

Carnage in Rome



Advanced Seminar 600.

Spring Semester 2009; Time: Thursday 1:20-3:20.

Lecture room: Greek and Latin Reading Room (Memorial Library, 4th floor). In order to access the room you need a key. You need to pay a deposit of \$10.00 on the third floor of Memorial Library.

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Office Hours: Monday 11:00-1:00.

The emperor Gaius Iulius Caesar Germanicus, better known under his nickname Caligula, ruled for only four years, AD 37-41. During his reign the relationship between senate and emperor deteriorated, the reserve created by his financially conservative predecessor Tiberius was soon exhausted, and in foreign politics his reliance on vassal kings turned out to be not viable. In spite of the signal failure of his reign, Caligula has received more attention than any other Roman emperor (with the possible exception of Nero). The reason for this is not difficult to discover. Caligula was an atypical emperor, to say the least, who may have been unfit to rule. Popular media are mesmerized by the image of the unstable emperor who engages in acts of cruelty, cross-dressing and inappropriate fits of dark humor. Academic writers, in contrast, attempt to show that Caligula has been misrepresented and misunderstood. They argue that he may have been unstable and unbalanced, but assert at the same time that that does not mean that all the cruel, bestial and despotic behavior that has been attributed to Caligula is the result of accurate portrayal. In some cases what seems to be accepted by popular media and popular books on Caligula appears to be the repeating of a bad reading of the original sources. For example, you will read in many accounts that Caligula was thinking of making his horse consul. Suetonius (*Life of Caligula*, 55) only states that **it was said** that he **planned** to make Incitatus consul, while Dio Cassius (Roman History 59.14.7) states that he “swore by the animal’s life and fortune and even promised to appoint him consul, a promise that he would certainly have carried out if he had lived longer.” It is uncertain how Dio Cassius can be so positive about the execution of the promise. It is a conclusion which is only acceptable to the reader who is already convinced that Caligula is capable of anything, even if the evidence to substantiate the claim is not available. The original context of Caligula’s remark can no longer be reconstructed, but it is just as plausible that the emperor may have made a throw away remark about the qualities of the current consuls (a relic of the old Republican constitution with little actual power) stating that that was the kind of job that his horse Incitatus could do just as well. In this seminar we want to avoid drawing conclusions, presuppositions and assumptions about the emperor before we have looked at the available evidence critically.

Ancient writers use a variety of negative characteristics to describe Caligula, ranging from bizarrely insane to calculatingly cruel. There are two key moments in his reign. Caligula, everyone agrees, started out well as the successor to Tiberius. As the son of the very popular Germanicus the young emperor (he was twenty-five when he became emperor) was welcomed with cheers and applause by the people of Rome. Caligula was able to meet expectations for the first couple of months until he fell seriously ill. The cause of the illness and the permanent consequences for his behavior have given rise to a heated debate, but our sources are simply not detailed enough to allow for a diagnosis. What seems to be self-evident, however, is the fact that the disease was a physical ailment, not a mental affliction. We know this from the only contemporary source that has survived from the reign of Caligula. Philo of Alexandria visited Rome in AD 38 as one of the leaders of a Jewish embassy in the hope of resolving a longstanding conflict between the Jews and the Greeks living in Alexandria. He and the other members of the embassy met with the emperor in person, and to Philo Caligula appeared insensitive to Jewish customs and oblivious to their privileges and rights, but Philo never refers to him as insane. Caligula may not have been insane, but he was obviously inexperienced for such an important position and he may also have been unbalanced, suffering from nervous afflictions and insomnia, hearing voices at night, or delusions of grandeur. This is not surprising in view of the fact that his family had suffered under

