must have had good luck in the north.<sup>95</sup> After the campaigning season, he returned to Lyons in Gallia Lugdunensis to spend the winter.<sup>96</sup>

In the following year, Caligula decided to continue his campaign against the Germans.<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, again, the primary sources, as Barrett notes (p. 134), are not too clear in their descriptions of what occurs at this point. Suetonius (*Lives of the Caesars*, 12.6.3) says:<sup>98</sup>

*And when Gaius arrived, Galba and his army made such a good impression, that out of the great body of troops assembled from all the provinces none received greater commendation or richer rewards.*

The satirist Persius (6.43-44) explains that Caligula asked for a triumph for his German victories, thus indicating that he was successful against them in AD 40.<sup>99</sup>

After the affairs in Germania were concluded, several sources indicate that the emperor decided to head for Britain.<sup>100</sup> Barrett warns (p. 135) that it is very difficult to "sort out fact from fantasy in the descriptions of this undertaking." With this idea in mind, one of the earliest literary sources that researchers have regarding the incident in

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<sup>95</sup> Winterling, p. 114; Cassius Dio (*Roman History*, 59.22.2), who says that Caligula's men acclaimed him *imperator* seven times. Also, see Barrett, p. 131.

<sup>96</sup> Winterling, p. 114 and Barrett, p. 132. While at Lyons, he apparently engaged in many extravagant activities according to the sources, such as oratorical competitions. Juvenal (*Sat.* I, 44) warns about anyone speaking at the altar in Lyons and comparing the event to stepping barefoot upon a snake. It is an allusion to this event according to Barrett (p. 132).

<sup>97</sup> Barrett (p. 133) believes that his first choice would have been Mainz, where Galba was positioned.

<sup>98</sup> Barrett, p. 134. Translation from Rolfe, John C. *Suetonius: With an English Translation*. Vol. 2. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1914, p. 201.

<sup>99</sup> Barrett (p. 134) recalls Persius (6.43-44) who says that Gaius sent a laurel to the Senate at Rome for the defeat of the German youth: *missa est a Caesare laurus in signem ob cladem Germanae pubis*. Also see Evans, Lewis, and William Gifford. *The Satires of Juvenal, Persius, Sulpicia and Lucilius*. London: Bohn, 1852. p. 264.

<sup>100</sup> Barrett, p. 135 and Winterling, p. 117.

Britain stems from Tacitus, who briefly recounts all the individuals interested in Britain, starting with Julius Caesar.<sup>101</sup> In regard to Caligula's expedition, though, Tacitus explains the following:<sup>102</sup>

*It is certain that Gaius Caesar meditated an expedition into Britain; but his temper, precipitate in forming schemes, and unsteady in pursuing them, together with the ill success of his mighty attempts against Germany, rendered the design abortive.*

Although Tacitus' account of the reign of Caligula has been lost, his allusion to the invasion of Britain in AD 40 in his *Agricola* seems to indicate that his treatment did not vary too dramatically from what appears in other accounts, like Suetonius'.

Suetonius, writing somewhat later than Tacitus, voices even more puzzling details about the incident and frequently describes the emperor in a negative manner.<sup>103</sup> For instance, in chapter 45 of his biography of Caligula, Suetonius mentions the invasion of Britain while describing Caligula's debauchery in chapter 46.<sup>104</sup> Suetonius notes the following about the British episode:<sup>105</sup>

*Finally, as if he intended to bring the war to an end, he drew up a line of battle on the shore of the Ocean, arranging his ballistas and other artillery; and when no one knew or could imagine what he was going to do, he suddenly bade them gather shells and fill their helmets and the folds of their gowns, calling them "spoils from the Ocean, due to the Capitol and Palatine." As a monument of his victory he erected a lofty tower, from which lights were to shine at night to guide the course of ships, as from the Pharos. Then promising the soldiers a gratuity of*

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<sup>101</sup> See Tacitus (*Agricola*, chs. 13 and 14). Of course, the section of the *Annals* relating to Caligula is missing.

<sup>102</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola*, 13.63-65. Translation by: Brooks, Edward. *The Germany and the Agricola of Tacitus*. Philadelphia: David McKay, 1897. p. 104-105. It is also interesting to note that Tacitus suggests Caligula's attempts in Germany were not successful; however, the majority of the other sources seem to say that he was. Still, it's difficult to construct accurately both his German and British campaign.

<sup>103</sup> Suetonius (*The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 4.19.3; 4.44.2; 4.46).

<sup>104</sup> Suetonius (*The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 4.45). Translation by: Rolfe, John C. *Suetonius: With an English Translation*. Vol. 1. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1914. p. 475.

<sup>105</sup> Suetonius (*The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 4.46). Translation by: Rolfe. p. 477.

*a hundred denarii each, as if he had shown unprecedented liberality, he said, "Go your way happy; go your way rich."*

In an earlier chapter (4.44.2), Suetonius points out that Caligula had completed only one event in Britain:<sup>106</sup>

*All that he accomplished was to receive the surrender of Adminius, son of Cynobellinus king of the Britons, who had been banished by his father and had deserted to the Romans with a small force; yet as if the entire island had submitted to him, he sent a grandiloquent letter to Rome, commanding the couriers who carried it to ride in their post-chaise all the way to the Forum and the House, and not to deliver it to anyone except the consuls, in the temple of Mars the Avenger, before a full meeting of the senate.*

Barrett notes that one portion of Suetonius' above passage (i.e., the prince being driven out by his father) might not have been true at all.<sup>107</sup> A final point of interest is that Suetonius relates the following (4.19.3):<sup>108</sup>

*I know that many have supposed that Gaius devised this kind of bridge in rivalry of Xerxes, who excited no little admiration by bridging the much narrower Hellespont; others that it was to inspire fear in Germany and Britain, on which he had designs, by the fame of some stupendous work.*

This section alludes to the famous Bridge of Baiae incident, and Suetonius here is indicating that it was built to arouse fear in his enemies. Just as Tacitus does on several occasions, Suetonius mentions that Caligula was interested in Britain; however, the negative tone of the surviving sources presents problems for modern scholars.

The historian Dio Cassius also discusses Caligula's British campaign in his *Historia Romana* and his account is generally negative as well. At one point in his

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<sup>106</sup> Suetonius (*The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 4.44). Translation by: Rolfe, p. 473.

<sup>107</sup> Suetonius (*The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 4.44.2). See Barrett, p. 136-137. It may not be true because the prince simply could have surrendered himself to the Romans.

<sup>108</sup> Translation by Rolfe, p. 433. Caligula's enemies, of course, were the Britons and Germans.

narrative, Dio says that Gaius headed for Britain, but that once he arrived at the ocean's shore, he "turned back" and "showed no little vexation at his lieutenants who won some slight success."<sup>109</sup> Obviously, these statements, while interesting, do not tell scholars enough about the event, and Barrett (p. 135) notes that there is a gap in Dio's narrative here.<sup>110</sup> In chapter 59.25, however, the text as it has been preserved gives a fuller account, one that is in line with that of Suetonius:<sup>111</sup>

*And when he reached the ocean, as if he were going to conduct a campaign in Britain, and had drawn up all the soldiers on the beach, he embarked on a trireme, and then, after putting out a little from the land, sailed back again. Next he took his seat on a lofty platform and gave the soldiers the signal as if for battle, bidding the trumpeters urge them on; then of a sudden he ordered them to gather up the shells. Having secured these spoils (for he needed booty, of course, for his triumphal procession), he became greatly elated, as if he had enslaved the very ocean; and he gave his soldiers many presents. The shells he took back to Rome for the purpose of exhibiting the booty to the people there as well. The senate knew not how it could remain indifferent to these doings, since it learned that he was in an exalted frame of mind, nor yet again how it could praise him. For, if anybody bestows great praise of the extraordinary honours for some trivial exploit or none at all, he is suspected of making a hissing and a mockery of the affair. Nevertheless, when Gaius entered the city, he came very near destroying the whole senate because it had not voted him divine honours.*

Curiously, Dio hints at Caligula's involvement in Britain again (59. 25.5a), by noting that he was addressed as both "Britannicus" and *imperator*:<sup>112</sup>

*Because of his adulteries he was frequently styled imperator as well as Germanicus and Britannicus, as if he had subdued the whole of Germany and Britain.*

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<sup>109</sup> Translation by Cary and Baldwin, p. 327. See Cassius Dio, 59.21.4.

<sup>110</sup> Because much of Dio is preserved in epitome, a portion of this account might have been excluded here.

<sup>111</sup> Cassius Dio, 59.25. Translation by Cary and Baldwin, p. 339.

<sup>112</sup> Translation from Cary and Baldwin, p. 341. It is important to note, though, that Dio, writing at a much later date, might have been adding institutions from his own time period (i.e., the cognomen *Britannicus* for Caligula). Regardless, it is still interesting that the author gives the victory title to Caligula.

One interesting feature of this section is that Dio calls Caligula an *imperator* in reference to Caligula's supposed adulteries; *imperator* was the title reserved for triumphant generals after actual military victories, not adulterous affairs.<sup>113</sup> Also, although both Dio's and Suetonius' accounts share similarities, Suetonius says nothing about Caligula entering a ship or receiving the title "Britannicus"; also, Dio's version, as it has been preserved, does not include the story of Caligula capturing Adminius and a band of fellow soldiers. Perhaps most important, though, is that both authors portray Caligula very negatively, emphasizing that researchers should be cautious when re-constructing this event of the emperor's life.

Paulus Orosius, writing in the 5th century, includes an account of the British invasion as well.<sup>114</sup> His version of the incident is brief, but it does have some of the details present in the older sources. Also, he does not discuss Caligula as negatively as Suetonius and Dio do, at least in the section pertaining to Britain:<sup>115</sup>

*Caligula... stopped at the Ocean coast within sight of Britain. And when he had received in surrender Minocynobelinus, the son of the king of the Britons, who banished by his father was wandering with a few followers, since grounds for war were lacking, he returned to Rome.*

Although the passage is short, it provides researchers with a picture that is somewhat similar to the aforementioned authors: halting at the ocean's coast; receiving the prince who was driven out by his father; and finally, returning back home because there was not

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<sup>113</sup> Potter, D. S. *Ancient Rome: A New History*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009. p. 337- 338. Since Dio is calling Caligula an *imperator*, once must ponder why. Was it an exaggeration by Dio, or did Caligula actually achieve success in Britain?

<sup>114</sup> Orosius, Paulus (*The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, 7.5). Summary provided by Deferrari, Roy J. *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*. Washington: Catholic University of America, 1964.

<sup>115</sup> Translation by Deferrari, Roy J., p. 293.

a cause for the war. It is worth mentioning, though, that the name of the prince is "Minocynobelinus" in this version, rather than Adminius. If Orosius was using Suetonius as his source, one must wonder why he changed the name of the prince; scholars, again, must be careful here when deducing the incident. Regardless, Orosius' mention of the event supports the idea that Caligula wanted to declare war on the Britons, but that it never actually occurred.

In short, the sources, while at times biased, generally agree that Caligula and his legions first headed toward the shore of the ocean, fully preparing to invade Britain. The emperor then decided to abort the operation, perhaps commanding his soldiers to collect seashells. At some point, a British king's son, being driven off the island by his father, surrendered to Caligula; Caligula accepted his surrender and possibly used his surrender as a way of declaring victory over the entire island of Britain.

### **The Military Victory: Legitimation of a Leader through Conquest**

*'Roman, remember to rule the citizens with military authority, (these will be your powers), and to establish a conduct for peace, and to spare the ones you have subdued, and to conquer the haughty.'*<sup>116</sup>

In Vergil's *Aeneid*, Anchises explains one of the most important aspects of all military leaders: *imperium*.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, military conquest, expansion, and control were the duties expected of a superb Roman general. Lineage, offices, and patronage

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<sup>116</sup> This is a section from Vergil's *Aeneid* (bk. 6, lines 850-853) spoken by Anchises; Anchises informs Aeneas about the outstanding lineage that will spring up later in time from his son, while encouraging him to conquer all (i.e., *tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento*). Translation by: Joseph Bissler.

<sup>117</sup> *Imperium*, a term that extended way back into the regal period, was originally the "absolute authority over all members of a community and leadership in war." Potter, D. S. *Ancient Rome: A New History*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009. p. 30. Also, Potter notes (p. 338) that *imperium* eventually became the "legal power of a magistrate, by extension the area where the power was exercised."



were important qualities for an aristocrat, but leading a Roman army to victory was always the highlight of a Roman's political career. Often when the general of these armies would capture a territory, he would receive the greatest honors in the forms of loot, praises, career advancements, and, perhaps most importantly a triumph.<sup>118</sup> After all, even the very position of emperor (derived from the title *imperator*) was at its roots a military position.<sup>119</sup>

Military victory was a frequent theme in public artwork. Coins and sculpture commonly depicted Mars, trophies, generals in military uniforms, the battles, and captives.<sup>120</sup> Arches predominantly from the imperial period celebrated victorious battles and campaigns.<sup>121</sup> Such images emphasized how Rome was a very militaristic society that esteemed victory as extremely important; after all, many travelers would pass them during their journeys, seeing images of the general and his army successfully defeating their foes.

Although Romans prized military victory above all else, they also stressed how wars needed to be justified, meaning that their wars were supposed to have served a purpose: they were to "carry some moral weight" and not be "mere legal formalities".<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Triumphs, according to Livy, were the highest honor a Roman could receive. Versnel, H. S. *Triumphus an Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970. p. 304. Liv. 30, 15, 12: *neque magnificentius quicquam triumpho apud Romanos ... esse*.

<sup>119</sup> McFayden, Donald. *The History of the Title Imperator under the Roman Empire*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1920. p. 6 and 67. *Imperator* eventually meant how many times a victorious emperor had been saluted by his army.

<sup>120</sup> Southern, Pat. *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006. p. 7-18. Coins, for instance, might also have weapons and shields on them indicating warfare.

<sup>121</sup> Gurval, Robert Alan. *Actium and Augustus: The Politics and Emotions of Civil War*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995. p. 38-40. Arches were small in number before the imperial period, and generally they were unrelated to triumphs or military victories; however, the Actian Arch was specifically erected to celebrate Octavian's victory at Actium.

<sup>122</sup> Gentili, Alberico, Benedict Kingsbury, Benjamin Straumann, and David A. Lupher. *The Wars of the*

Although leaders were assumed to have waged just wars, it is obvious that many wanted personal gains as well. Because leaders, such as Caligula's ancestor Julius Caesar, during the early days reaped such great rewards from battles (especially foreign ones), one has to wonder: why wouldn't Caligula have used this strategy to his advantage also?<sup>123</sup> Because the rewards were remarkable, the Romans felt they needed to set limitations upon ambitious aristocrats who might use the ideology of military victory to selfishly achieve their own political agendas. This strategy seems to have been primarily a product of the extensive expansion during the late Republic when men like Marius, Sulla, and Julius Caesar used military conquest to win political power in Rome. The first Roman emperor, Augustus, was very active in wars as well, as his *Res Gestae* explains:<sup>124</sup>

*I extended the boundaries of all the provinces which were bordered by races not yet subject to our empire. The provinces of the Gauls, the Spains, and Germany, bounded by the ocean from Gades to the mouth of the Elbe, I reduced to a state of peace. The Alps, from the region which lies nearest to the Adriatic as far as the Tuscan Sea, I brought to a state of peace without waging on any tribe an unjust war.*

Augustus wanted to emphasize that the wars he waged were truly just and that they served a purpose outside of personal gains. Thus, when investigating the military activity of Caligula, it is imperative to do it within the context of the ideology of military victory.

Augustus, from all appearances, then, was eager to buy into the ideology of military victory. His successor, Tiberius, however, was the opposite: he had little to do

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*Romans : A Critical Edition and Translation of De Armis Romanis*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011. p. xv. They point out a statement by Laelius from Cicero's *Republic*: "No war is considered just unless it is announced and declared and unless it involves recovery of property."

<sup>123</sup> Caligula likely did use this tactic. He may well have taken his troops toward Britain from Germany in the hopes of gaining a quick military victory and the rewards it brought.

<sup>124</sup> Shipley, Frederick W. *Compendium of Roman History; Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 388-389. Also, see *Res Gestae* 26.

with wars and campaigns while he was emperor. One reason, for example, that the literary sources painted him so negatively is because he did not legitimize his power as a leader through warfare; he appeared as a weak social outcast to the Romans. Caligula, knowing how both Augustus' and Tiberius' reigns played out, would have embraced any chance he could to amplify his image. By engaging in war, Caligula was explicitly showing that he was better than his predecessor, while simultaneously embracing both Germanicus' and Augustus' emphasis on warfare.

Claudius came to the throne quite differently from his predecessors; his reign was the result of a coup, and he had no direct blood relationship with Augustus at all.<sup>125</sup> The physically deformed and ridiculed man was constantly insecure about his reign, so he needed a way to soften the negative characteristics likely felt by the people around the empire, and so he decided upon military victories. Britain was the choice established for the emperor's glory:<sup>126</sup>

*On learning of his achievement, [they] gave him the title of Britannicus and granted him permission to celebrate a triumph. They voted also that there should be an annual festival to commemorate the event and that two triumphal arches should be erected, one in the city and the other in Gaul, because it was from that country that he had set sail when he crossed over to Britain. They bestowed upon his son the same title as upon him, and, in fact, Britannicus came to be in a way the boy's regular name.*

As this passage indicates, Claudius's grand success in Britain allowed for the primary sources to depict him as a more positive emperor than his predecessor. Claudius

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<sup>125</sup> Ginsburg, Judith. *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire*. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. p. 64

<sup>126</sup> Cassius Dio 60.22.1-2. Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius Roman History*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 423.

advertised his victory on a gold *aureus* depicting the arch built for the occasion.<sup>127</sup>



Figure 1. This is a Roman *aureus* showing the emperor Claudius on the obverse and the words *De Britann* on the reverse. The reverse also has various individuals celebrating Claudius' victory with a triumphal arch; constructions, such as arches, were important projects that celebrated a triumphant general's military victory.

Thus, Caligula's failure to both attack and subdue Britain is reflected in the various praises of the literary sources towards his successor's valiant achievement. Conquest and expansion were necessities for an effective ruler, and the military victory itself was a defining feature of a ruler who both wanted to legitimize power and one whom the literary sources tended to depict more favorably.

### Why the Romans were Interested in Britain: Recalling Caesar and Claudius

*For these [Romans] I set no limits in time or space, and have given to them eternal empire, world without end. Even Juno, who in her spite and fear now vexes earth, sea, and sky, shall adopt a better view, and with me cherish the Romans, lords of the world, and the people of the toga. That is my pleasure. And there will come a time as the years glide on, when the descendants of Trojan Assaracus shall subdue glorious Mycenae, Phthia, and Argos. From this*

<sup>127</sup> Roman *aureus* image of Claudius taken from: Gold Aureus of Emperor Claudius." *British Museum* -. Web. 27 Jan. 2013.[http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/cm/g/gold\\_aureus\\_-\\_emperor\\_claudius.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/cm/g/gold_aureus_-_emperor_claudius.aspx).