Tiberius. His father Germanicus died in AD 19 in the East, presumably poisoned by Caius Calpurnius Piso, the governor of Syria. His mother Agrippina was so convinced that the emperor Tiberius had instructed Piso to poison her husband that she felt a lifelong hatred for him. She had a tempestuous nature, was quick to speak her mind, and was easily enraged. The mother of three boys and three girls, she was convinced that Tiberius was targeting her family for extinction. Tiberius knew very well that Agrippina was a proud woman who especially gloried in her two eldest sons, Drusus and Nero, and he believed that his position as emperor was permanently threatened by members of his own family. The sinister prefect of the Praetorian Guard, Sejanus, fed Tiberius' suspicions by using spies to collect information on Agrippina and her sons. In the end Drusus and Nero were both arrested and they died as prisoners, Drusus in the imperial palace and Nero on the island of Pandateria. Friends of Agrippina were pestered and threatened or indicted for crimes they did not commit. Agrippina herself was not allowed by her uncle to remarry and she was finally put under house arrest and subsequently exiled to an island, where she died under miserable circumstances. During the same time when his family was persecuted Caligula became more and more part of the ambit of Tiberius. After the fall of Sejanus in AD 31 the reigning emperor promoted him and his grandson Tiberius Gemellus (the twin; one of surviving twins) as his successors. For six years Caligula remained a loyal pupil of the emperor without ever uttering a word about his family. There is consensus amongst modern scholars that Caligula did not want to be the next victim of Tiberius' reign of terror and therefore remained quiet so as not to suffer the same fate as the rest of his family. The first thing he did after he had been made emperor was to retrieve the ashes of his mother and of his brother Nero from the islands where they had died, a trip in rough sea and therefore at considerable risk to himself.

The second key event in Caligula's reign came in AD 39, two years into his reign, when he started to act more suspicious towards the senate. He convinced himself that the senate had been heavily involved in the deaths of his brothers and mother, and he became openly hostile towards them. His suspicions even included the members of his own family, or what was left of it. These were his uncle Claudius and his two remaining sisters, Agrippina and Livilla (Drusilla, his favorite sister, had died in 38). Claudius was an intelligent historian and a specialist in the Etruscan language, but suffered from a stammer and was otherwise physically handicapped. In 39 Caligula suddenly moved north with a number of troops, ostensibly to organize training maneuvers in Germany and Gaul, but the emperor also claimed to have uncovered a conspiracy against his life. We know from an inscription that the major culprit was believed to be Gaetulicus, the governor of Lower Germany, but others came under a dark cloud as well. Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, the former husband of Caligula's sister Drusilla, was executed, and Agrippina and Livilla were exiled. Other famous Romans were also exiled around the same time, all of them suspected of involvement in the conspiracy. The two most famous individuals were Lucius Annaeus Seneca, the philosopher and later instructor of the emperor Nero, and Lucius Ofonius Tigellinus, who would become notorious as praetorian prefect in the later years of the emperor Nero. After the conspiracy had been exposed Caligula continued to execute opponents or alleged opponents of his regime. He was almost permanently short of funds, having taken only a couple of months to spend the reserve that Tiberius had built up over many years in order to boost his initial popularity. This led him to confiscate property of those who opposed him, to organize auctions of superfluous imperial memorabilia, and to raise new taxes, such as the one on prostitutes. Finally, at the beginning of the year 41 a number of senators and

soldiers had enough of his increasingly erratic behavior and they killed him while he was inspecting the rehearsal of a dancing group (Caligula always had an interest in dancing).

The accounts of his reign and the occasional observations reported by other writers are overwhelmingly negative. Caligula was surely an unusual personality with a rather dark sense of humor, a particular tendency to be cruel, and filled with the sense that no one before him had realized how much power the Roman emperor truly possessed. The many infamous things that are attributed to him are partly exaggerations concocted by authors who were senators (most writers of history were senators), the group which had suffered the most during his reign. Roman historians have a strong tendency to measure the qualities of an emperor on the basis of how well or how badly they cooperated with the senate, which had been a requirement since Augustus invented the Principate. It may be possible that Caligula wanted to break with that constitutional tradition and move in a more absolutist direction. His reign is too short and his behavior too erratic to observe any consistent trends. When all the accounts that we possess are downright negative it becomes well nigh impossible to reconstruct a reliable history of his reign. We may argue that his actions have been consistently misunderstood and tendentiously misrepresented, but it is too simplistic to argue that in order to draw up a more accurate assessment of his reign we need to simply change negatives into positives. The fact of the matter is that Caligula was perhaps not very qualified to become emperor. His personal experiences in a dysfunctional family probably conditioned him for paranoia and his lack of grooming made him dangerously inexperienced. The game bad emperor-good emperor is a little bit too sterile. We should avoid it as best as we can, although it is not always possible to do so. The question of his illness will no doubt for ever dominate research of his reign, but this is an area where not a lot of progress will be made in the next couple of years or decades. This leaves plenty of interesting topics for us to analyze. Caligula's childhood and youth remain of interest (try to make a list on the basis of Barrett's book of the different households in which Caligula lived and you will quickly see that the imperial family was not a very stable environment). Being dressed up in soldier's outfit and experiencing a violent mutiny at the age of two must also have left their mark on young Gaius. There is the issue of the transition of government orchestrated by Macro and Caligula's obvious popularity in the first couple of months of his reign. It is difficult to say when things began to move in the wrong direction. Suetonius writes a biography and does not provide a chronological narrative. Tacitus, who did, does not survive for this period. Dio Cassius is much later, about 200 years after the death of Caligula, and his account of the reign of Caligula only survives in a medieval summary by a Byzantine scholar. Our two best sources are therefore Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus. Both authors were Jews and as such they wrote outsiders' reports on the emperor, while their main interest was situated in how Roman government affected the Jewish population. For this reason Caligula presents quite a challenge.

Course Aims

This course is designed as an intensive reading, discussion, research, and writing experience for advanced undergraduates who major in History. Students are expected to read and be able to discuss the secondary literature for each seminar. This means that students should read carefully, taking extensive notes. Before each seminar, students are encouraged to review their notes and prepare a list of questions and discussion topics they wish to raise during the class meeting. Students are expected to find additional material by using reference works, bibliographies, and internet search tools.

Students are expected to write a polished original research paper for this course. The details of this assignment are discussed below. The student research paper will focus on a specific and narrowly defined topic, but it must also reflect on some of the larger themes raised in class readings and discussions. Students will consult individually with the instructor as they formulate their research topics, collect sources, draft their papers, and revise their work for final submission. The length of the research paper is between 15 and 20 pages.

<p>Please note that your research should be based on primary sources (in translation) and secondary printed works only. Internet sources such as Wikipedia etc. can not be deemed scholarly resources and are therefore unacceptable for the paper. Of course, you may use the internet as a search tool, but in your essay you should always refer to the printed primary sources and secondary literature.</p>

Class Participation

Class discussions are a central part of this course. Students are expected to attend every seminar. Not attending meetings will only be allowed for serious medical, personal or other circumstances and should be reported to the instructor by email, preferably before the seminar is meeting. Students should complete all of the assigned reading before each seminar meeting, and arrive prepared for a detailed and critical discussion. Seminars are designed to exchange opinions on the

reading, analyze important historical questions, and compare various viewpoints. The quality of each student's class participation during the semester will comprise 10 % of his/her grade.

Exercises

Students will do three exercises for this course. These exercises aim to improve students' critical and analytical skills. The exercises will be done in class and will be handed in to the instructor at the end of class. Performance in these exercises will count for 30% towards the final grade for the course. The reading material for the exercises will be distributed to students ahead of time.

Research Paper Proposal

On **March 5** students should submit a 2 page research paper proposal in class. The research paper proposal should include the following:

A statement of the main research question; A statement of the hypotheses and arguments that the student will make in the paper; An explanation of how these hypotheses and arguments revise existing interpretations; An explanation of the strengths and shortcomings in the available sources.

The research paper proposals should reflect careful and polished writing. Proofread your proposals before submission! Avoid passive voice, clichés, and awkward phrases. Check your grammar carefully. Make sure that each paragraph has a topic sentence. Each sentence should contribute to the point of the paragraph where it is situated. The research paper proposal will count for 10% of each student's grade.