*resplendent line shall be born Trojan Caesar, who will extend his Empire to the Ocean and his glory to the stars, a Julian in the lineage of great Ilus.*<sup>128</sup>

Caligula was certainly familiar with his ancestor's success on the island. In the summer of 55 BC<sup>129</sup>, Gaius Julius Caesar decided to postpone his Gallic War and assault Britain, initially for personal financial gain.<sup>130</sup> Caesar and his men faced many hardships while battling the Britons, and Caligula would have known specific events that hindered a quick victory for Caesar. For instance, various British tribes sent envoys to Caesar who said that they were offering submission; in reality, though, many betrayed Caesar, thus showing their overall deceptive nature.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, the weather was not always favorable, and as Caesar and his soldiers first crossed the English Channel, violent storms blew the cavalry transport ships back to the continent; the Britons, of course, benefited from the Romans' disadvantageous situation, waiting on the shore for them to disembark from their ships.<sup>132</sup> Although Caesar finally defeated the Britons, Caligula's understanding of Caesar's troubles on the island would possibly have been influential on his overall decision to not cross the channel nearly a century later.

Caesar's invasion of Britain proved to be a huge military and political victory. Indeed, Salway (p. 31) points out that the Senate did, after all, decree a lengthy period of thanksgiving for his victory.<sup>133</sup> Additionally, Caesar accomplished two tasks (Salway p.

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<sup>128</sup> A section from Vergil's *Aeneid* (bk. 1, lines 279-288) spoken by Jupiter. Translation by Lombardo, Stanley. *Aeneid*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2005, p. 10. This quote highlights the general Roman attitude towards warfare; Vergil was writing close in time to both Caesar and the Julio-Claudians.

<sup>129</sup> The time of the year wasn't the greatest; according to Peter Salway (p. 25-26), the Romans rarely ever campaigned during the wintry months. Salway, Peter. *Roman Britain*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1984.

<sup>130</sup> Green, Miranda J. *The Celtic World*. London: Routledge, 1995. p. 627.

<sup>131</sup> Salway p. 27. The Britons broke the peace treaty that they had made with the Romans.

<sup>132</sup> Salway p. 27-28.

<sup>133</sup> Salway (p. 37) points out that Caesar also acquired hostages, an annual tribute, and a promise that the

31): "he made a substantial military impression on public opinion at Rome and he had seen the Britons and their mode of fighting." Green (p. 627) offers that Caesar also wanted to break the "Gallic trading monopoly with the Britons, mainly in wine"; archaeological evidence in the form of amphorae and silverware indeed suggests that the Romans set up trading posts in the friendly parts of Britain.<sup>134</sup> Furthermore, Salway suggests (p. 38) that Caesar might have viewed the crossing of *Oceanus* as a victory in itself, an idea ingrained in Roman ideology, since Caesar was essentially going beyond the world the Romans knew.<sup>135</sup> Caesar's overall motive, though, seems to have been to conquer Britain for prestige and glory, but he needed to know whom and what exactly he was up against. Having learned from the mistakes of the earlier campaign, Caesar decided to return to Britain in the following year.<sup>136</sup>

Nearly a century after Caesar had successfully waged war with the Britons, the fourth Roman emperor, Claudius, launched his own campaign on the island.<sup>137</sup> Because Claudius' invasion took place only a couple of years after Caligula's, comparisons between the two emperors can be useful, since there are legitimate motivations surrounding Claudius' invasion of Britain, too. For instance, Caligula failed in his attempt

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enemy would not declare war on the tribe that was allied with him.

<sup>134</sup> Green, p. 627. One area in which the trading posts have been discovered is Skeleton Green, and other goods were found in the Welwyn area. Green (p. 627) notes that Caesar would have known how beneficial the friendly trading posts would have been to the Romans; they could place a "heavy export charge on goods leaving the empire." Finally, (p. 627) the Britons could become "established to Roman goods and with it the establishment of a currency and the more extensive use of it for commercial exchange."

<sup>135</sup> Caesar's "victory over the Ocean" idea resonates well with a portion of the primary sources (i.e., Suetonius and Dio Cassius) who describe Caligula's battle as being partially with the Ocean, too. The seashells in the authors' accounts who discuss Caligula might be construed as the spoils of the war.

<sup>136</sup> Salway, p. 33-37. For instance, he brought more soldiers with him, and he was also well-prepared to get off the ships more quickly. He defeated Cassivellaunus, ruler of the British tribe against whom he fought, and established terms of peace with him; afterwards, he and his legions returned to the continent.

<sup>137</sup> Barrett, p. 135.

of capturing the island and the Romans might have wanted to see it finally conquered.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, the tribes in Britain were harassing each other, and Claudius probably felt that he himself would need to intervene before matters got out of hand.<sup>139</sup> Salway (p. 69-70) notes further that the Britons could have also united at some point soon and attacked Roman territory.<sup>140</sup> As another example, Suetonius himself relates the following about Claudius' ambition for doing battle with the Britons:<sup>141</sup>

*[He] without any battle or bloodshed received the submission of a part of the island, returned to Rome within six months after leaving the city, and celebrated a triumph of great splendour. To witness the sight he allowed not only the governors of the provinces to come to Rome, but even some of the exiles; and among the tokens of his victory he set a naval crown on the gable of the Palace beside the civic crown, as a sign that he had crossed and, as it were, subdued the Ocean.*

Thus, he wanted to earn a triumph legitimately by waging a war, and he selected Britain as the place to merit one.<sup>142</sup> In this sense, then, he is comparable to Caesar: they both wanted glory and prestige, which a war could offer to the victorious parties, and especially to their leaders. Salway points out (p. 70-71) another possibility: when Claudius came to the throne, he had to distinguish himself from his loathed predecessors, Tiberius and Caligula. Finally, Claudius' succession looked somewhat illegitimate, so he needed to show legitimacy through war because he could not get it through lineage. He

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<sup>138</sup> Salway, Peter. p. 69. Regardless if it were an influence on Claudius' decision to raid Britain or not, it is still interesting to realize that he is the one whom the primary sources depict as being successful without metaphors.

<sup>139</sup> Salway, Peter. p. 69.

<sup>140</sup> Salway continues (p. 70) by explaining that two powerful British leaders, Togodumnus and Caratacus, were already in control of much of the south, east, and west of the island, and the two were not on good terms with Rome.

<sup>141</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, 5.17.3. Translation by Rolfe, John C. *Suetonius: With an English Translation*. Vol. 2. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1914, p. 35.

<sup>142</sup> Salway, Peter. p. 70.

had to emulate someone from the past whom all the Romans knew and praised, and he chose Julius Caesar.<sup>143</sup>

As soon as Claudius decided to assault Britain, his first task was to make Aulus Plautius, a very distinguished commander, the man in charge of the operation itself; Salway notes (p.73-75) that the Romans brought at least four legions on their journey, totaling about forty-thousand men. Thus, the Romans were ready for a quick and smooth victory, but that is not what happened at all: before crossing *Oceanus* and heading into "strange" lands, the troops mutinied.<sup>144</sup>

Realizing it would be difficult to inspire forty-thousand legionary soldiers to cross the English Channel, Plautius sent a message back to Claudius asking for help in raising the soldiers' spirits; Claudius dispatched his powerful freedman, Narcissus, to try to encourage them.<sup>145</sup> Narcissus' exhortations worked, and the soldiers set out for Britain; the Britons, however, thought that the Romans' mutinying meant that they themselves were safe and neglected to have troops waiting on the shore for their arrival.<sup>146</sup> The Roman invasion met with significant initial success; the emperor Claudius himself even went to Britain personally for the conclusion of the campaign:<sup>147</sup>

*He came to the ocean and crossed over to Britain, where he joined the legions that were waiting for him near the Thames. Taking over the command of these, he crossed the stream, and engaging the barbarians, who had gathered at his*

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<sup>143</sup> Salway, Peter. p. 70-71. Salway may be correct in his belief that Claudius was modeling Julius Caesar when deciding to attack Britain. This was a weird choice for idolization since Caesar was considered the "murdered dictator" by Augustus, whose memory needed to be shunned. Claudius, though, had no blood ties to Augustus.

<sup>144</sup> Salway, Peter. *Roman Britain*. 1984, p. 81-82. Salway points out that this could be the same thing that happened with Caligula (i.e., mutinying).

<sup>145</sup> Salway, Peter. *Roman Britain*. 1984, p. 81-82.

<sup>146</sup> Salway, Peter. *Roman Britain*. 1984, p. 82-83.

<sup>147</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 60.21.2-4. Translated by Cary, Earnest, and Herbert Baldwin, p. 423.



*approach, he defeated them and captured Camulodunum, the capital of Cynobellinus. Thereupon he won over numerous tribes, in some cases by capitulation, in others by force, and was saluted as emperor several times, contrary to precedent; for no man may receive this title more than once for one and the same war. He deprived the conquered of their arms and handed them over to Plautius, bidding him also subjugate the remaining districts. Claudius himself now hastened back to Rome, sending ahead the news of his victory by his sons-in-law Magnus and Silanus.*

Claudius' success no doubt awakened the Roman sentiments felt almost a century earlier when Caesar had been victorious on foreign territory across *Oceanus*. Claudius celebrated by naming his son Britannicus and erected a triumphal arch in Rome.<sup>148</sup> The Romans continued to expand their new province throughout the rest of Claudius' reign.

Briefly, it is also relevant to discuss what materialistic goods the island itself offered to the Romans who wanted to conquer it during the early Empire. Salway notes (p. 633-634) that Britain was abundant in mineral deposits, like lead and iron.<sup>149</sup> Because there were so many mines, the inhabitants put it to use in the forms of pottery and tiles.<sup>150</sup> Another material that was mined quite often was coal, a good source of energy for baths, tile factories, and other facilities.<sup>151</sup> Finally, the island also had regions which were suitable for growing grain, one of the main sources of food for the legionary soldiers.<sup>152</sup> In addition to the political and militaristic advantages of seizing Britain, then, there were other reasons for having Britain be under Roman control.

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<sup>148</sup> Salway, Peter. *Roman Britain*. 1984, p. 89.

<sup>149</sup> Salway, Peter. p. 630-634. He points out that the Romans "exploited" the deposits as soon as the army was in control of the district. Also, sources indicate that lead was mined during the early years of the Empire. Taken further, much of this mining might have taken place under Claudius.

<sup>150</sup> Potter, T. W., and Catherine Johns. *Roman Britain*. Berkeley: University of California, 1992, p. 52-54.

<sup>151</sup> Salway, Peter p. 631. He mentions how coal was important to the ancient Greeks, too, just as Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (320-340), for example, has a scene in which coal is regarded as being precious.

<sup>152</sup> Salway, Peter. p. 621-622. He specifies that the highland zones "were more arable" for the production of food.

### Analyzing AD 40: What Modern Research Suggests about the British Episode

First and foremost, it seems clear from the evidence that Caligula's planned invasion of Britain never got underway. In fact, most modern scholars assume that a real invasion was planned and was perhaps cancelled at the last minute.<sup>153</sup> Before investigating what likely occurred at the shore, one must understand that there are many problems associated with taking the primary sources' historical accounts at face value. For instance, Barrett (p. 135) relates that, although the Romans were doing well in Germany in AD 40, the situation would not likely have been stable enough to require an invasion of Britain. In addition, various Germanic tribes were resisting the Romans quite aggressively, which at some point apparently compelled the emperor to recite this portion of Vergil's *Aeneid* to his soldiers:<sup>154</sup>

*He also admonished them in the familiar line of Vergil to "bear up and save themselves for better days."*

Another issue has to deal with the number of ships it would have required to transport the legions across the channel; unlike Caesar's account, which states specifically how many vessels were required, there is no indication in any sources for Caligula's voyage.<sup>155</sup> Additionally, one would expect that if Caesar knew the dangers of sailing over *Oceanus* during the winter nearly one-hundred years earlier, his descendant would. Going along with this idea, Barrett (p. 136) remarks that the time of the year would have made

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<sup>153</sup> Barrett, p. 135.

<sup>154</sup> Barrett p. 135. Some of the resisting tribes, for example, included the Canninefates, Cauchi, and Chatti. The quote is a suggestion from Barrett p. 135, taken from Suet. 4.45.2, and trans. by Rolfe p. 475. Also, see Vergil's *Aeneid* (1. 207).

<sup>155</sup> Barrett p. 135. He notes that Caesar needed eight-hundred transport ships. It is important to state, though, that the literary sources themselves do not always mention the exact numbers of military requirements, like ships.

Caligula's trip to Britain impossible. Barrett reconstructs the chronology based on Caligula's very slow trip back to Rome ending in May of AD 40; the trip to Rome, as Barrett explains (p. 136), would have been around one thousand miles from the British Channel. This journey would have taken at least two months to make, assuming they covered about twenty miles a day.<sup>156</sup> All this information indicates that the emperor would have needed to depart from Britain sometime in March, and that he would have staged a war with the Britons at some point earlier than that (e.g., perhaps February).<sup>157</sup> It would have been quite miraculous for Caligula to have waged a successful war with the Britons in a month or two, captured one of their princes, and traveled back to Rome at a slow pace by May. Barrett also considers Vegetius' passage on shipping, which clearly states that "up to March 10 the seas are closed."<sup>158</sup> Finally, Barrett brings up Suetonius' assertion that Caligula had erected a monumental tower for his victory over Britain; it was intended, according to Barrett's interpretation of Suetonius, "to aid the return of ships ferrying men and supplies to Britain, after the incident at the channel."<sup>159</sup> And so, it is essential for the modern historian to agree that Caligula may never have stepped foot on

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<sup>156</sup> Barrett p. 136. As already mentioned Suetonius describes the journey to Rome as being leisurely, which would have made twenty miles a day seem like too many. Barrett (p. 136) relates that some senators even begged him to hasten his journey back to Rome.

<sup>157</sup> Barrett, p. 136.

<sup>158</sup> Barrett, p. 136. Also, see Vegetius 4.39: *Ex die igitur tertio idus Nouembres usque in diem sextum idus Martias maria clauduntur*. It is important to note, though, that Vegetius wrote much later in time.

<sup>159</sup> Barrett, p. 136. Also, see Suetonius 4.46, which says (trans. by Rolfe, p. 477): "As a monument of his victory he erected a lofty tower, from which lights were to shine at night to guide the course of ships, as from the Pharos." This lofty tower was a light house at Boulogne, which was visible until 1644 when it was destroyed, see: Duruy, Victor. *History of Rome, and of the Roman People, from Its Origin to the Invasion of the Barbarians*. Boston: C.F. Jewett Pub., 1894. p. 506.

British soil, while keeping in mind Barrett's postulation: "If Suetonius' sequence of events is correct... the actual invasion was planned for a later date."<sup>160</sup>

The question, then, is: What really happened at the British Channel? Scholars have pondered this question for quite a long time. One of the earliest modern researchers to address this question was M. Gelzer, who suggested that all the Britons came together for one large attack against the Romans<sup>161</sup>; his implication here was that the Romans were simply too afraid to do battle against one large swarm of Britons. J.P. Balsdon took Gelzer's hypothesis a step further: He posited that after the soldiers refused to engage the Britons, Caligula commanded them to pick up seashells "as a form of humiliation" because of their timidity.<sup>162</sup> One problem with Gelzer's theory that Barrett (p. 135) points out is that it would have been incredibly audacious for Caligula to have ordered his soldiers to do this task. After all, he had already been, by this point, a target of two conspiracies; and so, it is not likely that he would have intentionally angered the legionary soldiers. Additionally, the legionary soldiers knew Caligula's father as a distinguished war hero, so he likely would have been popular amongst them; to gain prestige and win them over further, for instance, he might have launched an invasion on Britain. P. Bicknell, however, believed that Caligula did not intend to take over the Britons at all, but rather that he was setting his sights on one of the Germanic tribes at the Rhine: the Canninefates.<sup>163</sup> While this idea is plausible (Galba was holding them off

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<sup>160</sup> Barrett, p. 136. There is no doubt that Caligula planned to attack Britain; however, it is wrong to claim that he either attacked or conquered it. His successor, Claudius, was the one who accomplished that task.

<sup>161</sup> Barrett, p. 135. Also, see Gelzer, M. "Iulius Caligula." *Real-Enzyklopädie* 10.405-406 (1919).

<sup>162</sup> Barrett, p. 136. Also, see Balsdon, J.P.V.D. *The Emperor Gaius*. Oxford, 1934.

<sup>163</sup> Barrett, p. 136. Also, see Bicknell, P. "The Emperor Gaius' Military Activities in AD 40." *Historia* 17

during this time), there is no evidence in the literary sources to suggest that this was the case.<sup>164</sup> Finally, R.W. Davies contends that the soldiers were engaging in training practices at the British Channel. This idea could go along well with Bicknell's proposition, but, as Barrett speculates, there are obvious errors with his idea: it is highly unlikely that the soldiers would have used seashells as "missiles"; also, why would Caligula have specifically selected the British Channel's shore for military training purposes?<sup>165</sup>

Two other prominent and more recent historians have their own thoughts about what happened at the Channel's shore<sup>166</sup>; because much of their analyses mesh well with this chapter's argument, they will be explored in more detail. Barrett specifies that it is possible that Caligula received the surrender of the British prince Adminius.<sup>167</sup> When Adminius fled for refuge to the Romans<sup>168</sup>, Caligula used Adminius' "surrender" to his own advantage by stating that he had captured a British prince without bloodshed, which in turn would have led to a triumphal procession; the "surrender" might have occurred at sea in the trireme that Dio mentions in his account.<sup>169</sup> Finally, to the Roman mindset, conquering Britain would have been like conquering *Oceanus*, so perhaps the collecting of the shells served the purpose of offering *spolia* to the Capitoline. Although Barrett's

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(1968): p. 496-505.

<sup>164</sup> Barrett, p. 136. He notes that this would be incredibly misleading; a victory over *Oceanus*, to the Romans, he points out, would have instantly conjured up a victory pertinent to Britain, not Germany.

<sup>165</sup> Barrett, p. 136. Also see Davies, R.W. "The Abortive Invasion of Britain by Gaius." *Historia* 15 (1966): p. 124-28.

<sup>166</sup> See Barrett, p. 136-137 and Winterling, p. 118-119.

<sup>167</sup> Barrett, p. 136. Adminius was a prince and son of Cunobelinus.

<sup>168</sup> Barrett, p. 137. Recall that both Orosius and Suetonius hint at this.

<sup>169</sup> Barrett, p. 137. This same trireme would be back at Rome in the procession itself, perhaps indicating its importance to the occasion, i.e., the "conquering" of Adminius.

reconstructions may be somewhat of a stretch for many readers, it is plausible. For instance, he notes that many coins have been discovered from various areas of Britain with depictions and images in reference to Adminius, obviously a person of significance to the Britons.<sup>170</sup> A. Winterling, on the other hand, simply believes that the soldiers mutinied on the shore just as they had done to Aulus Plautius during Claudius' reign; when Caligula ridicules the soldiers and offers "bonus pay" to them, it should be interpreted as the emperor wanting to inflict fear in them.<sup>171</sup> Finally, Winterling believes that if Caligula had invaded Britain, he likely would have been victorious.<sup>172</sup>

### **A Fresh Analysis of the Incident**

Having investigated the sources and modern theories on this episode, it is now possible to attempt a reconstruction of the events surrounding Caligula's invasion of Britain. After campaigning on the Rhine to bolster his popular support at Rome, a wary Caligula<sup>173</sup> marched his troops northwest, fully intending to make an assault on Britain. Caligula almost certainly had in mind the precedent of his ancestor Julius Caesar who had also campaigned across the Rhine and then invaded Britain in the same year. The plan was reasonably sound, and his successor, Claudius, would successfully invade the island just a few years later.