Draft of the Research Paper

On **April 23** each student should submit a completed 5-10 page draft of his/her research paper in class. These drafts should not be "rough." They should include polished prose, careful argumentation, clear organization, a creative introduction, a thoughtful conclusion, completed footnotes, and a full bibliography.

I will read the draft papers carefully for style and substance. I will offer extensive written and oral comments for students to use in the final version of their papers. The draft research paper will account for 10% of each student's grade.

Final Version of the Research Paper

The required length of the research paper is between 15 and 20 pages with 1.5 spacing. Students must submit the final version of their research papers to the instructor's office by 4:00 PM on Friday, **May 8**. Late papers will not be accepted. Students should try to implement as many of the revisions suggested on the draft paper as possible. The final papers should also reflect additional proofreading for clarity, style, and overall presentation. The final paper will account for 40% of each student's grade.

Grading	
Class Participation	10%
Assignments	30%
Research Paper Proposal	10%
Draft of the Research Paper	10%
Final Version of the Research Paper	40%

IMPORTANT DATES:
RESEARCH PROPOSAL: 3/5
SUBMISSION OF DRAFT: 4/23
SUBMISSION OF PAPER: 5/8

Teaching Program

Thursday 1/22

Week 1: Introduction to the Principate and the Julio-Claudian dynasty.

Thursday 1/29

Week 2: The sources for the reign of Caligula.

Philo; Flavius Josephus; Suetonius; Tacitus; Dio Cassius.

Thursday 2/5

Week 3: Exercise 1: Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 1.6-1.8; 1.12-1-14 (pp. 34-36; 39-41).

Thursday 2/12

Week 4: Welcome to the imperial family.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 1-17.

Suetonius, *Life of Caligula*, 1-13.

Thursday 2/19

Week 5: The first months in power.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 50-73.

Suetonius, *Life of Caligula*, 13-17; Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 59.1-9.

Thursday 2/26

Week 6: A monster is born.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 73-91.

Thursday 3/5

Week 7: Conspiracy.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 91-115.

Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 59.22-24.

Thursday 3/12

Week 8: Exercise 2: Trying to make sense of Caligula.

Readings:

P. J. Bicknell, 'Gaius and the sea-shells', *Acta Classica* 5 (1962), 72-74.

J. G. F. Hind, 'Caligula and the spoils of the ocean: a rush in the far North-West?', *Britannia* 34 (2003), 272-4 (electronic publication).

S. J. V. Malloch, 'Gaius on the Channel coast', *Classical Quarterly* 51 (2001), 551-6 (electronic publication).

David Woods, 'Caligula's sea-shells', *Greece & Rome* 47 (2000), 80-7 (electronic publication).

Thursday 3/19

Spring Break: no classes.

Thursday 3/26

Week 9: Exercise 3: Reading secondary literature for argument.

Reading:

Zvi Yavetz, 'Caligula, Imperial Madness and Modern Historiography', *Klio* 78 (1996), 105-29.

Thursday 4/2

Week 10: Divine Honors.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 140-54.

Thursday 4/9

Week 11: Assassination.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 154-172.

Suetonius, *Life of Caligula*, 56-60.

Thursday 4/16

Week 12: Caligula and the Jews.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 182-192.

Thursday 4/23

Week 13: Evaluating Caligula.

Reading: Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, pp. 213-241.

Thursday 4/30

Week 14: No class. Instructor is available for one-on-one conferencing.

Thursday 5/7

Week 15: No class. Instructor is available for one-on-one conferencing.

Bibliography Caligula

Primary Sources and Commentaries:

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T. P. Wiseman, *Death of an emperor*, translation and commentary by T.P. Wiseman, Exeter 1991 (DG283 J57 1991).

Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* (Embassy to the emperor Gaius), edited with an introduction, translation and commentary by E. Mary Smallwood, Leiden 1970 (DS135 E4 P483 1970).