While Caligula and his men were on the shore, they perhaps first prepared weaponry (e.g., ballistae) against a group invading from Britain. When the Romans realized how many allied Britons they would be fighting, widespread fear led the soldiers to mutiny. The theory of a mutiny makes sense, since the troops would attempt the same

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<sup>170</sup> Barrett, p. 137. The coins were discovered in places like Kent and Sussex.

<sup>171</sup> Winterling, p. 118. Thus, he has somewhat of an agreement with Gelzer and Balsdon.

<sup>172</sup> Winterling, p. 119-120. The conditions, as he notes, in Britain suggest that it could have been conquered. Also, Claudius conquered it only a few years later.

<sup>173</sup> He was wary because he had been the target of two conspiracies.

tactic when Claudius was preparing his invasion of Britain.<sup>174</sup> After the soldiers opposed Caligula's orders, Adminius, a prince, surrendered himself, possibly with some of his own tribesmen. He might have surrendered because he and the Britons shared a unanimous feeling of antipathy, as they had remembered what had happened a century earlier; thus, they all might have been struck with fear too, so their leaders could have sent hostages to Caligula in the hope of stopping a war from occurring on their very soil. The sources might have downplayed the event because they loathed Caligula; yet, there was presumably a triumph for the emperor<sup>175</sup>, so it is likely that the Britons really did surrender prominent individuals and that Adminius was not just banished from his homeland by his father. It is also certainly possible that the fear felt in Caligula's army prompted the angry emperor to instruct his soldiers to collect seashells as spoils of *Oceanus*; while this idea seems ridiculous to modern readers, Caligula wanted to keep the army faithful, so he likely would not have ordered them to depart for Britain a second time. Instead, he and his men celebrated the "victory" over Britain by collecting seashells, *spolia Oceani*; what could have at first been a method for humiliating his fearful soldiers might have turned into a victory. For instance, taking spoils from the ocean was equal to conquering Britain in their eyes; to them, Britain and *Oceanus* were interconnected. After these events, Caligula and his army made a slow journey back to Rome bearing "booty" (i.e., Adminius, perhaps some of his tribesmen, and spoils from *Oceanus*) in order to show how they had been "victorious" over Britain. The lighthouse that was built could have been a further symbol of this victory. Finally, it is worth pointing out that the primary sources discuss the British invasion while they simultaneously depict Caligula often in a negative manner, which again emphasizes how the validity of their accounts

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<sup>174</sup> Recall that the soldiers mutined under Aulus Plautius.

<sup>175</sup> Even if there were not a triumph for Caligula, the authors do discuss the matter.

must be questioned. Thus, while it may be impossible for modern analysts to know exactly what happened at the British Channel in the early spring of AD 40, it is highly probable that Caligula would have crossed *Oceanus* and conquered much of Britain if his troops had been more willing to cooperate.



## CHAPTER 2: CALIGULA'S BOND WITH HIS THREE SISTERS

*Oh you three roads, and you secret glen, you, thicket, and narrow way where three paths met—you who drank my father's blood from my own hands—do you remember, perhaps, what deeds I have performed in your sight, and then what fresh deeds I went on to do when I came here? Oh marriage rites, you gave me birth, and when you had brought me forth, you again bore children to your child, you created an incestuous kinship of fathers, brothers, sons, brides, wives, and mothers—all the foulest deeds that are wrought among men! But it is improper to mention what it is improper to do—hurry, for the love of the gods, hide me somewhere beyond the land, or slay me, or cast me into the sea, where you will never behold me any longer! Approach—deign to lay your hands on a wretched man—listen and fear not: my plague can rest on no other mortal.*<sup>176</sup>

People today often remark that brothers and sisters are as close as hands and feet, and for good reason: they are forever genetically-linked, sharing a common lineage that casual friends do not possess. Individuals come together with their siblings at a variety of events throughout their lives, such as at ceremonies, funerals, and celebrations. Thus, it is not surprising that the Romans acted similarly; they themselves placed a great deal of importance on the family, just as, for instance, the emperor Caligula had done with his three sisters. After all, out of the nine siblings his mother Agrippina bore, only six (including Caligula himself) lived past infancy: three boys and three girls.<sup>177</sup> Caligula's two older brothers, Nero and Drusus, became victims of Tiberius.<sup>178</sup> Because so many of

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<sup>176</sup> Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, lines 1398-1415. Translation provided by: Jebb, R. C. *The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles*. Cambridge University, 1933. The quote highlights the negative emotions, such as disgust, attached to the idea of incestuous relationships in antiquity.

<sup>177</sup> Barrett, Anthony. *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990, p. 6. The six children were: Drusus, Nero, Caligula, Agrippina the Younger, Drusilla, and Livilla.

<sup>178</sup> Winterling, Aloys. *Caligula: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California, 2011. p. 36-41. Nero was banished to Pontia as a *hostis* at around AD 29; he died at around AD 30. Drusus was arrested in Rome in AD 30 and placed in a cell beneath the Palatine on the orders of Sejanus, Tiberius' very powerful *praetorian prefect*. Drusus likely starved to death in AD 33. Caligula's mother, Agrippina, was also exiled in AD 29 to Pandataria, and seems to have starved herself in AD 33. Germanicus died in AD 19.

his immediate family had died, it is logical to assume that the new ruler would become closer to whatever family members were remaining (i.e., his sisters). The existing sources, however, go one step further and claim that Caligula's closeness to his sisters was a product of his incestuous relations with them. It is likely that these statements are the result of the generally negative depictions of Caligula and his reign. In this chapter, I will show that these accounts of incest are exaggerated; it is much more likely that Caligula was trying to promote the imperial family (the *domus divina*), much as Augustus had done before him.

### **Description of Incest in the Literary Sources**

In this subsection, I will recount in chronological order some of the primary literary sources that relate Caligula's supposed incestuous relationships with his three sisters.

The earliest source that mentions Caligula's incestuous relationships with his sisters is the first century AD Jewish historian Josephus:<sup>179</sup>

*He was a sinister character who had reached the peak of perversity, a slave to pleasure, a lover of slander, a man dismayed by danger and consequently most bloodthirsty against those of whom he was not afraid. He was greedy of power with one object only, to treat abusively or to bestow senseless largess where it least behooved him, one who obtained his revenue by means of slaughter and injustice. It was his object to be and to be thought stronger than religion or the law, but he had no strength to resist the flatteries of the mob, and regarded as virtuous achievement everything that the law condemns as disgraceful and on which it imposes a penalty. He was unmindful of friendship, however close it was and however great the occasion for it, and he would inflict punishment for the slightest matter on any at whom he became enraged. Everything that went with virtue he regarded as hostile; if he took a fancy to anything he tolerated no opposition to any command that he gave. Hence he even had sexual intercourse*

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<sup>179</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 19.2.5. Translation by: Feldman, Louis H. *Jewish Antiquities, Books 18-19*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1965. p. 309.

*with his own sister: this conduct was the source from which the citizens' hatred of him grew fiercer and fiercer. For such a deed, which for ages past had not been recorded, drew them to incredulity and hatred of the doer. No great work, not even a palace, can be cited as constructed by him for the benefit either of his contemporaries or of posterity.*

This is an important passage for several reasons. First, Josephus, who is writing during the reign of Vespasian, is the earliest literary source to mention Caligula's incestuous relationship; many of the other sources' accounts came at much later dates. Also, Josephus' character profile of Caligula is generally very negative and filled with grand and exaggerated generalizations.

Suetonius, writing about forty years after Josephus, gives the following account:<sup>180</sup>

*He lived in habitual incest with all his sisters, and at a large banquet he placed each of them in turn below him, while his wife reclined above. Of these he is believed to have violated Drusilla when he was still a minor, and even to have been caught lying with her by his grandmother Antonia, at whose house they were brought up in company. Afterwards, when she was the wife of Lucius Cassius Longinus, an ex-consul, he took her from him and openly treated her as his lawful wife; and when ill, he made her heir to his property and the throne. When she died, he appointed a season of public mourning, during which it was a capital offence to laugh, bathe, or dine in company with one's parents, wife, or children. He was so beside himself with grief that suddenly fleeing the city by night and traversing Campania, he went to Syracuse and hurriedly returned from there without cutting his hair or shaving his beard. And he never afterwards took oath about matters of the highest moment, even before the assembly of the people or in the presence of the soldiers, except by the godhead of Drusilla. The rest of his sisters he did not love with so great affection, nor honour so highly, but often prostituted them to his favourites; so that he was the readier at the trial of Aemilius Lepidus to condemn them, as adulteresses and privy to the conspiracies against him; and he not only made public letters in the handwriting of all of them, procured by fraud and seduction, but also dedicated to Mars the Avenger, with an explanatory inscription, three swords designed to take his life.*

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<sup>180</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars: The Life of Caligula*, 24.1-3. Translation by: Rolfe, John C. Suetonius. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1913. p. 441.

Suetonius' account names the favored sister as Drusilla, explaining in greater detail the history of the relationship between both brother and sister. He also claims that the emperor was incestuous with not just this one sister but all three.

Dio Cassius, who wrote about a century after Suetonius, also relates Gaius' incestuous affairs and special treatment of Drusilla:<sup>181</sup>

*Drusilla was married to Marcus Lepidus, at once the favorite and lover of the emperor, but Gaius also treated her as a concubine. When her death occurred at this time, her husband delivered the eulogy and her brother accorded her a public funeral. The Praetorians with their commander and the equestrian order by itself ran about the pyre and the boys of noble birth performed the equestrian exercise called "Troy" about her tomb. All the honours that had been bestowed upon Livia were voted to her, and it was further decreed that she should be deified, that a golden effigy of her should be set up in the senate-house, and that in the temple of Venus in the Forum a statue of her should be built for her, that she should have twenty priests, women as well as men; women, whenever they offered testimony, should swear by her name, and on her birthday a festival equal of the Ludi Megalenses should be celebrated, and the senate and the knights should be given a banquet. She accordingly now received the name Panthea, and was declared worthy of divine honours in all the cities. Indeed, a certain Livius Geminius, a senator, declared on oath, invoking destruction upon himself and his children if he spoke falsely, that he had seen her ascending to heaven and holding converse with the gods; and he called all the other gods and Panthea herself to witness. For this declaration he received a million sesterces. Besides honouring her in these ways, Gaius would not permit the festivals which were then due to take place, to be celebrated either at their appointed time, except as mere formalities, or at any later date. All persons incurred censure equally whether they took offence at anything, as being grieved, or behaved as if they were glad; for they were accused either of failing to mourn her as a mortal or of bewailing her as a goddess. One single incident will give the key to all that happened at that time: the emperor charged with maiestas and put to death a man who had sold hot water.*

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<sup>181</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.11. Translation by: Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 293-295.

According to the above passage, Drusilla was placed on a pedestal equal to Livia; Livia was a primary example of how women should behave during the early empire. Also, he narrates how momentous Drusilla's death was to the emperor: Suetonius, for instance, says that Caligula deified her and created a cult in her honor. In another passage, Dio, while describing the conspiracy of AD 39, states:<sup>182</sup>

*As for the others who perished, there is no need of my naming over most of them, but I will mention those of whom history requires some record. In the first place, then, he put to death Lentulus Gaetulicus, who had an excellent reputation in every way and had been governor of Germany for ten years, for the reason that he was endeared to the soldiers. Another of his victims was Lepidus, that lover and favourite of his, the husband of Drusilla, the man who had together with Gaius maintained improper relations with the emperor's other sisters, Agrippina and Julia, the man whom he had allowed to stand for office five years earlier than was permitted by law and whom he kept declaring he would leave as his successor to the throne. To celebrate this man's death he gave the soldiers money, as though he had defeated some enemies, and sent three daggers to Mars Ultor in Rome. He deported his sisters to the Pontian Islands because of their relations with Lepidus, having first accused them in a communication to the senate of many impious and immoral actions. Agrippina was given Lepidus' bones in an urn and bidden to carry it back to Rome, keeping it in her bosom during the whole journey. Also, since many honours had been voted earlier to his sisters manifestly on his act, he forbade the awarding of other distinctions to any of his relatives.*

In the above section, Dio, as had Suetonius, discusses both the importance of Drusilla over the other sisters and the sexual relationships he had with all three of them.<sup>183</sup>

Eutropius, writing in the fourth century, says the following about the affairs:<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 22.5-9 Translation by: Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 329-331. Drusilla did not plot against him like his other two sisters.

<sup>183</sup> Winterling, p. 110 notes that the precise dates of these events (i.e., the sisters' exiles and trials) is difficult to identify precisely. However, the Arval Brethren performed a sacrifice to "offer thanks that the nefarious plans of Gnaeus Lentulus Gaetulicus against Gaius Germanicus were detected." Likely, then, the betrayals surrounding his sisters and Lepidus had not yet reached Rome.

<sup>184</sup> Eutropius, *Abridgement of Roman History*, 7.12. Translation by: Watson, John S. *Eutropius' Abridgement of Roman History*. New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1853.

*To him succeeded CAIUS CAESAR, surnamed CALIGULA, the grandson of Drusus, the step-son of Augustus, and grand-nephew of Tiberius himself, a most wicked and cruel prince, who effaced even the memory of Tiberius's enormities. He undertook a war against the Germans; but, after entering Suevia, made no effort to do anything. He committed incest with his sisters, and acknowledged a daughter that he had by one of them. While tyrannizing over all with the utmost avarice, licentiousness, and cruelty, he was assassinated in the palace, in the twenty-ninth year of his age, in the third year, tenth month, and eighth day of his reign.*

Eutropius declares that Caligula not only was incestuous, but that he also had a child with one of them (probably Drusilla).<sup>185</sup>

Writing at around the fourth century, Sextus Aurelius Victor details the following:<sup>186</sup>

*But suddenly, after he [Caligula] had first killed a few innocent people through various crimes, he revealed the nature, as it were, of a wild beast that had tasted blood. And so thereafter three years passed while the world was defiled with the widespread murders of senators and nobles. Furthermore he amused himself by debauching his sisters and mockingly marrying noblewomen, and would go about dressed like a god since he claimed that he was Jupiter on account of his incest, but also Liber because of his chorus of Bacchants.*

Sextus Aurelius expands upon the reports of incest by claiming that Gaius modeled his incestuous affairs after Jupiter, king of the gods, who, of course, was married to his own sister Juno.

Lastly, Orosius, who was writing during the fourth or fifth century AD, touches upon Caligula's and his sisters' actions, saying:<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> It is worth mentioning that by the time Eutropius was writing his account on Caligula, he could have confused Caesonia, Caligula's final wife, with Drusilla. Caesonia did bear a daughter for him.

<sup>186</sup> Sextus Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus*, ch.3. Translation by: Bird, H. W. *Liber De Caesaribus*. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1994. p. 3-4.

<sup>187</sup> Orosius, *The Seven Books Against the Pagans*, 7.5.9. Translation by: Deferrari, Roy J. *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*. Washington: Catholic University of America, 1964. p. 203-294. It is interesting to note that all exiles were ordered to be killed in his account (e.g., his sisters).

*Gaius Caligula also added this crime to his acts of lusts, that of, first, polluting and defiling his own sisters and, then, condemning them to exile. And later he ordered all exiles also to be killed. Two pamphlets were found in his secret papers, to one of which had been ascribed the title, The Dagger, to the other, The Sword. Both contained the names of outstanding men of both orders, the senatorial and the equestrian, with notations of those destined for death. There was also found a large chest of various poisons, and when these later were thrown into the sea on order of Claudius Caesar, the waters became infected and killed many fish, whose dead bodies the waves tossed up at random over the neighboring shores.*

Orosius does not name the sisters, but he, too, indicates that Gaius "polluted" them.

Additionally, he mentions that they were both exiled and killed. There is a long literary tradition, therefore, for Caligula's incestuous relations with his sisters. It is important, however, to contextualize these accounts and strip away the judgmental tone to better understand what Caligula actually did and what his intentions were.

### **The Importance of Family: The concept of the *Domus Divina* under Caligula**

*He appointed funeral sacrifices, too, to be offered each year with due ceremony, as well as games in the Circus in honor of his mother, providing a carriage to carry her image in the procession. But in memory of his father he gave to the month of September the name of Germanicus. After this, by a decree of the senate, he heaped upon his grandmother Antonia whatever honors Livia Augusta had ever enjoyed; took his uncle Claudius, who up to that time had been a Roman knight, as his colleague in the consulship; adopted his brother Tiberius on the day that he assumed the gown of manhood, and gave him the title of Chief of the Youth.*<sup>188</sup>

Greg Rowe notes that in the Tiberian decrees the imperial household was usually referred to as the *domus augusta*, (the "Augustan House")<sup>189</sup>, and other evidence comes

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<sup>188</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars: The Life of Caligula*, 15.2-3. Translation by: Rolfe, John C. Suetonius. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1913. p. 425.

<sup>189</sup> Rowe, Greg. *Princes and Political Cultures: The New Tiberian Senatorial Decrees*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002. p. 19. It may be difficult for someone today to comprehend all the complex dynamics that encompassed the Roman family; however, understanding its basic features is paramount for seeing how it ties in to Caligula's relationship with his sisters and other family members. Three chief

from the recently discovered *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre*.<sup>190</sup> The *domus augusta* was the "imperial household or the private property of the emperor or empress."<sup>191</sup> In the reign of Caligula, the *domus augusta* was substantially smaller than it had been under Tiberius.<sup>192</sup> It would have included, then, his sisters, Tiberius Gemellus, and Claudius, as well as all the imperial possessions. During the early principate, the *domus augusta* steadily became increasingly more advertised across the empire, and the women in the imperial household started to have more roles, which led to a "construction of a dynastic ideology."<sup>193</sup>

Later in imperial history, the usual term for the imperial house was the *domus divina*. The origin of this phrase, however, is much older and seems to have already been in use in the Julio-Claudian period. For instance, an altar from Nasium in Belgica, dated to about AD 33, says: "On behalf of the continuous safety of the divine household."<sup>194</sup>

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concepts of the family to the Romans were: the *gens* (people who shared a *nomen*); the *familia* (people "linked agnatically"); and the *domus* (the "family plus cognate relations"). He specifies that the imperial family "presented itself as all three, a *gens*, a *familia*, and a *domus*."

<sup>190</sup> See Damon, Cynthia, and David S. Potter. "The Senatus Consultum De Cn. Pisone Patre." *American Journal of Philology* 120.1 (1999): 13-41. Lines 160-163, for instance, say: *ti essent scelere Cn. Pisonis patris, omnesque, qui sub auspices and imperio principis nostri milites essent, quam fidem pietatemque domui Augustae praestatueros, cum scirent salutem imperi nostri in eius domus custo.* "... that all soldiers under the auspices and command of our *princeps* would forever display the fidelity and devotion that they were displaying to the house of Augustus, since they knew the safety of our empire had been placed in the custody of that house."

<sup>191</sup> Berger, Adolf. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953. p. 442.

<sup>192</sup> It is worthwhile to point out specifically whom Tiberius commends in the Piso inscription: Julia Augusta, Drusus, Germanicus, Agrippina, Antonia, Livia (sister of Germanicus), Germanicus' children (e.g., Nero is named), etc. See Damon, Cynthia, and David S. Potter. "The Senatus Consultum De Cn. Pisone Patre." p. 35-37.

<sup>193</sup> Bowman, Alan K., John B. Bury, and Averil Cameron. *The Cambridge Ancient History*. Vol. 12. Cambridge, 1986. p. 140.