Suetonius, *Life of Caligula*, in Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, transl. by Robert Graves and with an introduction by Michael Grant, Harmondsworth 2000 (DG277 S7 T5 2000).

Donna W. Hurley, *An Historical and Historiographical Commentary on Suetonius' Life of C. Caligula*, Atlanta 1993 (DG283 S83 H87 1993).

David Wardle, *Suetonius' Life of Caligula: a commentary*, Brussels 1994 (PA25 C62 v.225).

Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, introduction and translation by Michael Grant, Harmondsworth 1996 (DG207 T3 G7 1996).

E. Mary Smallwood, *Documents illustrating the principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero*, London/Cambridge 1967 (DG281 S6).

General Histories:

Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, and Andrew Lintott (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. X: The Augustan Empire, 43 BC-AD 69, Cambridge 1996, pp. 70-147; 198-229; 737-782.

Chester G. Starr, *A History of the Ancient World*, New York and Oxford 1991 (D59 S75 1991).

H. H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero: a history of Rome from 133 BC to AD 68*, New York and London 1982 (DG254 S35 1982).

Monographs:

J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *The Emperor Gaius*, Oxford 1934 (DG283 B3).

A. A. Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*, New Haven 1989 (DG283 B37 1990).

A. Ferrill, *Caligula, Emperor of Rome*, London 1991 (DG283 F47 1991).

Articles:

Jane Bellemore, 'Gaius the pantomime', *Antichthon* 28 (1994), 65-79.

Thomas D. Benediktson, 'Caligula's madness. Madness or interictal temporal lobe epilepsy?', *Classical World* 82 (1988-1989), 370-375 (electronic publication – JSTOR).

Thomas D. Benediktson, 'Caligula's phobias and philiias: fear of seizure', *Classical Journal* 87 (1991-1992), 159-163 (electronic publication – JSTOR).

P. J. Bicknell, 'Gaius and the sea-shells', *Acta Classica* 5 (1962), 72-74.

P. Bilde, 'The Roman emperor Gaius (Caligula)'s attempt to erect his statue in the temple of Jerusalem', *Scandinavian Journal of Theology* 32 (1978), 67-93.

G. W. Clarke, 'Seneca the Younger under Caligula', *Latomus* 24 (1965), 62-69.

Duncan Fishwick, 'A ducking in the Tiber (Dio 61[60], 33, 8)', *American Journal of Ancient History* 12 (1987), 73-76.

Duncan Fishwick and B. D. Shaw, 'Ptolemy of Mauretania and the conspiracy of Gaetulicus', *Historia* 25 (1976), 491-494 (electronic publication – JSTOR).

Marleen Boudry Flory, 'Caligula's *Inverecundia*: a note on Dio Cassius 59.12.1', *Hermes* 114 (1986), 365-71 (electronic publication – JSTOR).

Thomas E. Goud, 'The Sources of Josephus Antiquities 19', *Historia* 45 (1996), 472-82 (electronic publication – JSTOR).

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M. Kajava, 'The name of Cornelia Orestina/Orestilla', *Arctos* 18 (1984), 23-30.

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R. S. Katz, 'Caligula's illness again', *Classical World* 70 (1977), 451 (electronic publication – JSTOR).

- B. J. Kavanagh, 'The conspirator Aemilius Regulus and Seneca's aunt's family', *Historia* 50 (2001), 379-384 (electronic publication – JSTOR).
- B. J. Kavanagh, 'Asiaticus, Seneca and Caligula's Assassination', in Mark Joyal (ed.), *In altum: Seventy-five years of classical studies in Newfoundland*, St. John's 2001, 105-17.
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- M. Kleijwegt, 'Caligula's "Triumph" at Baiae', *Mnemosyne* 47 (1994), 652-71 (electronic publication – JSTOR).
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- M. G. Morgan, 'Once again Caligula's illness', *Classical World* 70 (1977), 452-453 (electronic publication - JSTOR).
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