<sup>194</sup> Fishwick, Duncan. *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West*. Leiden: Brill, 1987. p. 423. The Latin says: *pro perpetua salute divinae dominus*. The translation is by Joseph Bissler. This is the earliest piece of archaeological evidence about the *domus divina*, and it is dated to just after Sejanus fell from power.



The same phrase (i.e., *domus divina*) appears quite early in literature, too, under the reign of Caligula by Phaedrus, who writes, "While he is taking pride in the dignity of the divine household."<sup>195</sup> Ovid, in the reign of Augustus, also uses a similar phrase (i.e., *sacra domus*) in two of his works.<sup>196</sup> These primary sources indicate, therefore, that the concept was known during the early reigning emperors, including Caligula. Modern scholars continue to speculate about the exact meaning of the *divina* portion of the phrase *domus divina*. Fishwick (p. 424-426) points out that it is very difficult to interpret the adjective during the early principate because it might have had different connotations during the later empire. He states (p. 424) that when authors place *divina* with other nouns (e.g., *mens*, *manus*, etc.), it can only mean "divine"; however, he rationalizes that it originally referred "notionally to *Divus Augustus*, and there can be no question that the emphasis of the term is squarely among living members of the house... this is evident in dedications", such as the *pro perpetua salute divinae domus*.<sup>197</sup> In regard to the meaning of "divine" in the different accounts, Fishwick says that when Statius records it, he may be referring to Domitian's reign, as it would definitely be fitting.<sup>198</sup> Fishwick finally comes to this conclusion:<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Fishwick, p. 423. The Latin reads: *superbiens honore divinae domus*. Translation by: Joseph Bissler. This is from Phaedrus 5.7, a poem titled *Princeps Tibicen*. In this story, a certain flute player named "Princeps" tries to take for himself the honors that were owed to the divine house of Augustus.

<sup>196</sup> Fishwick, p.423. Ovid employs the phrase *sacra domus* in *Fasti* 6, 810 and *Pont.* 4, 6, 20.

<sup>197</sup> Fishwick 427-428. He contends that the temples of the Divine Augustus near the Palatine and at Tarraco "echo the fact that the primary concern of official policy was with the cult of Tiberius' predecessor, now duly enrolled among the State gods."

<sup>198</sup> Fishwick p. 429. Also, see Statius *Silvae* 5.

<sup>199</sup> Fishwick, p. 430. He also stresses that the practice began during the early principate, but it "reached its climax" during the Severi, and it would be a "piece with the development of an official vocabulary that hedged the emperor, his house, and everything he touched with divine character."

*Furthermore, just as the emperor, who was himself related to a line of divi, could normally expect posthumous apotheosis, so Gaius, Nero, Titus, Domitian, the Antonines, and the Severi extended the same right to a widening circle of their own nearest relatives, particularly the females. As a result, the domus imperatoria already possessed in life a kind of right by relationship to divinity after death, so to speak of the "divine house" by prolepsis would befit a family destined for eventual divinity. Equally, it would be in keeping with the fashion of comparing the emperor and his kin with Olympic and other deities already in their lifetime.*

Thus, the idea is that the emperor was something more than human with the possibility of divinity after his death, and the phrase envelops not only his qualities and living family members, but also "his proposals, pronouncements, decisions, orders and rescripts, his palace, finances, arrival, expedition, constructions, and fortifications."<sup>200</sup>

The first Roman emperor, Augustus, strived to make his family a model for the rest of the empire, as various primary sources indicate. For instance, on the *Ara Pacis* there are many images of "peace and security [that] come in the individually depicted forms of Augustus' family, both human and divine."<sup>201</sup> Further, these family members are "shown to exemplify and ensure the productive peace which Augustus brought to Rome—a clear step toward a defined public role for his private family."<sup>202</sup> Beth Severy notes: "The individual members of Augustus' large family act as guarantors of the *Pax Augusta*; visually, they and a set of priests represent Rome on this altar."<sup>203</sup> Thus, the concept of imperial family was both extremely important prior to Caligula's reign and the imperial family itself served as an example for the rest of the empire to follow.

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<sup>200</sup> Fishwick, p. 430-431.

<sup>201</sup> Severy, Beth. *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire*. New York: Routledge, 2003. p. 104-105.

<sup>202</sup> Severy, p.104.

<sup>203</sup> Severy continues (p. 111) by saying that the young men on the monument would "grow into the generals who ensured Roman domination", whereas the women "legitimately produced those babies and generals."

Archaeological evidence for the importance of the family exists for the later Julio-Claudians, too, such as appears on the *Sebasteion* at Aphrodisias, a monument in Turkey celebrating much of the Augustan family.<sup>204</sup> While the *Ara Pacis* was constructed during Augustus' reign, work on this structure likely began under Tiberius and ended at around the time of Nero<sup>205</sup>; this is important because it again emphasizes how the rest of the empire perceived the Augustan family as a model for their own after Augustus' death. Finally, it is significant that many of the figures appear youthful in some fashion<sup>206</sup> (as in other artwork) on the *Sebasteion*, possibly stressing the perfect physical qualities for a flawless leader and family.

The records of the Arval Brethren also indicate the high value of the imperial family during the Julio-Claudian period.<sup>207</sup> The records of the Arval priests, "copied on stone at La Magliana outside Rome, provide us with precisely-dated evidence extending throughout the Principate for the routine activities of one priesthood."<sup>208</sup> Dating back to at least the days of the Republic, the emperor Augustus revived the priesthood of the Arvals.<sup>209</sup> What has remained to the present is a "body of inscriptions with many breaks of the minutes of the Arval Brothers' meetings from the first year of Tiberius's reign

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<sup>204</sup> Kleiner, Fred S. *A History of Roman Art*. Boston, MA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010. p. 113-114.

<sup>205</sup> Kleiner, p. 113.

<sup>206</sup> Kleiner, p. 113-114. He notes, for instance, that Augustus appears youthful and Claudius himself has the head of a roughly fifty-year old man, yet his lower half is youthful as well.

<sup>207</sup> The data for this section comes from Dr. Brian Harvey's Microsoft Access file of the *Acta Arvalia*.

<sup>208</sup> Rüpke, Jörg, and R. L. Gordon. *Religion of the Romans*. Cambridge: Polity, 2007. p. 40.

<sup>209</sup> Hastings, James, John A. Selbie, and Louis H. Gray. *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. 2. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908. p. 7. The authors specify that the cult of the Pontifex Maximus perhaps became important around the time Lepidus died as a *Pontifex Maximus* (i.e., around 12 BC), and Augustus claimed the title for himself.

down into the reign of Gordian."<sup>210</sup> In fact, the emperors themselves frequently appear as participants in the rituals.<sup>211</sup> The records of this cult are remarkably well-preserved for the reign of Caligula. As such, they are extremely important documents for reconstructing the chronology of Caligula's reign and for understanding how religious ritual commemorated the imperial family.

The records of the Arval Brethren reveal that there were more frequent commemorations of the imperial family during the reign of Caligula than in either of the two previous regimes. It is worth mentioning, though, that the Arval records do not prescribe festivals, they merely commemorate them.<sup>212</sup> Nevertheless, during Augustus' and Tiberius' regimes, sacrifices in honor of important anniversaries and birthdays of members of the imperial family were among the most important duties of the Arvals.<sup>213</sup> In AD 38, the tablets mention several sacrifices in honor of important events surrounding the succession of Caligula,<sup>214</sup> sacrifices for the safety of the emperors' sisters (especially Drusilla), and sacrifices to honor the birthdays of *Divus Augustus*, Tiberius, Germanicus, Livia, and Antonia.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Hastings, James, John A. Selbie, and Louis H. Gray, p. 8. It is worth pointing out that, in regard to Caligula and the emperors afterwards, the election for the members into the priesthood was decided by the emperors; elections were a "mere formality."

<sup>211</sup> Hastings, James, John A. Selbie, and Louis H. Gray, p. 8-9.

<sup>212</sup> See, for instance, the Dura-Europos calendar for specific festivals.

<sup>213</sup> Specific members of the household mentioned in the records for around AD 20 include: Tiberius, Livia, Julia, and their descendants. Some other sacrifices under their regimes include: to Dea Dia; when a tree had fallen in the sacred grove of Dea Dia; the safety of the people; the Quirites and Roman people; etc.

<sup>214</sup> Some of these include: the senate conferring the title of *imperator* upon Caligula on March 18th; his entering of Rome on March 28th; etc.

<sup>215</sup> For instance, on January 12th, the Arval priests asked for fortune for Caligula and his household, specifically stating his sisters (*ipsi sororibusque*) as well. The memory of Drusilla is honored on September 23rd: *eodem die ob consecrationem Drusillae in templo divi Augusti novo*. She is also addressed as *divae Drusillae*, which again highlights the importance of her friendship to Caligula as viewed by the rest of the empire. It is worth noting that the *Fasti Ostienses* in AD 37 indicate that Caligula's grandmother,

In AD 39, the priests recorded mostly individuals in Caligula's immediate family again<sup>216</sup>, but there were some interesting changes. For instance, the priests sacrificed in honor of the birthday of Caligula's mother Agrippina the Elder, in *nomine natali* (of probably Livilla)<sup>217</sup>, and finally the birthday of his sister Agrippina. Perhaps most striking about this year, then, is that all three sisters receive specific sacrifices commemorating their birthdays.

In AD 40, there are again numerous commemorations of the family, with some differences from the previous two years.<sup>218</sup> As an example, sacrifices were given in honor of Caesonia's birthday (Caligula's final wife) and the birth of his child with Caesonia.<sup>219</sup> The data on the tablets for this year reflect a few important points. First, the conspiracy of his sisters occurred, and the Arval priests likely knew not to sacrifice in their honor. Second, his father Germanicus is continually given honors as the tablets indicate; this makes sense, though, since he was a reputable war hero and the emperor used him as a model for himself.

Finally, there is an undated fragment<sup>220</sup>, which reveals that commemorations were conducted in honor of the *Diva Drusilla*, the temple of Augustus, and the *genius* of

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Antonia died in May; and in AD 38, Drusilla departed from life in June. Unfortunately, the *Fasti* do not really provide anything else worth pointing out, but the overall picture concerning Caligula's proximity to certain family members in his life impacted the citizens of Ostia to such an extent that they recorded it for posterity's sake. See Vidman, Ladislav. *Fasti Ostienses*. Praha: Nakl. Československé Akademie Věd, 1957, p. 43.

<sup>216</sup> For instance, Germanicus, Augustus, and Antonia are recorded in this year as well. Caligula is again named *imperator* on March 28th.

<sup>217</sup> This is a reference to one of Caligula's sisters, although she is not specifically named here. It probably is not Agrippina, though, since she is specifically honored earlier.

<sup>218</sup> For instance, Germanicus' birthday is mentioned, but none of the other immediate family members appear.

<sup>219</sup> The fragment reads *nomine ob natalem Caesoniae*.

<sup>220</sup> Because it discusses members of Caligula's household, it must fall in between AD 38- 41.

Caligula. The records of the Arvals, therefore, indicate that Caligula used the state cult, as reflected in the records of the Arval priesthood, for celebrations more often than Augustus and Tiberius did; they also emphasize that the individuals receiving praises were mostly recognized individuals of his immediate family, such as his sisters, parents, and grandparents.

Caligula extended great honors to many members of his family, such as, for instance, Augustus. Barrett (p. 69) explains that Caligula, during his early reign, emulated Augustus, and perhaps one of his most important deeds in respecting his great-grandfather was officially dedicating the Temple of *Divus Augustus*, an event which took place on August 30th and 31st in AD 37.<sup>221</sup> Additionally, Caligula allowed Claudius to take his place as a member of the advertised imperial family. At age forty-six, Claudius shared the consulship of AD 37 with Caligula; Claudius, of course, "up to that time had been treated with much scorn and contempt, and had been kept in the background."<sup>222</sup> Also, Caligula granted exceptional rites to Antonia, his grandmother.<sup>223</sup> Finally, Caligula voyaged to Pontia and Pandateria to retrieve the ashes of his brother, Nero, and his mother, Agrippina, in order to store them in the mausoleum of Augustus with his father

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<sup>221</sup> The dates are significant, since Caligula's birthday was August 31st. Barrett notes that this strategy was intentional: he wanted to stress his direct blood line to Augustus. He says (p. 70) that the "most effective exploitation" of Augustan symbolism by Caligula was giving up the consulship and refusing the *pater patriae* title.

<sup>222</sup> Barrett, p. 68-69. He states that, prior to this event, Claudius was an equestrian; now, though, he was a consul, senator, and could "preside at the games in the absence of Caligula."

<sup>223</sup> Barrett, Anthony. *Livia: First Lady of Imperial Rome*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2002. p. 324. Also, the honors apparently bestowed upon Antonia can be found in Suet. *Cal.* 15.2 and Dio 59.3.4. These rites granted to Antonia included: "all the rights of Livia", the "title of Augusta", "made her priestess of Augustus", and "granted her the privileges of the Vestal Virgins."

Germanicus.<sup>224</sup> Caligula honored his family in these ways for several reasons: he felt an extremely strong connection with his family, and, since he knew that Tiberius was criticized harshly for not honoring past family members, he himself wanted to emphasize his prominence over his predecessor.

As Barrett (p. 62) points out, some of the literary accounts claim that Caligula honored his sisters above all others.<sup>225</sup> For instance, Dio Cassius recalls: <sup>226</sup>

*To his sisters he assigned these privileges of the Vestal Virgins, also that of witnessing the games in the Circus with him from the imperial seats, and the right to have uttered in their behalf, also, not only the prayers annually offered by the magistrates and priests for his welfare and that of the State, but also the oaths of allegiance that were sworn to his rule.*

Barrett indicates (p. 62-63) that it is "exceptionally remarkable that the sisters were included in the annual vows of allegiance to the emperor", and he specifies that certain people of the Near East, at Assos, did swear allegiance to both the emperor and "his house". Suetonius expands on the oath even further:<sup>227</sup>

*He caused the names of his sisters to be included in all oaths: "And I will not hold myself and my children dearer than I do Gaius and his sisters"; as well as in the propositions of the consuls: "Favour and good fortune attend Gaius Caesar and his sisters."*

Thus, while it is not difficult to see that Caligula valued his family<sup>228</sup>, the bulk of data seems to indicate that Drusilla, Agrippina, and Livilla were placed at the top of his "list"

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<sup>224</sup> Barrett, Antony, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*. p. 60-61.

<sup>225</sup> Barrett, p. 62. Barrett also states that the three sisters received the "greatest honors."

<sup>226</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.3.4. Translation by: Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 269-271. It is possible, though, that Dio Cassius is wrong about the vows since Suetonius does not speak of them.

<sup>227</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars: The Life of Caligula*, 15.3. Translation by: Rolfe, John C. *Suetonius*. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1913. p. 425.

<sup>228</sup> according to both the Arval Records and the literary accounts (Dio Cassius and Suetonius).

of important individuals.

In addition to the archaeological and literary evidence concerning Caligula's proximity to his sisters, there is also numismatic evidence in the form of a *sestertius* depicting the emperor on the obverse and his three sisters on the reverse:<sup>229</sup>



Figure 2 of a coin depicting Caligula on the front side and his three sisters (Agrippina, Drusilla, and Livilla) on the back side.

The Roman government began to issue this coin during Caligula's first year of reign, and apparently only during that year.<sup>230</sup> Agrippina, on the left side, is shown with the iconography of *Securitas* ("safety"), with a cornucopia in her right hand and her left hand on Drusilla's shoulder.<sup>231</sup> Drusilla, placed in the center, represents *Concordia* ("harmony") holding a *patera* in her right hand and a cornucopia in her left hand.<sup>232</sup> Julia Livilla, representing *Fortuna* ("fortune"), stands on the right side, holding a rudder in her right hand and a cornucopia in her left hand.<sup>233</sup> All three representations depict important

<sup>229</sup> Picture of a *sestertius* taken from *Steff Metal*, <http://www.steffmetal.com/metal-history-caligula>.

<sup>230</sup> Barrett, p. 63.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p. 63.



benefits brought to the empire as a result of Caligula's rule. While imperial women had previously been depicted in statues with the iconography of deities, Barrett notes (p. 63), "The prominence given to the sisters has no real precedent in the history of Roman coinage, and suggests an extraordinary honour." Barrett identifies two probable reasons why Caligula's three sisters were sculpted on the coin: Caligula wanted to "enhance the prestige of the imperial family and thus Caligula himself"; and also possibly because he wanted to show "purely personal and sentimental feelings" to three individuals to whom he felt closest.<sup>234</sup>

There is also a provincial coin that depicts Caligula on the obverse while Agrippina, Drusilla, and Julia Livilla are on the reverse:<sup>235</sup>



Figure 3 shows the reverse of a provincial coin with the three sisters.

This coin was issued during Caligula's reign, and although it bears similarities to the aforementioned one, it is particularly interesting to observe that Drusilla is described as *diva* ("divine"), and so the image of the original coin had been updated to reflect the

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, p. 63. Other individuals were minted on coins during Caligula's reign, too, such as his brothers, his father, and Marcus Agrippa.

<sup>235</sup> Barrett, p. 166. Image of a *sestertius* from Apamea taken from: Barrett, p. 166. The coin probably would have been based on the one minted at Rome.

deification of Drusilla after her death.<sup>236</sup>

All of this evidence points to Caligula's strong emphasis of his family. He did not limit this emphasis to his sisters alone, but he extended it to his close relations, both living and dead. It remains to be decided, though, just how exactly the stories of incest in the literary accounts fit in with the context of this evidence.

### **Outside Influences on the Literary Accounts: the Deities and the Ptolemies**

*At the same moment Jove adeptly spurs on Juno: "My own sister, my sweet wife as well, it's Venus, just as you thought, your judgment never fails. She is the one who supports the Trojan forces, not their own strong hands that clutch for combat, not their unflinching spirits seasoned hard to peril. And Juno replies, her head bent low: "My dearest husband, why rake my anxious heart? I dread your grim commands. Your love for me, if it held the force it once held, and should hold still, you'd never deny me this, All-powerful One: the power to spirit Turnus clear of battle, save him all unscathed for his father, Daunus."<sup>237</sup>*

It is very likely that the later authors knew of Caligula's obsession with "oriental ideas and customs", and some researchers insist that the "whole of Caligula's reign is an adherence to the religious and political traditions of Egypt."<sup>238</sup> Because people around the Empire knew that Caligula had ties with the east, it is important to examine critically the culture in which the rumors of incest arose. The Romans themselves were somewhat ambiguous. For example, if the Romans were truly appalled by incestuous affairs to such an extent as the literary sources suggest,<sup>239</sup> they would not have needed to look very far to find occurrences of sibling intimacy in their own religion. As an example, two of the

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<sup>236</sup> Barrett, p. 248.

<sup>237</sup> This is a quote from Vergil's *Aeneid* (Book 10, 606-616). Translation by: Fagles, Robert. *The Aeneid*. New York: Viking, 2006. Print. p. 313-314.

<sup>238</sup> Barrett, p. 219-220. Caligula lived with Antonia for much of his youth; she was, after all, the daughter of Marc Antony, a man who was himself highly involved with Egyptian traditions.

<sup>239</sup> Incest was also illegal.

three important deities of the Capitoline Triad (i.e., Jupiter and Juno) were not only husband and wife, but they were also brother and sister. Perhaps the most striking feature of their relationship, though, is that the two bore children together: Vulcan and Mars.<sup>240</sup> Astonishingly, Vulcan bears abnormalities often associated with people who are the products of incest; for example, he is remembered today as the "lame god", and he was not very handsome. The other sibling, Mars, is the father of Romulus; Romulus, of course, is oftentimes regarded as the legendary founder of the Romans themselves. Jupiter and Juno were not the only ones who engaged in incestuous affairs among the gods, either; another was Saturn and Ops (father and mother of Jupiter and Juno).

Diodorus explains that brother-sister royal marriages were modeling the Egyptian deities Osiris and Isis; these two "represented civilization and order over chaos and disorder", and they were "emblematic of marital love that was also a sibling love."<sup>241</sup> S. Ager (p. 176) explains that numerous creation myths "emphasize the power of incestuous sexuality to bring order and structure out of chaos."

The Hellenistic rulers of Ptolemaic Egypt also engaged in brother-sister marriages. First, Ptolemy II married Arsinoë II.<sup>242</sup> The brother and sister did not produce any children; additionally, Ager (p.167) states that this first official instance of full-blown

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<sup>240</sup> Tatlock, Jessie May. *Greek and Roman Mythology*. New York: Century, 1917. p. 36. Zeus and Hera had another child in the Greek tradition: Hebe.

<sup>241</sup> Ager, Sheila L. "The Power of Excess: Royal Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty." *Anthropologica* (2006): 165-86. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Dec. 2012. <[www.jstor.org/stable/25605309](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25605309)>. According to the myth, Osiris was killed by his brother Set; Isis helped to restore Osiris back to life and they produced a son: Horus. Horus avenged his father and killed Set. Horus represents the new pharaoh, whereas Osiris represents the recently deceased pharaoh. Isis was the "seat of political power". Going along with this idea, then, is the Egyptians' belief that the pharaoh (as Horus) was defending the world from chaos.

<sup>242</sup> Ager, Sheila L. "The Power of Excess: Royal Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty." *Anthropologica* (2006): 165-86. *JSTOR*. Web. 2 Dec. 2012. <[www.jstor.org/stable/25605309](http://www.jstor.org/stable/25605309)>.

sibling marriage was largely based on how the public viewed them. For example, Ptolemy II's marriage to his sister was not considered normal, and he still wanted his son (by another wife) to marry someone more distant (i.e., a female cousin from Cyrene).<sup>243</sup> Later on, Ptolemy IV both married his full sister, Arsinoë III, and he bore a legitimate child with her: Ptolemy V.<sup>244</sup> This all-in-the-family approach to marriage continued, with one famous example being Ptolemy VIII who married Cleopatra III, his niece on both sides of the family.<sup>245</sup> Ager proposes that although the Ptolemies always seemed "willing to marry off excess females to Seleucids, they strove wherever possible to reserve a Ptolemaic bride for the royal heir."<sup>246</sup>

Since the authors likely would have known that Caligula embraced his eastern heritage, it is probable that they embellished their accounts in regard to how they wanted to record his memory.<sup>247</sup> Adams (p. 202) notes that Caligula's eastern upbringing as a young child influenced not only how he behaved as a *princeps* in the public arena but also in his "personal private familial relations." Caligula did, of course, honor Marc Antony and his Ptolemaic connection.<sup>248</sup> Going along with this idea, Adams (p. 202) points out that the supposed incestuous relationships between Caligula and his sisters represent "another example of what it was be an absolute ruler", and he suggests specific examples to emphasize his claim (e.g., certain Ptolemies and Antiochus IV Epiphanes).

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<sup>243</sup> Ager, p.167.

<sup>244</sup> Ager p. 167-168. Ager notes that Ptolemy V was an only child.

<sup>245</sup> Ager p. 169.

<sup>246</sup> Ager p. 175.

<sup>247</sup> Adams, Geoff W. *The Roman Emperor Gaius "Caligula" and His Hellenistic Aspirations*. Boca Raton, FL: Brown Walker, 2007. p. 202-203.

<sup>248</sup> Bauman, Richard A. *Women and Politics in Ancient Rome*. London: Routledge, 1992. p. 161.

And so, it is not difficult to see from these examples why one might believe that Caligula himself was incestuous: he was drawn to the eastern cultures, and he possibly was modeling his reign on Hellenistic kingdoms; incest, while illegal, generally was also frowned upon by the Romans;<sup>249</sup> he lavished praise upon his sisters more than anyone else; and the king and queen of the Greek and Roman deities were themselves siblings. If, for instance, the two most important deities in the Roman religious system were incestuous, should it not be assumed that the most powerful figure in the Roman Empire could engage in such acts? After all, Caligula could be acting, in the view of the writers, as a "Jupiter on earth" to restore order just as the Ptolemies did by emulating Horus. Since Caligula was likely associating himself with both monarchical and divine circles, it is highly probable instead that the ancient writers were merely fabricating the incestuous accounts as slander. A final idea is that the stories themselves circulated after his death, and they were taken up by the ancient authors; the monarchical claims would have come to the forefront because they went against the power of the senate.

### **Caligula was not an Incestuous Beast: What Modern Research has to Say**

I will now turn to some specific and significant reasons that many contemporary scholars dismiss the various literary accounts of Caligula's incestuous affairs with his

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<sup>249</sup> Caligula is frequently portrayed as a loathsome and disgusting emperor, so it would make sense for him to be described as incestuous. Plus, the Romans themselves must have been quite familiar with the Ptolemaic incest, and when the authors allude to accounts of incest, they also could be emphasizing how powerful Caligula's monarchical tendencies were. The Augustan poet Propertius, in 3.11.39, for instance, refers to Cleopatra by saying: *scilicet incesti meretrix regina Canopi* ("Certainly the queenly prostitute of incestuous Canopus"). Hans Peter Stahl (p. 243) says that this poem was a source of Augustan propaganda, again highlighting how the Romans both were disgusted by incest and also that they generally knew about Ptolemaic incest for royal and divine purposes. See, Stahl, Hans-Peter. *Propertius: "love" and "war": Individual and State under Augustus*. Berkeley: University of California, 1985.

sisters. First of all, from an evolutionary standpoint it would be very difficult for someone who spent a great deal of time with fellow siblings to develop intimate feelings for them, hence what is known as the "Westermarck Effect": the instruction to avoid sex with others who shared one's childhood.<sup>250</sup> An obvious reason nature makes humans detest procreating with fellow siblings is because genetic mutations are more common; the incest taboo thus serves as a force for allowing a person to mate with people outside his or her immediate family, since "numerous experiments show the adverse effects on future reproductive success of excessive inbreeding."<sup>251</sup> Finally, psychologists and anthropologists point out that the incest taboo is nearly a human universal; for instance, Gottschall and Wilson (p. 92-93, 2005) state that "different cultures define the details of incest in different ways, but certain kinds of incest are universally prohibited."<sup>252</sup> In regard to the Ptolemies, though, the specific prohibition varied because only "royalty was good enough for royalty."<sup>253</sup> The literary sources depict Caligula as being "habitually incestuous" with his sisters, and especially with Drusilla; he actually seemed to lustfully desire his sisters. A modern, scientific perspective, however, makes such a claim more unlikely.

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<sup>250</sup> Cartwright, John. *Evolution and Human Behavior: Darwinian Perspectives on Human Nature*. Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2000. p. 82-84. Obviously there are cases where the Westermarck Effect does not occur as the scientists suggest. The point, though, is to emphasize that there is also scientific evidence to go along with the other data to indicate that Caligula was not incestuous with any of his sisters.

<sup>251</sup> Cartwright, p.82.

<sup>252</sup> Gottschall, Jonathan, and David Sloan. Wilson. *The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2005. They go on to use Sophocles' example of *Oedipus Tyrannus* to suggest that mother-son incest seems to be the most powerful prohibition cross-culturally. The authors state, "Sophocles can safely anticipate that his audience will instinctively sympathize with the revulsion of feeling that leads to Oedipus to gouge out his own eyes." p. 92.

<sup>253</sup> Peacock, James L. *The Anthropological Lens: Harsh Light, Soft Focus*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1986. p. 97. Just because the Ptolemies or other dynasties practiced incest, it does not necessarily suggest that any of them were physically intimate or sexually attracted to their siblings.

Classicists, such as Barrett (p. 85, 1990), suggest a few reasons, too. For example, Caligula, during certain portions of his reign, did not have a "compatible wife"; nor did he have a father or mother figure at all. His affection, then, would have come from his closest living relatives, i.e. his sisters: Drusilla, Julia Livilla, and Agrippina.<sup>254</sup> Although the three sisters offered affection to him, they likely were also political tools for Caligula, which led to the stories of incest that the authors recounted.<sup>255</sup> Barrett (p. 86) speculates that the accounts in the literary sources that say Caligula especially favored Drusilla were the result of her death before she could be implicated in the conspiracy that resulted in the exile of Agrippina and Julia Livilla. Finally, both Barrett (p. 85) and Winterling (p. 3) point out that the claims of incest were brought up neither by Philo nor by Seneca, both contemporary authors of Caligula.<sup>256</sup> Going along with this idea, Winterling (p. 3) believes that the entire incestuous account was invented far after Caligula had died. If Caligula were truly involved in scandalous sexual behaviors with his sisters, it is likely that both Philo and Seneca, who often discuss the emperor's debaucheries, would have mentioned something about the significant charges of incest.

Charging the emperors with a desire to be with their mothers was common amongst the literary sources.<sup>257</sup> As one example, the Julio-Claudian emperor Nero, whose name also carries negative connotations with it, is shown by Suetonius as being

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<sup>254</sup> Barrett, p.85.

<sup>255</sup> Barrett, p.85. Also, see Barrett, Anthony. *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1996. p. 81-82. Barrett notes that Seneca was supposedly having an affair with Livilla, so Seneca might have kept silent about the incest accounts; regardless, one would think he still might have said something about Caligula's supposed incestuous relationships with at least Drusilla.

<sup>256</sup> Winterling, p.3.

<sup>257</sup> See, for instance, Ginsburg, Judith. *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire*. New York: Oxford UP, 2006. p. 115-125.

incestuous with his mother Agrippina:

*That he even desired illicit relations with his own mother, and was kept from it by her enemies, who feared that such a help might give the reckless and insolent woman too great influence, was notorious, especially after he added to his concubines a courtesan who was said to look very like Agrippina. Even before that, so they say, whenever he rode in a litter with his mother, he had incestuous relations with her, which were betrayed by the stains on his clothing.*<sup>258</sup>

One theory is that since the mother of the emperor was not available to fill the role of incestuous lover, as in Caligula's case, the charge was shifted towards the sisters.<sup>259</sup>

Barrett notes (p. 86) that any emperor could be the target of such "gossip". He goes on to relate the story of a certain Passienus Crispus who traveled with Caligula on one of the emperor's trips; in this account, Passienus was asked if he, like his emperor, had been incestuous with his own sister, and the man replied, "Not yet."<sup>260</sup> This historical account of Passienus, if it is true, is important because it suggests not that Caligula was really incestuous, but that some of the exaggerated stories surrounding Caligula (and other negatively conveyed emperors) perhaps "arose from jocular remarks".<sup>261</sup> What the scholars emphasize, then, is that the authors' various accounts must not be taken at face value; there are legitimate reasons as to why we need not conclude that Caligula may not have been incestuous with Drusilla or his other two sisters.

### **Caligula and His Sisters: A Fresh Interpretation of the Literary Accounts**

*It is recognized that early infantile sexual life reaches its peak in what is known as the Oedipus complex ... A horror of incest and an enormous sense of guilt are*

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<sup>258</sup> Quote is taken from Suetonius, *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars, The Life of Nero* 28.2. Translation is by Rolfe, John Carew. *Suetonius*. London: William Heinemann, 1914, p. 133.

<sup>259</sup> Willrich, Hugo. *Caligula*. 1903, p. 293.

<sup>260</sup> Barrett, p.85. Barrett (p. 274) points out that the information about Crispus comes from a Scholiast on Juvenal 4.81, and that Suetonius originally had the account in his *De Oratoribus*, which is now lost.

<sup>261</sup> Barrett, p.85.



*left over from the prehistoric epoch of the individual's existence. It may be that something quite similar occurred in the prehistoric epoch of the human species as a whole and that the beginning of morality, religion, and social order were intimately connected with the surmounting of that primeval era. Our construction of prehistory forces us to another explanation. The command in favour of exogamy, of which the horror of incest is the negative expression, was a product of the will of the father and carried this will on after he had been removed. Its [civilization's] first, totemic phase already brings with it the prohibition against an incestuous choice of object, and this is perhaps the most drastic mutilation which man's erotic life has in all time experienced.<sup>262</sup>*

With an abundance of evidence suggesting that Caligula was just very closely attached to his sisters, not incestuous, it is imperative that a construction of his relationship with the siblings be examined, keeping in mind how important the family unit was to the Romans. Caligula not only was very attached to his family members, but he also wanted to advertise them in any way possible. The advertisement of the imperial family had been a key element of the imperial ideology of Augustus and continued to be so under Tiberius. The imperial family, however, had also shrunk considerably since the early days, especially as the numerous children of Julia the Elder, Antonia the Younger, and Agrippina the Elder died or were executed. As head of the surviving, but much smaller, *domus augusta*, Caligula bestowed honors on what family members he could: his sisters, Antonia, and Claudius. The only three people alive in his very immediate family, however, at this time were his sisters: Drusilla, Agrippina, and Julia Livilla. Drusilla is often depicted as the favorite and his "lover" for a few reasons: she did not live long enough to have her memory tarnished by involvement in the conspiracy against her brother; and she was married off to Lepidus, Caligula's good friend. As shown above, the only evidence for incest comes from the literary sources. Although there is no doubt that

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<sup>262</sup> This is a series of quotes from the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, taken from Cohen, Jonathan. *Apart from Freud: Notes for a Rational Psychoanalysis*. San Francisco: City Lights, 2001. p. 37-38. Although Freud's details on incest are somewhat different than Westermarck's, his overall depiction of incest highlights that the practice is connected to psychological, social, and biological systems. Evolutionary forces have driven humans away from incest.

the sisters received extraordinary honors above other high-ranking officials, there again are reasons for Caligula's decisions: political gains<sup>263</sup> and closeness of family. The literary sources, like Suetonius and Dio Cassius, exaggerated the truth in order to dishonor the memory of the emperor. Other negatively viewed emperors<sup>264</sup>, such as Nero, for example, were victims of claims of incest as well; incest was a crime, and it made sense to add this crime to the list of malicious deeds that accompanied the wicked emperors. Interestingly, no surviving contemporary authors discuss Caligula's wicked sexual acts with his sisters, and one would suppose that someone like Philo might say something about it. Finally, from a scientific standpoint the incest taboo exists in order to steer people away from mating with immediate family members so that genetic mutations might not occur; the incest taboo is nearly a human universal. Thus, if modern researchers want to preserve the truth concerning Caligula's relationship with his three sisters, they will realize that the ancient historians misrepresent the depictions of the imperial family as advertised by Caligula.

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<sup>263</sup> For instance, Caligula bestowed such remarkable honors on women, like his own sister Drusilla; it also highlights the importance of the *domus augusta*.

<sup>264</sup> Another negatively viewed emperor who received charges of incest with his sister was Commodus, who just happened to have the same birthday as Caligula. These accusations of incest against Commodus even appeared in the movie *Gladiator*, although they likely were exaggerations and fabrications as well.

### CHAPTER 3: CALIGULA: A GOD AMONGST MORTALS?

*For I wished, most sacred Emperor, to give thanks to your divinity in the very entrance hall of your palace when, with the divine voice of your indulgence and this invincible right hand of yours stretched forth, you raised up the Senate prostrate before your feet. Nor would words have failed me, although I was unprepared; for who could either have prepared himself for such unexpected benefactions or have checked such great rejoicing?*<sup>265</sup>

The separation of man and god was not that distinct in Roman and Greek religion and mythology.<sup>266</sup> There are examples, for instance, of mortals in classical myths who achieved immortality for their deeds on earth. Hercules, who originally was loathed by a deity<sup>267</sup>, performed heroic deeds and ascended to heaven. Additionally, Perseus, who rescued Andromeda and killed a Gorgon, became immortal in the form of a constellation. To go along with this idea, Euhemerus of Messene (ca. 300 BC) believed that kings, queens, and generals were, over periods of time, elevated to the level of deities in the well-known classical myths; his interpretation for the starting of religious ideas might have been used to “justify the claims of Hellenistic kings who demanded worship from their subjects.”<sup>268</sup> Elevating a person to the level of a deity, then, is neither unimaginable nor is it unique to just one culture; people throughout history have attained reputations that have allowed their statuses to flourish lavishly. In general, effective and good leaders

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<sup>265</sup>Nixon, C. E. V., and Barbara Saylor. Rodgers. *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1994. p. 264-266. This is a praise in honor of the emperor Constantine, with the author highlighting his *numen*, or “divinity”.

<sup>266</sup> Barrett, Anthony. *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990. p. 140. Because the Romans’ religious behaviors were so different, modern scholars must not be ethnocentric in their contemporary mindsets of what is normal and abnormal.

<sup>267</sup> Hera, queen of the gods

<sup>268</sup> Buitenwerf, Rieuwerd. *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and Its Social Setting*. Leiden: Brill, 2003. p. 330.

bear qualities<sup>269</sup> that people under their jurisdictions should possess, or they are the qualities that individuals aspire to have. According to Roman lore, for instance, the legendary founder of Rome, king Romulus, was deified upon his death.<sup>270</sup> Julius Caesar was also deified upon his death. In the imperial period, it became traditional to elevate good emperors to the rank of a *divus*, or deified human.<sup>271</sup> However, for any Roman to actually claim to be a *deus* while he or she were alive was practically detestable and unthinkable.<sup>272</sup> Many of the more notorious emperors, though, have come down to the present as individuals who not only believed that they were gods, but they also often supposedly expected people to openly worship them as such.<sup>273</sup> One emperor who has become associated with claims of divinity is Caligula; but it is important for modern historians to not accept all these assertions of the literary sources at face value. In this chapter I intend to discuss briefly the foundation and functions of the imperial cult in Roman society in order to show how important individuals throughout Roman history became associated with divine honors. Then I will look at how the various accounts in the sources paint Caligula as behaving as if he were a god<sup>274</sup>, while pointing out examples of how other so called “good” emperors and distinguished individuals did the same. I will add modern research to justify my claims, and, finally, a fresh analysis of the entire

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<sup>269</sup> For instance, being strong, noble, honest, trustworthy, decisive, etc.

<sup>270</sup> See Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita*, 1.16, for information about Romulus. Also, in Plutarch’s *Life of Romulus*, 25.3-4, Plutarch describes him as skillful, brave, strong, and swift. See also, Perrin, Bernadotte. *Plutarch's Lives*. Vol. 1. London: W. Heinemann, 1914. p. 169.

<sup>271</sup> Hopkins, Keith. *Conquerors and Slaves*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978. p. 214. In regard to deified emperors, Rome would simultaneously witness signs of grief and festivals to honor his life.

<sup>272</sup> Potter, D. S. *Ancient Rome: A New History*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2009. p. 203.

<sup>273</sup> Potter, D. S. p. 203.

<sup>274</sup> For instance, taking up the appearance of various deities and having temple(s) set up in his honor at Rome.

episode will be constructed in which I will show how Caligula never forced others to view him as a god and that he himself did not establish any religious institutions for people to worship him specifically as a deity at Rome.

### **Building up the Imperial Cult: From Kings to Gods**

*As far as I am concerned, most sacred Emperor, I chose best to praise these things particularly on your real birthday. For the rest of the virtues and other goods come about with advancing age: courage grows stronger with increasing years, self-control is instilled by discipline's precepts, justice is learnt as well by knowledge of the law. Finally, she who seems to be the mistress of all things, wisdom herself, is taught by observing men's natures and examining the outcome of events.*<sup>275</sup>

Tracing the history and structure of the Roman imperial cult is a complex task. It is important to keep in mind that modern historians view Rome as a society in which both religion and politics were intertwined and that the imperial cult represented both a “constitutional revolution and a religious reformation.”<sup>276</sup> In short, the imperial cult bore associations with the legendary kings of the regal period, which “left its mark on the Republican constitution.”<sup>277</sup> The ritual of worshipping a deified emperor, whether he were dead or alive, did not exist during the Republican period before Augustus, but it was still practiced by certain public officials who repeatedly tried to placate the gods.<sup>278</sup>

In the late Republic, significant figures tried to show that they were descended

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<sup>275</sup> Panegyric 11(19).2 to Maximian by an unknown author. Translation by: Nixon, C. E. V., and Barbara Saylor. Rodgers. *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*. Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1994. p. 102-103. Even more specifically, this is a *genethliacus*, or birthday address, to the emperor.

<sup>276</sup> Brent, Allen. *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian*. Boston: Brill, 1999. p. 17.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid, p. 17-34. Brent brings up points in which both the legendary kings and emperors bear similarities, e.g.: Numa and Augustus both “sought to replace power that was based *vi et armis* with an authority that was founded *iure eam legibusque ac moribus*.”

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p. 19. Of course, Julius Caesar was deified, but he was not an emperor; he was dictator for life.

from deities or had special favors or connections with them. Religion became a tool for such powerful individuals, as: Marius and Sulla, Caesar and Pompey, and Antony and Octavian.<sup>279</sup> The winner of each of these “brawls” asserted that he had more reliable access to divine support than his rival, and many claimed that it must be true, because the Romans at this time often recalled Scipio Africanus, who himself was said to have flaunted his special relationship with Jupiter.<sup>280</sup> Whether Scipio made the claim himself or popular stories just carried the legend, it still adds to the fact that “the image of Scipio marks a stage in the evolution of religio-political power in Rome.”<sup>281</sup>

In the first century BC, high-ranking individuals were displayed divinely in a variety of ways. For example, Plutarch notes both that Sulla called himself *Epaphroditos* and that his trophies bear the inscription “Lucius Cornelius Sulla Epaphroditos”; the name *Epaphroditos* is strongly connected to the goddess Aphrodite.<sup>282</sup> Additionally, a *denarius* depicts Sulla sleeping near the goddess Luna, who offers him advice for defeating Marius.<sup>283</sup> Cicero called Pompey *felix* for defeating enemies in the East. In this context *felix* refers to the favor from the gods (i.e., *felicitas*).<sup>284</sup> With leaders from the late

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<sup>279</sup> Beard, Mary, John North, and S. R. F. Price. *Religions of Rome*. Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998. p. 227.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, p. 227. It is interesting to point out what exactly Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights*, VI.I, 1-6), as the authors note and translate, has to say about this incident: “He [Scipio] also is thought to be a man of godlike quality. It is worth adding that the same authorities also record that this same Africanus used to go up on to the Capitol in the dead of night, before dawn had appeared, and have the shrine of Jupiter opened for him; he would remain there for a long time, as though he was consulting with Jupiter about the state of the Republic.”

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, p. 218. Plutarch, *Life of Sulla*, 34. Plutarch also says that Sulla was hailed as “Savior”, “Father”, and “Fortunate one.” His twin children were named “Faustus” and “Fausta”, meaning, of course, “happy”. These words are closely associated with personified deities in the Roman religious system.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p. 219.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid, p. 220-221. Also, see Cicero, *On the Command of Pompey*, 47. Of course, the reward for *pietas* was *felicitas*. Divine favor, prosperity, and success were described as *felicitas*. See, Langford, Julie.

Republic receiving such reverence and divine attributes, it might not be too surprising that Julius Caesar himself was treated in a similar manner. Caesar was, after all, a military genius and his deification could symbolically represent “Rome’s supremacy in the whole world.”<sup>285</sup> Additionally, emperors customarily were deified after death, but only if the senators deemed they earned it.<sup>286</sup>

Julius Caesar, however, seems to have planned to go beyond association with the gods and claim outright divinity for himself while alive.<sup>287</sup> In his speech delivered in the autumn of 44 BC against Marc Antony, Cicero specifically discusses Caesar’s cult.<sup>288</sup> Additionally, during his lifetime, Caesar was the first living Roman to be depicted on coinage, and other coins during his life depicted his lineage with Venus and Aeneas, emphasizing his divine connections.<sup>289</sup> Although Caesar was not officially deified until after his death, plans for his deification may have begun before he died.<sup>290</sup> It is very

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*Maternal Megalomania: Julia Domna and the Imperial Politics of Motherhood.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013. p.66

<sup>285</sup> Galinsky, Karl. *Augustan Culture: An Interpretive Introduction.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1996. p. 17-18.

<sup>286</sup> Beard et al., p. 222.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 222-223. Caesar’s immediate successors chose to avoid this action of claiming divinity while living.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, p. 221-222. Also, see Cicero, *Philippics II.* 110-11. The authors translate it thus: “What greater honour did he ever get than that he should have the sacred couch, the statue, the gable on his house, the special *flamen*? So you see, just as there is a *flamen* for Jupiter, for Mars and for Quirinus, so there is now a *flamen* for the *divus* Julius.” It is worthwhile, though, to note that the speech was after Caesar’s death and intended to defame Antony.

<sup>289</sup> Beard et al., p. 223-224. The coins of Caesar are dated from 47-44 BC, and one of them actually has a star on it, possibly suggesting divine imagery. Following in his predecessor’s footsteps, Octavian’s head also appeared on coins once he was acclaimed as Caesar’s heir, and he “added his now deified father *divus* Julius to the traditional claim of divine ancestry through Venus. Furthermore, Octavian appears on a *denarius* in the guise of Neptune, his foot standing on a globe, with the inscription reading: “Caesar Divi F(ilius)” The coin is dated before 31 BC. As this example shows, then, Octavian could be depicted on a coin symbolically representing a major god; he, of course, has come down to the present as one of the best emperors Rome ever witnessed.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid, p. 222. It is astonishing that Cicero seems to know about these plans so early, and scholars postulate that it may be because the Romans intended to implement the plans for Caesar’s deification right

possible, too, that Caesar could have been deified during his lifetime if he had not been assassinated.<sup>291</sup> Additionally, the sources portray Caesar as kinglike, and it is possible that he himself was attempting to return the state to a monarchy, which the Romans detested.<sup>292</sup> While the emperors were often closely associated with the deities in Rome, the “wicked” emperors were the ones who are generally remembered today as the ones who became gods during their own lifetimes.<sup>293</sup> Emperors, as the literary sources detail, needed to avoid such haughty behaviors while living.

Worship of living emperors in the west was restricted to indirect worship of such deities as the *genius* and *numen* of the emperor. All the Romans possessed what was called a *genius* (i.e. “a spirit with its own divine qualities... to which prayers and offerings could be made”), and the people eventually began to venerate Augustus’ *genius* in their own houses in the form of the *Lares Augusti*.<sup>294</sup> Another term associated with the worship of an emperor was the *numen* (i.e. the power of a thing or person, which ultimately came to mean “god” in Augustus’ time): “To worship the *numen* of Augustus was in a sense to worship the divine property of him without crossing the line completely and acknowledging him as divine.”<sup>295</sup> Archaeological evidence exists in the form of an

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after his death; the plans, then, would have been drafted while Caesar himself were still living.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid, p. 222. It is possible that Caesar was beginning to “cross the line” in terms of how he was representing himself divinely, which helped to lead both to his assassination and a somewhat bad memory for posterity’s sake.

<sup>292</sup> Goldsworthy, Adrian Keith. *Caesar: Life of a Colossus*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2006. p. 3-4. Caesar’s behavior, then, paralleled how Caligula supposedly acted as monarch according to the literary sources.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 222. One of the “bad” emperors, of course, was Caligula.

<sup>294</sup> Barrett, p. 142. He says that the Romans had “long worshipped the *Lares*, the gods of the household, not only in private homes but also at the crossroads... and during the Republic their shrines had fallen into disuse”. They used statues of Augustus’ *genius* as replacements between the *Lares*, which were called the *Lares Augusti*.

<sup>295</sup> Barrett, p. 142. He says that all the Romans during Augustus’ reign might not have known the full differences between *numen* and *genius*, and thus might have used the terms interchangeably; however, the



altar at the forum in Narbo, which shows the direct worship of Augustus' *numen* at specific festivities.<sup>296</sup>

People in prestigious positions from the Republic up until the predecessors of Caligula, then, were associated with divine images. Deification of an emperor after death was acceptable to the Romans, but it was both wicked and abnormal for an emperor to claim divinity for himself while still alive. The evolution of the imperial cult would continue for centuries, with emperors adding divine characteristics to themselves more frequently, as the various literary, archaeological, and numismatic evidence suggests.

### **Caligula's Attitude and Apparel: Establishing a God on Earth?**

The literary sources often mention Caligula as a stereotypical wicked emperor who would take on the role of god on earth, and one way of separating himself from mortals, according to the sources, was to dress up as the deities themselves so that he could claim to be one of them. In this subsection, I will lay out in chronological order many of the literary sources that discuss Caligula's supposed "supernatural dress-ups"<sup>297</sup> and divine depictions. I will then offer modern opinions and analysis on them.

First, the Jewish writer Philo notes the following about Caligula's plan to appear in the clothing and symbols of gods:<sup>298</sup>

*This conception he had firmly sealed in his mind and carried about with him, poor fool, a mythical fiction as if it was an indisputable truth. And when once he*

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two terms are completely different nonetheless.

<sup>296</sup> Barrett, p. 142-143. The festivities would have included the emperor's birthday and other "significant anniversaries."

<sup>297</sup> Dressing up as the various deities, again, was a symptom of the greater issue of Caligula claiming to be a deity.

<sup>298</sup> Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, chapter 12. Translation by: Colson, F. H. *Philo: The Embassy to Gaius*. London: W. Heinemann, 1962. p. 40-42.

*had gained courage and was emboldened to publish to the multitude his most godless assumption of godship he tried to make his actions correspond and harmonize with it and gradually as if on stepping-stones advanced to the top. For he began first of all to liken himself to the so-called demigods, Dionysus and Heracles and the Dioscuri, treating Trophonius and Amphiaraus and Amphilochus and their like and their oracles and celebrations as laughing-stocks compared with his own power. Then, as in a theatre, he assumed different costumes at different times, sometimes the lion skin and club, both overlaid with gold, to adorn himself as Heracles, sometimes caps on his head when he made himself up as the Dioscuri, or again as Dionysus with ivy, thyrsus and fawn's skin.*

Philo says, then, that Caligula supposedly did not assume the apparel of major gods; rather, he started emulating minor gods first. He slowly worked his way up to the major gods:<sup>299</sup>

*So great a frenzy possessed him, so wild and delirious an insanity that leaving the demigods below he proceeded to advance upwards and armed himself to attack the honors paid by their worshippers to the deities held to be greater and divine on both sides, Hermes, Apollo and Ares. To take Hermes first, he arrayed himself with herald's staffs, sandals and mantles, a grotesque exhibition of order in disorder, consistency in confusion, reason in derangement. Then when it pleased him he would strip them off and change his figure and dress into Apollo's, his head encircled with garlands of the sun-rays, wielding a bow and arrows in his left hand and holding out Graces in his right to signify that it was fitting for him to extend good things readily and that these should hold the superior position on the right, while punishment should be kept in the background and allotted the inferior place on the left. And at once at his side singing paeans to him stood drilled choirs of those who but now were calling him Bacchus or Evius or Lyaeus and honoring him with hymns when he was assuming the garb of Dionysus. Often too he would don a breastplate and proceed sword in hand, with helmet and shield, hailed as Ares, and on either side went a procession of the worshippers of the new Ares composed of homicides and official cut-throats to render their base service to a master avid for slaughter and thirsting for human blood.*

Again, Philo indicates Caligula's tendency to openly dress as deities, both wearing the apparel of the major gods and also behaving explicitly as they did. Finally, Philo

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<sup>299</sup> Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, chapter 13. Translation by: Colson, F. H. *Philo: The Embassy to Gaius*. London: W. Heinemann, 1962. p. 47-49.

concludes his discussion on Caligula's "transformations" into the gods with this statement:<sup>300</sup>

*Need we more than these proofs to teach us that Gaius has no right to be likened to any of the gods or demigods either, for his nature, his substance, his purpose in life, is different from theirs? But passion we see to be a blind thing, particularly when it is reinforced by vanity and ambition, combined with possession of the supreme dominion which made havoc of our former prosperity.*

To Philo, then, Caligula served as an example of why emperors should not explicitly behave as gods, especially when they were not fit to do their tasks appropriately.

Another Jewish writer, Josephus, has a similar description of Caligula's emulation of the gods:<sup>301</sup>

*Gaius not only exhibited the madness of his insolence in relation to the Jews who dwelt in Jerusalem and throughout Judaea, but he also sent it forth to spread over every land and sea which was subject to the Romans, and infected the empire with countless ills, such as had never before been chronicled in history... when he visited the Temple of Jupiter, which they call the Capitol and which is first in honor among their temples, he had the audacity to address Jupiter as brother.*

Josephus' account of Caligula shows that the emperor had ascended past the lesser gods and now claimed to be the brother of Jupiter. For Josephus, the emperor's wild behaviors not only highlight his madness, but also his wish to become a god on earth. Yet, in another passage Josephus goes on to say:<sup>302</sup>

*So far did Gaius' frenzy go, that when a daughter was born to him he actually carried her to the Capitol and deposited her on the knees of the statue, remarking that the child belonged to both him and Zeus and that he had appointed two*

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<sup>300</sup> Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium*, chapter 16. Translation by: Colson, F. H. *Philo: The Embassy to Gaius*. London: W. Heinemann, 1962. p. 57.

<sup>301</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book XIX.1. Translation by: Feldman, Louis H. *Josephus: Books XVIII-XIX*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. p. 212-215. Josephus was writing close in time with Philo.

<sup>302</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, book XIX.2. Translation by: Feldman, Louis H. *Josephus: Books XVIII-XIX*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. p. 220-221.

*fathers for her, but left open the question which of the two was the greater. Such was the behavior that the world had to put up with.*

Drusilla, Caligula's daughter with Caesonia, was seen as the offspring of both Zeus and the emperor himself; Josephus' account of this dual parentage is reminiscent of the myth of Hercules who also had two "fathers".<sup>303</sup>

A few decades later, Suetonius includes in his biography a section in which he describes more of Caligula's supposed outrageous behaviors, such as his monarchical inclinations:<sup>304</sup>

*So much for Caligula as emperor; we must now tell of his career as a monster. After he had assumed various surnames (for he was called "Pious," "Child of the Camp," "Father of the Armies," and "Greatest and Best of Caesars"), chancing to overhear some kings, who had come to Rome to pay their respects to him, disputing at dinner about the nobility of their descent, he cried: "Let there be one Lord, one King."*

After highlighting Caligula's deeds, Suetonius plunges into the emperor's sins, first highlighting his desire to rule alone over everyone. After narrating the emperor's desire to be king, Suetonius specifies that Caligula was wishing to become a deity while alive, just as Philo and Josephus already stated:<sup>305</sup>

*But on being reminded that he had risen above the elevation both of princes and kings, he began from that time on to lay claim to divine majesty... he often took his place between the divine brethren... and some hailed him as Jupiter Latiaris.*

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<sup>303</sup> Hercules' biological father was Zeus, but the father he knew and loved with his mother was Amphitryon. Perhaps Josephus wanted to create a parallel between Hercules and Caligula to show the emperor's supposed divine delusions.

<sup>304</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, book IV, chapter XXII. Translation by: Rolfe, John Carew. *Suetonius: Lives of the Caesars*. Vol. 1. London: W. Heinemann, 1913. p. 434-435.

<sup>305</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, book IV, chapter XXII. Translation by: Rolfe, John Carew. *Suetonius: Lives of the Caesars*. Vol. 1. London: W. Heinemann, 1913. p. 435-437.

Unlike Philo and Josephus, though, Suetonius claims that Caligula was emulating Jupiter directly. Jupiter Latiaris, of course, was an important deity to the Romans.<sup>306</sup>

Furthermore, this section connects claims of divinity and kingship, which the Hellenistic rulers were known to have practiced.<sup>307</sup> Thus, Suetonius' writings illustrate that both monarchy and claims of divinity often were connected in the literary accounts. The aristocrats (i.e., the writers of these accounts and individuals who were accustomed to politically and militarily experienced leaders, such as Augustus and Tiberius) would have looked down heavily upon these supposed claims of Caligula.<sup>308</sup> In another section, Suetonius addresses Caligula's even more abnormal behaviors:<sup>309</sup>

*In his clothing, his shoes, and the rest of his attire he did not follow the usage of his country and his fellow-citizens; not always even that of his sex; or in fact, that of an ordinary mortal. He often appeared in public in embroidered cloaks covered with precious stones, with a long-sleeved tunic and bracelets; sometimes in silk and in a woman's robe; now in slippers or buskins, again in boots, such as the emperor's body-guard wear, and at times in the low shoes which are used by females. But oftentimes he exhibited himself with a golden beard, holding in his hand a thunderbolt, a trident, or a caduceus, emblems of the gods, and even in the garb of Venus. He frequently wore the dress of a triumphing general, even before his campaign, and sometimes the breastplate of Alexander the Great, which he had taken from his sarcophagus.*

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<sup>306</sup> Hansen, Mogens Herman. *A Comparative Study of Thirty City-state Cultures: An Investigation*. Copenhagen: Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 2000. p. 219-220. Jupiter Latiaris was king Latinus who became a god upon his death. It is also associated with cult worship on the Alban Mount. It is possible, too, that Suetonius could be hinting at "Latin Jupiter" with his choice of words (i.e., *Latiarem Iovem*). The "divine brethren" were Castor and Pollux.

<sup>307</sup> Caligula is, of course, thought of by many as an emperor who behaved like the Hellenistic leaders.

<sup>308</sup> Alston, Richard. *Aspects of Roman History: AD 14-117*. London [u.a.: Routledge, 1998. p. 47.

Caligula's supposed behaviors are very reminiscent of Caesar's.

<sup>309</sup> Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, book IV, chapter LII. Translation by: Rolfe, John Carew. *Suetonius: Lives of the Caesars*. Vol. 1. London: W. Heinemann, 1913. p. 485.

There are some important points about this section. First, it shows that Caligula not only imitated male deities, but even females, like Venus. Additionally, according to Suetonius, the emperor wielded the iconography of Jupiter, most notably the thunderbolt. Going along with this idea, this section highlights Caligula's monarchical aspirations and his claims of divinity since the emperor seems to be symbolically equipping himself with items of Jupiter, king of the gods. Finally, Suetonius' referencing of Alexander is fitting, since, again, Hellenistic kings embodied both monarchy and divinity, and this passage is suggesting that Caligula was claiming the same.

Dio Cassius expands on Suetonius' ideas, including more deities that the emperor impersonated:<sup>310</sup>

*And when some called him a demigod and others a god, he fairly lost his head. Indeed, even before this he had been demanding that he be regarded as more than a human being, and was wont to claim that he had intercourse with the Moon, that Victory put a crown upon him, and to pretend that he was Jupiter, and he made this a pretext for seducing numerous women, particularly his sisters; again, he would pose as Neptune, because he had bridged so great an expanse of sea; he also impersonated Hercules, Bacchus, Apollo, and all the other divinities, not merely males but also females, often taking the role of Juno, Diana, or Venus. Indeed, to match the change of name he would assume all the rest of the attributes that belonged to the various gods, so that he might seem really to resemble them.*

Dio adds Juno and Diana to the list of female deities that Caligula emulated, likely to emphasize the extent of the emperor's twisted debaucheries. Furthermore, he reaffirms what the prior literary sources asserted in regard to Caligula acting as demigods, gods, and taking up items consistent with their iconographies.<sup>311</sup> Finally, it is worth pointing

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<sup>310</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.26.5-10. Translation by: Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 345-347.

<sup>311</sup> In one section (59.28.5), Dio mentions that he models himself again after Jupiter Latialis, reasserting Suetonius' views.

out that Dio thinks of Caligula as a madman, and he implies that the emperor's insanity is correlated with his outrageous behaviors. In later passages, Dio states even more audacious claims of Caligula:<sup>312</sup>

*Likewise, whenever a bolt fell, he would in turn hurl a javelin at a rock, repeating each time the words of Homer, "Either lift me or I will thee." When Caesonia bore a daughter only a month after her marriage, he pretended that this had come about through supernatural means, and gave himself airs over the fact that in so few days after becoming a husband he was now a father. He named the girl Drusilla, and taking her up to the Capitol placed her on the knees of Jupiter, thereby hinting that she was his child, and put her in charge of Minerva to be suckled. This god, now, this Jupiter (for he was called by these names so much at the last that they even found their way into documents) at the same time that he was doing all this was also collecting money in most shameful and dreadful ways.*

Like Josephus, Dio also alludes to the dual parentage of his daughter Drusilla.

Additionally, Dio points out that many documents had recorded that Caligula was frequently addressed as Jupiter; thus, his supposed bizarre habit of behaving like the gods, in Dio's mind, stretched far and wide.

The author of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*<sup>313</sup>, writing in the fourth century, also describes Caligula's fascination with dressing up as the deities, indicating once again both that the story was very engrained in Roman culture and also how wickedly the Romans viewed the behavior:<sup>314</sup>

*He went about in the dress of his personal gods; he used to claim that he was Jove on account of his incest, and Liber, moreover, from his bacchanalian chorus. I am uncertain whether it will have been proper to write about this for posterity,*

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<sup>312</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.28.6-8. Translation by: Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 354-355.

<sup>313</sup> It is attributed often to Sextus Aurelius Victor, see: Banchich, Thomas M. M. "Roman Emperors - DIR Epitome of Sextus Aurelius Victor." *Roman Emperors - DIR Epitome of Sextus Aurelius Victor*. Canisius College, 24 Apr. 2009. Web. 30 Mar. 2013. <<http://www.roman-emperors.org/epitome.htm>>.

<sup>314</sup> Sextus Aurelius Victor (ascribed): *Epitome de Caesaribus*, ch.3. Translation by: Banchich, Thomas M. M., <http://www.roman-emperors.org/epitome.htm>.

*except perhaps since it helps to know everything about the principes, so that the unfit at least may shun such enormities through fear of their reputation.*

More than three-hundred years after Caligula's demise, according to this author, the detested emperor still served as an example of malevolence; future emperors, in his view, should take note of how not to behave (e.g., dressing up as the gods, like Jupiter).

Finally, it is worth mentioning a brief passage from the first century AD orator Quintilian, who describes one of Caligula's important titles; furthermore, Quintilian's writings are rather early:<sup>315</sup>

*And yet at a slightly earlier date, 'iussi', which we write with a double 's', was spelled with only one. Further, 'optimus maximus', which older writers spelled with a 'u', appear for the first time with an 'i' (such at any rate is the tradition) in an inscription of Gaius Caesar.*

"Optimus Maximus" was associated with the epithet of Jupiter as he was worshipped on the Capitoline Hill in Rome.<sup>316</sup> Quintilian's assertion seems to indicate that Caligula adopted the title *optimus maximus* in order to further associate himself with Jupiter.

Although there is an abundance of literary evidence suggesting that Caligula portrayed himself as various deities, it still does not prove that he viewed himself directly as a god. Barrett (p. 140) warns that, before jumping to any conclusions in regard to these accounts, contemporary researchers should not "impose on the ancient world their own preconceptions of what constitutes a sound and healthy relationship between the human

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<sup>315</sup> Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 1.7.21. Translation by: Butler, Harold Edgeworth. *The Institutio Oratoria of Quintilian*. Vol. 1. London: W. Heinemann, 1921. p. 143. Also, Suetonius, *The Life of Caligula*, 22, says that Caligula wanted to be addressed as *Optimus Maximus Caesar*.

<sup>316</sup> Bunson, Matthew. *A Dictionary of the Roman Empire*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. p. 294. Jupiter Optimus Maximus was the chief god of the Roman state cult. Temples dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus also appeared throughout the empire.



and the divine.” Going along with this idea, Winterling (p. 148-149) notes that the “heaven of the ancients was not nearly as distant as that of Christianity...from the fourth century BC on it was possible to designate persons who possessed power or wealth far in excess of human norms as ‘heroes’ or gods and to venerate them accordingly.” For instance, even “morally good” emperors were described by the primary sources as gods, such as what Vergil says about Octavian.<sup>317</sup> Octavian’s overall impression to Vergil (and to the Empire) was savior-like from this description; the authors, then, were somewhat hypocritical in how they could describe the emperors. Cicero, for example, calls a certain Publius Lentulus a “parent and god of our life”.<sup>318</sup> Furthermore, Mucius Scaevola says in reference to Crassus, “Indeed I have always thought that you were a god in speaking.”<sup>319</sup> As a last example, Scribonius Largus described the emperor Claudius as “our god Caesar.”<sup>320</sup> There are also more instances in which “morally good” emperors’ names are preserved with divine-like contexts;<sup>321</sup> however, the overall point is to emphasize that

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<sup>317</sup> Vergil says, “I could not quit my slavery nor elsewhere find gods so ready to aid. Here, Meliboeus, I saw that youth for whom our altars smoke twice six days a year. Here he was the first to give my plea an answer.” See, Barrett, p. 140. Vergil, *Eclogues*, 1.40-45. Translation by: Fairclough, H. Rushton. *Virgil: Eclogues, Georgics, Aeneid I-VI*. Vol. 1. London: W. Heinemann, 1932. Also, Octavian’s name is disguised by the Latin noun *iuvenem*.

<sup>318</sup> Barrett, p. 140. See Cicero, *Post Reditum in Senatu* 8, who says: *Princeps P. Lentulus, parens ac deus nostrae vitae, fortunae, memoriae, nominis, hoc specimen virtutis, hoc indicium animi, hoc lumen consulatus sui fore putavit*.

<sup>319</sup> Barrett, p. 140. See Cicero, *De Oratore ad Quintum Fratrem*, Book I, ch. 23: *Equidem te cum in dicendo semper putavi deum, tum vero tibi numquam eloquentiae maiorem tribui laudem quam humanitatis*.

<sup>320</sup> Winterling, Aloys. *Caligula: A Biography*. Berkeley: University of California, 2011. p. 209. See Scribonius Largus, *Praefatio* 60,163, who calls Claudius *deus noster Caesar*. There are also examples of later emperors who are described in divine-like contexts, such as Trajan.

<sup>321</sup> Fishwick, Duncan. *The Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Studies in the Ruler Cult of the Western Provinces of the Roman Empire*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1987. p. 334. Fishwick points out that Pliny addresses Trajan as *Caesar Noster* in Ep. 6, 31 and also that Antoninus Pius appears as *dominus noster* in an inscription in Rome (CIL 6, 2120). Additionally, Winterling (p. 149) says that Julius Caesar was called “Jupiter Julius” with Marcus Antony intending to serve as his priest, and that Augustus was addressed as a god by Propertius and Horace in addition to Ovid.

Caligula was not the only emperor (or high-ranking individual) whose name was connected with the gods in the literary sources. It is important to keep in mind, too, that clients could freely address their patrons as divine, but, again, emperors at around the time of Augustus were supposed to have avoided being labeled directly as gods until after their deaths.<sup>322</sup> Caligula, according to the authors, wanted to claim divinity for himself, which obviously would have been viewed negatively. As Barrett notes (p. 146), though, Suetonius' account of the emperor appearing as gods was not to show his religious ideas but to mention his exotic costumes; Dio's version of Caligula's dressing up was a "front adopted to seduce numerous women." Two of the significant authors' accounts, then, endeavored to depict one who portrayed himself as a god.

Another important issue to bring up is that both archaeological evidence and some literary sources indicate that other emperors and high-ranking individuals dressed up as deities also, oftentimes taking up the deities' iconographic characteristics. Roman statues often depicted living people with the iconography of gods as a way of symbolizing Roman political power.<sup>323</sup> Triumphant generals, for instance, decorated themselves in the garb of Jupiter to claim honor.<sup>324</sup> Suetonius records how, during the time of the Second Triumvirate, Octavian and his guests dressed up as gods at a dinner party.<sup>325</sup> Although the

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<sup>322</sup> Bardill, Jonathan. *Constantine, Divine Emperor of the Christian Golden Age*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011. p. 114.

<sup>323</sup> Fejfer, Jane. *Roman Portraits in Context*. Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2008. p. 395-402. Fejfer notes that the statue of Augustus at Prima Porta shows Augustus in a cuirass, likely representing Mars.

<sup>324</sup> Winterling, p. 149. The Roman general would wear a "tunic embroidered with palm trees and red make-up on his face... he carried a scepter; all three features were typical attributes of the god."

<sup>325</sup> Winterling, p.149. Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars, The Life of Augustus*, book 2, chapter 70. Octavian held a dinner party called "the dinner of the twelve gods", and each member of the banquet appeared as a different deity. Octavian himself took up the appearance of Apollo, and Suetonius records that Jupiter became outraged at Octavian's decision to behave as the gods to such an extent that the grain supply

entire occasion was useful for Antony as propaganda against Octavian, the latter has come down to the present positively, while the emperor Caligula has not. Also, Marc Antony modeled himself in the likeness of Dionysus, appearing with “the costume and paraphernalia.”<sup>326</sup> Even the emperor Hadrian, who is remembered as one of the five “good emperors”, depicted himself in some ways as if behaving like Hercules, both in terms of cultural preferences and in his physical appearance.<sup>327</sup> While Caligula clearly was not unique in taking up the iconography of various deities, the sources assert that he went as far as counting himself amongst their number; this action, of course, would have been crossing the line.

### **Cult Worship under Caligula’s Reign: Did it Happen? If it Did, Where?**

Like all the emperors before him, in the east Caligula was regarded as a god from the beginning, and the practice was acceptable.<sup>328</sup> Fishwick (p. 492) affirms this notion by saying, “Sometimes the emperor would be joined to a local deity and the two celebrated together.” One example of evidence for the ruler cult’s importance in the east exists in the form of a papyrus containing an Egyptian religious calendar, which shows imperial festivities and their related ceremonies during Marcus Aurelius’ reign.<sup>329</sup> In

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diminished.

<sup>326</sup> Winterling, p. 150. Caligula valued his eastern heritage, and since he grew up with Antonia, it is possible that if he did act as gods, he was simply emulating Marc Antony and/or Octavian. Regardless, Winterling (p.150) says that once Octavian became emperor, he did not act in the manner again and that Tiberius “followed in a similar manner.”

<sup>327</sup> Goodman, Martin, and Jane Sherwood. *The Roman World, 44 BC-AD 180*. London: Routledge, 1997. p. 71-72. For instance, Hadrian was called “Greekling”, and he was very devoted to the Eleusinian mysteries and Greek academics. Additionally, he grew out a beard, symbolizing his close ties to Greek culture and also likely Hercules. Also, see the *Historia Augusta, Hadrian*, 13.1-2.

<sup>328</sup> Barrett, p. 142.

<sup>329</sup> Fishwick, p. 492-493. This papyrus, along with other pieces of documentary evidence, is important because they indicate specifically when and what events were celebrated in honor of the emperor in the

regard to Caligula specifically, many of the Greek cities might have offered various congratulatory messages, for instance, with divine imagery to the emperor, and there are even examples that emphasize that the east behaved in this fashion.<sup>330</sup>

While discussing Caligula's worship in the east, it is important to discuss how he himself felt about being worshipped there. Our sources provide two examples: the Temple at Jerusalem and the "planned" temple at Miletus.<sup>331</sup> In regard to the Temple at Jerusalem, Philo specifies:<sup>332</sup>

*...he [Gaius], when he had read the letter, ordered a colossal statue gilt all over, much more costly and much more magnificent than the rich altar which had been erected in Jamnia, by way of insult to be set up in the temple of the metropolis, having for his most excellent and sagacious counselors...*

Although Philo thought that Caligula's conversion of the Jewish temple into a site for the worship of "Zeus Epiphanes" (possibly a reference to the emperor himself incognito), was sacrilegious and offensive, the act itself represents something that had been practiced in the east often by Roman emperors.<sup>333</sup> For instance, there were numerous dedications to Zeus as Augustus in disguise.<sup>334</sup> Furthermore, there may be political motivations behind Caligula's decision to intervene in Judaea.<sup>335</sup> Wilkinson (p. 55, 2005) says that when the Jews had destroyed an imperial altar set up by Greeks at Jamnia, the Roman population

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east, such as at Egypt.

<sup>330</sup> Barrett p. 143. Barrett notes that the Greeks might, for instance, refer to him with phrases such as *neos theos sebastos* ('the new God Augustus'). The phrase *ho Helios neos* ('the new Sun') appears on a decree from Cyzicus in reference to Caligula.

<sup>331</sup> Barrett, p. 143.

<sup>332</sup> Philo, *Legatio Ad Gaium*, XXX. 196. Yonge, Charles Duke. *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1993. p. 1018.

<sup>333</sup> Barrett, p. 143. "Epiphanes", interestingly, was an epithet used by Hellenistic kings. See, for example, Chamoux, François. *Hellenistic Civilization*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. p. 228.

<sup>334</sup> Barrett, p. 143.

<sup>335</sup> Wilkinson, Sam. *Caligula*. London: Routledge, 2005. p. 54-56.

could have interpreted the incident symbolically as an attack on the “imperial cult... which [cult] represented Rome.”

In regard to the cult of Caligula at Miletus, Barrett (p. 143) observes that it is important because “it provides us with a detailed picture of how Caligula’s worship was organized in one eastern province.” Additionally, the literary sources mention specific portions of this incident. Suetonius, for instance, notes: “He [Caligula] had planned, besides to rebuild the palace of Polycrates at Samos, to finish the temple of Didymaeon Apollo at Ephesus.”<sup>336</sup> Dio gives more detail of the incident:<sup>337</sup>

*Gaius ordered that a sacred precinct should be set apart for his worship at Miletus in the province of Asia. The reason he gave for choosing this city was that Diana had pre-empted Ephesus, Augustus Pergamum and Tiberius Smyrna; but the truth of the matter was that he desired to appropriate to his own use the large and exceedingly beautiful temple which the Milesians were building to Apollo.*

Most scholars believe that Caligula did indeed allow the province of Asia to construct a temple at Miletus for his own worship.<sup>338</sup> Asia Minor was, in fact, an important center for the imperial cult. Later, for example, the people erected the Antonine Altar in Ephesus, which was “probably the finest sculpture to survive from the Greek world in the imperial period.”<sup>339</sup> However, the charge by Dio that Caligula wanted to claim the temple of

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<sup>336</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars: The Life of Caligula*, 21.1. Translation by: Rolfe, John C. Suetonius. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1913. p. 435.

<sup>337</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.28.1 Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 353. Also, it is important to keep in mind that Dio Cassius was from Asia Minor; see, for instance, Murphy-O'Connor, J. *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2008. p. 61. It is possible that Dio was interested in discussing events from Asia Minor in his accounts since he originated from there.

<sup>338</sup> Barrett, p.143. Again, the East was allowed to do such practices more freely.

<sup>339</sup> Price, S. R. F. *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge [Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1984. p. 158-159.

Apollo at Didyma for himself likely was not true.<sup>340</sup> Thus, it is worth investigating also what the evidence is in regard to whether Caligula himself actually made use of the Temple of Apollo at Didyma. There is epigraphic evidence inside the temple which describes the dedication of a cult statue of Caligula; the inscription gives detailed information on how Caligula's cult was structured and it also indicates that Caligula's sanctuary was at Didyma, not Miletus.”<sup>341</sup> Thus, although Caligula's area of worship was located at Didyma, it makes one ponder about the validity of Dio's entire account on this incident and the emperor specifically wanting to take over the Temple of Apollo for himself. Indeed, one scholar says Dio must have confused the projects at Didyma and that “Caligula took great interest in Didyma, but never desired the temple [of Apollo] for himself.”<sup>342</sup>

While information concerning Caligula's cult worship in the east is neither as reliable as one might hope (in terms of the literary accounts) nor unique, fallacies also circulated about Caligula being involved in cultic practices at Rome itself later in his reign.<sup>343</sup> Caligula, according to the same literary sources, behaved quite audaciously, ordering the construction of a temple in Rome for his own worship. Suetonius says the following.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Barrett, p.143.

<sup>341</sup> Barrett, p. 144.

<sup>342</sup> Fontenrose, Joseph Eddy. *Didyma: Apollo's Oracle, Cult, and Companions*. Berkeley: University of California, 1988. p. 169.

<sup>343</sup> Barrett, p. 144-146. In the beginning of his ruling, Caligula denied that anyone set up “images (*eikones*) of himself and also requested that a decree ordering sacrifices to his *genius* be annulled, asking the last measure be inscribed on a tablet.” Also, establishing a cult in Rome for his own worship would have been taboo to Roman traditions and norms.

<sup>344</sup> Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars: The Life of Caligula*, 22.3. Translation by: Rolfe, John C. *Suetonius*. Cambridge (Ma): Harvard UP, 1913. p. 437.

*He also set up a special temple to his own godhead, with priests and with victims of the choicest kind. In this temple was a life-sized statue of the emperor in gold, which was dressed each day in clothing such as he wore himself. The richest citizens used all their influence to secure the priesthoods of his cult and bid high for the honour. The victims were flamingoes, peacocks, black grouse, guinea-hens and pheasants, offered day by day each after its own kind.*

Suetonius' account shows how bold some of Caligula's supposed tendencies to the divine were, actions which would have been completely unacceptable to established Roman tradition. For instance, the golden statue of the emperor was dressed as if it were symbolizing both Caligula and his divine character, and people were recognizing him as a god in Rome. Also, animals were sacrificed specifically to his divinity as well, again symbolizing his connection with the deities.

Dio provides a bit more detail of the incident, sounding very similar to Suetonius, (e.g., he mentions the sacrifices but not the specific animals):<sup>345</sup>

*Furthermore, though he at first forbade anyone to set up images of him, he even went on to manufacture statues himself; and though he once requested the annulment of a decree ordering sacrifices to be offered to his Fortune, and even caused this action of his to be inscribed on a tablet, he afterwards ordered temples to be erected and sacrifices to be offered to himself as to a god.*

This temple to which Dio refers receives greater detail in a later section of his narrative:<sup>346</sup>

*Thereupon he went to still greater lengths, and actually built in Rome itself two temples of his own, one that had been granted him by vote of the senate and another at his own expense on the Palatine. It seems that he had constructed a sort of lodge on the Capitoline, in order, as he said, that he might dwell with Jupiter; but disdaining to take second place in this union of households, and blaming the god for occupying the Capitoline ahead of him, he hastened to erect*

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<sup>345</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.4.4 Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 273.

<sup>346</sup> Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.28.2-7. Cary, Earnest. *Dio Cassius: Roman History*. Vol. VII. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1924. p. 355-357.

*another temple on the Palatine, and wished to transfer to it the statue of the Olympian Zeus after remodeling it to resemble himself. But he found this to be impossible, for the ship built to bring it was shattered by thunderbolts, and loud laughter was heard every time that anybody approached as if to take hold of the pedestal; accordingly, after uttering threats against the statue, he set up a new one of himself. He cut in two the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Roman Forum and made through it an approach to the palace running directly between the two statues, in order, as he was wont to say, that he might have the Dioscuri for gate-keepers. Styling himself Jupiter Latiaris, he attached to his service as priests his wife Caesonia, Claudius, and other persons who were wealthy, receiving ten million sesterces from each of them in return for this honour. He also consecrated himself to his own service and appointed his horse a fellow-priest; and dainty and expensive birds were sacrificed to him daily.*

Dio mentions more supposed inappropriate actions of the emperor. His account not only says that Caligula ordered the construction of a statue of himself in the temple, but that he modeled it after Zeus, as if trying to establish himself as the ultimate deity in the city Rome. Another controversial behavior would have been Caligula's decision to divide the temple of Castor and Pollux in the forum and to use it as a vestibule for his own temple; he essentially would have been making himself appear more divine with this decision also. Finally, Dio charges Caligula with the bold act of appointing his horse as a priest; however, only men of distinguished social status could become priests<sup>347</sup>, so Caligula would have been ignoring Roman laws and customs.

As Barrett warns (p. 145), though, researchers must carefully examine the evidence in regard to whether there really was an official cult of Caligula in Rome. First of all, aside from the literary accounts, there is not a single piece of evidence in Rome or in the west to suggest that a cult had been established for Caligula specifically at Rome

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<sup>347</sup> Giardina, Andrea. *The Romans*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1993. p. 58.



itself.<sup>348</sup> Although inscriptions of dedications have been found in the west for Caligula dating to around the time of the supposed temple construction, the Latin text in these inscriptions does not have words denoting divine attributes for the emperor as one might expect.<sup>349</sup> It is also worth pointing out that the Arval Records mention nothing of his divinity.<sup>350</sup> There are also no coins from the central mint of Rome that would suggest Caligula had a formal cult.<sup>351</sup> Going along with the numismatic evidence, Barrett explains further that it is also extremely significant that the emperor is not depicted bearing the radiate crown on any coins whatsoever, as it was the “distinctive attribute of the deified emperor”, especially since Caligula was “highly progressive in the types of his official coinage.”<sup>352</sup> In addition, both Philo and Seneca, individuals who were writing negatively about the emperor and his debaucheries while he was still living, mention nothing about Caligula’s cult worship, even though they both were residing at Rome during the end of Caligula’s reign.<sup>353</sup> Since both touch upon Caligula’s excesses, one would think that they would say at least something about his cult worship at Rome; they do not, for example, even claim that he identified himself as Zeus or Jupiter.<sup>354</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Barrett, p. 148.

<sup>349</sup> Barrett, p. 148-150. One dedication from Bourges in Aquitania addresses Caligula as *C. Caesar Germanicus*. Another inscription dated to AD 40 in Spain says nothing of divine characteristics. Finally, an inscription at Coimbra simply calls the emperor “Caesar”.

<sup>350</sup> Barrett, p. 149. The Arval Records do, however, address Claudius as *divinus princeps*, while he was alive. See, for instance, AFA lvii.8.24. Seneca mentions Claudius in divine contexts, too (e.g., *Apocolocyntosis*).

<sup>351</sup> Barrett, p. 149. There is absolutely no numismatic evidence to indicate that Caligula had a formal cult in the west.

<sup>352</sup> Barrett, p. 149. Augustus is depicted wearing it, and Nero is even depicted as wearing it on coins while he is living.

<sup>353</sup> Barrett, p. 149-150.

<sup>354</sup> Barrett, p. 149. Philo, who repeatedly criticizes Caligula for how he treats the Jews, mentions nothing about Caligula identifying himself with the chief god Jupiter.

It is also difficult to establish where exactly in Rome the temple was supposedly built, since Suetonius discusses only one temple without a specific place, and Dio mentions two temples at two different locales.<sup>355</sup> Modern researchers suggest that if a temple were to have been constructed, it would have been situated on the Palatine, not on the Capitoline.<sup>356</sup> The Palatine, of course, also held a shrine dedicated to the already dead Augustus, again highlighting that Caligula would not have been entirely unique in housing an object of worship for himself here.<sup>357</sup> Also, the claims that Caligula had a statue of himself placed within the supposed temple (as if it was nefarious to do so) were not all that out of line with past leaders.<sup>358</sup> Perhaps, too, the later sources confused his supposed temple with another possibility: the cult of Salus (“welfare”).<sup>359</sup> The cult of Salus was established during Augustus’ lifetime, so it is not farfetched to imagine that a similar cult had been initiated by Caligula.<sup>360</sup> Additionally, worship of Caligula’s *genius* at Rome would not have been unimaginable either, and Barrett (p. 152) suggests that one of the reasons Caligula might have received negative notice was because worshipping of the emperor’s *genius* was done privately; Caligula’s *genius* could have been worshipped at the “level of an official state cult, with a temple and body of priests to serve it.”<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Barrett, p. 147-150.

<sup>356</sup> Balsdon, John. *The Emperor Gaius (Caligula)*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1977. p. 167. Also, see Barrett, p. 147.

<sup>357</sup> Barrett, p. 147.

<sup>358</sup> Barrett, p. 147-148. Cicero discusses that Caesar’s statue had been placed in the Temple of Quirinus in Rome, and even Tiberius suggested that his statues be placed “among the adornments of the temple.” When the emperors appeared as Jupiter, it was “part of the Imperial propaganda.”

<sup>359</sup> Barrett, p. 152. The cult of Salus was likely connected with the *vota pro salute* taken every year and on important anniversaries (as the Arval records indicate).

<sup>360</sup> Barrett, p. 152. Also, see Weinstock, Stefan. *Divus Julius*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1971. p. 172 -173.

Weinstock suggests that since Dio recalls Caligula swearing by the *salus* and *genius* of Incitatus, there may be some truth to Caligula’s cult for his *salus*.

<sup>361</sup> Barrett, p. 152-153. As Barrett explains, for instance, the *genius* of an emperor neither had a temple nor

Thus, because there is a strong lack of evidence outside the literary accounts in regard to Caligula's claims of ordering the construction of a temple at Rome for his own worship, one must embrace the possibility that the emperor did not behave in the untraditional ways that the literary sources say he did; the sources were mainly interested in making sure that Caligula was remembered negatively.

### **A New Take on Caligula's Supposed Divine Nature**

There is no doubt that Caligula, an emperor who was interested in his heritage as well as the eastern expectations for imperial power, assumed divine attributes in a way that many tradition-minded Romans deemed as "crossing the line" in terms of what was acceptable in their social system. It is worthwhile first to mention, though, that almost all the literary sources of his divine nature were members of the Roman aristocracy (i.e. senators and knights).<sup>362</sup> If the sources were members of the senatorial rank, then, their accounts must be considered critically.<sup>363</sup> For instance, although some researchers may see historical accuracy in the ancient authors' accounts (i.e., believing the hatred and animosity attached to Caligula's name and character were indicative of a loathed figure), it is very possible that these senators were writing their accounts in anger out of how their power had diminished since the Republic and they thus exaggerated the truth. Furthermore, the Roman aristocracy did not support monarchical tendencies, as they tended to conjure up dreaded images of the kings from the regal period; these actions of Caligula could have offended everyone who interpreted his behaviors in this way.

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a priesthood for itself. To swear by the emperor's *genius* was routine by the time of Caligula.

<sup>362</sup> Winterling, p. 6-7. Senators were also in contact with the emperor often.

<sup>363</sup> Senatorial sources were critical of emperors who acted like monarchs.

In regard to specific godlike behaviors of the emperor, it is again important to note how Caligula was not the only emperor to act in this manner. As for his transvestism, for example, Caligula probably did dress up as certain deities; since the east saw him as divine, he likely acted in a similar manner at Rome. Readers of the literary accounts should not take to heart that it means that Caligula viewed himself as a god better than all the citizens, though.<sup>364</sup> Additionally, it is probable, as a variety of the sources mention<sup>365</sup>, that individuals knelt before Caligula, but it was not to honor him as a god; it was because the idea of his being associated with eastern rulers became engrained in society during his reign, so the Romans started to act in ways that corresponded to his rule. The authors embellished this incident to attach despicable characteristics to the growing stigma of the emperor. Finally, there surely were temples associated with cultic practices established in the east for Caligula; it is not surprising, though, nor is it transgressing past unacceptable norms. The sources decided to enhance these stories of his audacious behaviors further by claiming that he established a temple with cult worship directly at Rome; however, there is no evidence outside of the literary sources to suggest that he ordered the construction of a temple specifically for his worship in Rome. The only possible way to justify the sources' claims is to assume that a cult dedicated to Caligula's *genius* or *salus* had been established in Rome, and that the authors exaggerated the accounts out of hatred. A true account, then, might have been

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<sup>364</sup> Again, the sources were biased against Caligula.

<sup>365</sup> For instance, a certain Lucius Vitellius desperately bowed before Caligula in both Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*, Book VII, chapter 3 and Dio's *Roman History*, 59.27.4-6.

similar to this: a manic Caligula wielded a scepter<sup>366</sup> while prancing up and down the roads, receiving praises and honors in the forms of citizens kneeling before him. Thus, then, there is no reason to add the assertions about Caligula acting as a god on earth to the list of his detestable qualities; the literary sources' claims are full of distortions, exaggerations, and/or lies.

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<sup>366</sup> or other iconographic materials of the gods

## CONCLUSION: THE MEMORY OF AN EVIL CALIGULA LIVES ON

*Let them hate me, so they but fear me.  
I wish the Roman people had but a single neck.  
Remember that I have the right to do anything to anybody.  
Off comes this beautiful head whenever I give the word.*<sup>367</sup>

As this thesis has shown, it is important that scholars accurately portray people from history so that their memories live on without widespread falsehoods. The goal of historiography is to strive for the historical truth, and it involves looking at all pieces of available evidence. Caligula is remembered in popular culture today not only as one of the wickedest Roman emperors but also as one of the worst rulers of all time; the negative depictions in the literary accounts, from authors like Suetonius and Dio Cassius, have impacted the legacy of Caligula more so than any of his accomplishments. Taking the literary sources at face value is problematic; in general, they were written by aristocrats who disliked someone in higher authority or someone who went against their religious beliefs<sup>368</sup>. When other primary sources are introduced (e.g., coins and inscriptions) a clearer portrayal of the genuine Caligula oftentimes appears.

It is not difficult to find specific examples in popular culture emphasizing how Caligula's dark side has remained intact after two-thousand years. One documentary entitled *The Most Evil Men and Women in History*, shown on the Discovery Channel, included Caligula near the top of its list, and the narrators immediately began introducing

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<sup>367</sup> These are various words Caligula supposedly said taken from Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, 4.30.1, 4.30.2, 4.29.1, 4.33.1. Translation by: Rolfe, John Carew. *Suetonius*. London: W. Heinemann, 1913. pp. 451-457. I chose these supposed direct quotes to highlight how his memory is generally remembered today.

<sup>368</sup> such as Philo and Josephus

the emperor and explaining how he forced families to come to their own children's executions; many of the individuals who narrated the show were renowned historians.<sup>369</sup> Additionally, Jack Pulman adapted classical scholar Robert Graves' *I, Claudius* to a television series in which Caligula's twisted behaviors are greatly sensationalized; for instance, there is a scene in which Caligula dumps seashells in front of the senators as the "spoils of Neptune" while they all address him as Jove.<sup>370</sup> Outside of the semi-scholarly world, sitcoms such as *Seinfeld* and *The Big Bang Theory* mention Caligula with negative connotations attached to their references.<sup>371</sup> Caligula has even been connected to other forms of entertainment; for instance, there is a new web-based computer game called *Viva Caligula* in which a person "controls" Caligula and "purges" Rome of all her citizens and famous structures.<sup>372</sup> In addition, the British television show *Horrible Histories* often features Caligula, and in one catchy spoof the emperor appears with Elagabalus, Commodus, and Nero; each emperor argues that he is the "baddest emperor of them all".<sup>373</sup>

The chapters in this thesis highlighted events in Caligula's life that have made him appear as a psychotic and loathsome figure in society today; however, the research

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<sup>369</sup> "Caligula." *The Most Evil Men and Women In History*. Discovery. N.d. Television. This example shows how even people true to their own professions can easily be persuaded by the distorted literary sources.

<sup>370</sup> Pulman, Jack. "Hail Who?" *I, Claudius*. BBC. 1976. Television. In another episode (i.e., *Zeus, by Jove*), Caligula declares his love for his sister Drusilla.

<sup>371</sup> In *Seinfeld*, Jerry Seinfeld asks his friend Elaine whether a man she knows is a dentist or Caligula. See: David, Larry, and Jerry Seinfeld. "The Jimmy." *Seinfeld*. NBC. 16 Mar. 1995. Television. In *The Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon Cooper says to his friends, "At one point Raj put on reggae music and his sister took off her shoes. It was like the last days of Caligula." See: Lorre, Chuck, and Bill Prady. "The Toast Derivation." *The Big Bang Theory*. CBS. 24 Feb. 2011. Television.

<sup>372</sup> Adult Swim. *Viva Caligula*. 2009. Web. 12 June 2012. <http://games.adultswim.com/viva-caligula-adventure-online-game.html>. Caligula is very physically strong in this make-believe animated game.

<sup>373</sup> Cohen, Dave. "Rotten Romans." *Horrible Histories*. BBC. 14 June 2011. *CBBC*. Web. 11 June 2013. <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbbc/clips/p00hklkl>>. Nero is declared as the "baddest emperor of them all".

presented has clearly indicated that the ancient authors' claims were not all completely valid and reliable. In regard to Britain, the authors give mixed accounts, ranging from the emperor and his men fully capturing the island to seizing seashells and returning to Rome; modern evidence suggests that Caligula fully intended to invade Britain but did not, and that the "seized" seashells or captured prince could symbolize loot from conquered territory.<sup>374</sup> The literary accounts state that Caligula was incestuous with his three sisters, and epigraphic evidence showed that Caligula likely embraced the concept of the *domus divina* more readily than the emperors before him; his sisters were political tools and close friends, not lovers. Additionally, the authors frequently associate Caligula with monarchical and divine contexts; the archaeological evidence suggests it is true in the east, but there is no proof outside literary accounts that Caligula acted as a god or ordered the establishment of a cult for his own worship at Rome.

### **What can be said with Certainty about Caligula?**

Caligula was not the best emperor that ever lived; there must be some truth to the immoralities and eccentric behaviors that the authors assert. One aspect that seems to cut across much of Caligula's life, though, is his insanity. Even today, for instance, psychology textbooks make references to the deranged Caligula to show how mental illnesses are not something new to the twenty-first century. As one example, renowned forensic psychiatrist Anil Aggrawal mentions Caligula in one of his lengthy medical textbooks; the emperor seems to mesh well with the doctor's data in the sections

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<sup>374</sup> The conquered territory would be *Oceanus*. As my research demonstrated, military victories, such as capturing Britain, were important ways of distinguishing emperors.



pertaining to incest, transvestism, and sexual deviation.<sup>375</sup> It is worth recalling that Caligula was dealt many “blows” from birth to death. In today’s society, it would require much resilience for a person to “bounce back” after many of the hardships he or she endured during his life; unless he were somehow immune to psychological problems, Caligula would have likely agonized over something.<sup>376</sup> If a person suffers from psychological problems, his thoughts, personality, and behaviors may be affected; uncovering what mental disorder(s) Caligula suffered from might help to better construct specifically why he is associated with some of the worst misdeeds that can be attached to an emperor’s name.

### **Spreading the Truth about Caligula and Future Research**

Modern historical accounts discussing Caligula should be cautious of using only one type of primary source (e.g., literary sources) and taking it completely at face value. Gathering as many primary sources as possible is good practice for steering away from the negative stereotypes that have become so attached to Caligula’s character. Additionally, modern theories that discuss Caligula should take into consideration his mental health at specific points in his life. For instance, Caligula’s sister and close friend Drusilla died in AD 38, and his other two sisters conspired to kill him in AD 39. Obviously psychological traumas such as the aforementioned would affect how a leader

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<sup>375</sup> Aggrawal, Anil. *Forensic and Medico-legal Aspects of Sexual Crimes and Unusual Sexual Practices*. Boca Raton: CRC, 2009. p. 76; p. 321; p. 10. In regard to the “sexual deviation” section, Aggrawal, taking the literary accounts at face value, says that Caligula could be regarded also as a *zoophile* because of the extraordinary honors bestowed on Incitatus, his horse.

<sup>376</sup> One would think he might have suffered from serious mood disorders, such as at least depression and/or mania (perhaps even bipolar disorder).

might act in certain circumstances; thus it is worthwhile to keep in mind that Caligula was, after all, human and he too would have experienced the full range of emotions and feelings that accompany tragic events. Modern historians, then, should take an interdisciplinary approach<sup>377</sup> in efforts to unmask exactly who Caligula was.

This thesis is just a case study in the much bigger issue of reconstructing ancient historical events based on biased primary sources. With this in mind, there are other areas of Caligula's life that future researchers could investigate. As one example, Caligula is very often remembered as giving his horse, Incitatus, more honors than distinguished men; they could examine why, specifically, a horse was so important to the narratives. Additionally, while many know that Caligula supposedly ordered the construction of a bridge to be built at Baiae, few know the specifics, and it would be worth examining all available sources to reconstruct a more accurate picture of that event as well. Finally, it likely would be beneficial for history's sake to apply this methodology to the supposed transgressions of other loathed emperors<sup>378</sup>, as depicted in the literary sources, with Caligula's, since it could highlight further the distortions of the authors.

People often assume that what is written or said is fact; that is not the case at all, especially in regard to the Roman authors who brought about the defamation of Caligula, which would continue for thousands of years. When the word "Caligula" is said in conversation today, flashbulb memories should not elicit false historical facts encompassing words and phrases like "murderer", "lunatic", "incestuous beast", "god on

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<sup>377</sup> i.e., Both a psychological and historical approach might benefit research on Caligula rather than just one or the other. Of course, multiple disciplines (e.g., biological or sociological) could yield even better results.

<sup>378</sup> e.g., Nero, Domitian, Commodus, Elagabalus, et al.

earth”, “failed military leader”, “megalomaniac”, etc. Instead, his name should emphasize the more complex truth, which includes his deeds. As long as we historians continue to preserve Caligula’s legacy as a monster, chills will continue to run down the spines of people who read about his unfathomable (and distorted) sins.

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