



Summary :

Roman emperor who ruled from 37 to 41 AD. His reign has been negatively assessed. He is connected to Asia Minor mainly through the imperial cult practiced by the Greek cities to honour him. Moreover, his policy towards the minor kingdoms of the eastern Roman frontier is highly controversial.

Other Names

Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus

Date and Place of Birth

12 AD, Antium Italy

Date and Place of Death

41 AD

Main Role

Emperor

1. Biography

Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus (Caligula)¹ was born on the 31st of August 12 AD at Antium (modern Anzio in Italy), the place of retreat for the Julian-Claudian dynasty. He was the third of the six children of Caesar Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. In 14-16, when he was only a toddler, he accompanied his parents at Rhine. The soldiers nicknamed him 'Caligula', which escorted him throughout his entire adult life, because he was wearing sandals (caliga). After his father's death in 19 AD, Caligula and his mother lived in a hostile atmosphere in Rome, due to Agrippina's bad relations with [Tiberius](#). Finally, his mother and his elder brother were exiled in 29 AD, while his other brother followed them a year later. Young Caligula lived with his great-grandmother Livia Drusilla for a while and when she died, with his grandmother Antonia. In 31 AD he joined Tiberius at his villa on Capreae, where he stayed until his accession to the throne six years later. Furthermore, he received higher education, studying literature and rhetoric. He was still living there when he heard the news about the murders of his mother and brothers in 33 AD. Thus, he was next in succession with his cousin Tiberius Julius Caesar Nero Gemellus. When Tiberius died on the 16th March 37 AD he succeeded in eliminating Gemellus and gain the power, supported by both Q. Sutorius Macro, [prefect](#) of the praetorian guard, and the [senate](#). The new emperor entered Rome in a triumph on the 28th of March.

One of his first actions was to honour the memory of the assassinated members of his family. He also restored the electoral choice to the popular assemblies while he held the [consulship](#) four times in order to enhance his authority.² Furthermore, he recalled those exiled by Tiberius and redressed the injustices of the tax system. Caligula's first acts made him extremely popular. In addition, he was supported by the army and the provinces. However, according to the written sources, his government soon became tyrannical and his behaviour rather paranoid. Ancient writers³ view this revulsion as a result not only of his personality, but also of the serious illness which affected him in the autumn of 37 AD.

Nevertheless, it is indisputable that during his reign, conspiracies often occurred. His life was constantly under threat and his position was becoming more and more awkward as, despite his four marriages, he did not have a legal male heir.⁴ He led a secluded life, without the support of the people and the senate. Finally, he lost the support of the praetorians as well. Under those circumstances his assassination (22 or 24 January 41) was inevitable.⁵

2. The Imperial Cult in the East

The ascend of Caligula to the throne was enthusiastically accepted by the people of the Empire, even those in the East. Many cities



vowed allegiance to the new emperor. A resolution from [Assos](#) attests that the Boule and the demos celebrated the beginning of a new, blessed era, taking an oath to [Zeus Soter](#), [Athena Parthenos](#) and deified [Augustus](#). Furthermore, five delegates from Assos went to Rome to sacrifice at the temple of Zeus at Capitolium.⁶

The first measures taken by the emperor rouse enthusiasm in the Greek cities in Asia Minor, as they hoped for greater independence. For this reason Caligula was proclaimed **magister equitum** in [Cyzicus](#), the highest administrative office in the city,⁷ while people called him 'New Helios (sun)'. Moreover, he was offered the title of '[stephanephoros](#)' in [Priene](#).⁸

During his reign Caligula did not take any administrative measures which could affect directly the cities in Asia. Although his predecessors August and Tiberius were reluctant to allow the construction of temples for the [imperial cult](#), Caligula, even though initially he banned statues of himself, demanded later to be offered honours.⁹ His correlation with the sanctuary at [Didyma](#) is very interesting. Dio Cassius¹⁰ reports that Caligula preferred Miletus so that he could use the temple of Apollo for his own cult. Although this piece of information might be invalid, epigraphical and numismatic evidence testify the emperor's cult at Didyma,¹¹ where his statue had been erected. Moreover, the emperor demanded the creation of a colossal statue of Zeus in Jerusalem, bearing his own features, an act which was certain to provoke a revolt, had it not been for Caligula's death. There is also evidence for the cult of his sister Drusilla-who was deified after her death, in Cyzicus and in [Magnesia](#) as 'New Aphrodite'.¹² Furthermore, his younger sister Julia was worshipped as 'Synthronos Nea Nikephoros' (co-occupant of the divine throne and new victory) in [Pergamon](#), along with Athena Nikephoros (Victory) and [Athena Polias](#).¹³

A thorny issue related to Caligula's governing is his policy towards the minor client kingdoms of the East.¹⁴ Parthia was facing internal problems, thus the emperor was not particularly bothered. On the other hand, the situation in [Greater Armenia](#) deteriorated when Caligula imprisoned Mithridates in Rome, leaving that small kingdom without a ruler.¹⁵ In addition, he restored the heirs to the throne of [Pontus](#), which was controlled by the Romans since Tiberius' reign. So, [Polemon I Eusebes](#) became ruler of Pontus and [Bosporus](#), while Cotys received [Lesser Armenia](#). Problems occurred in [Commagene](#) as well. Although the kingdom was part of the Roman Empire since 17 AD, Caligula restored [Antiochus IV](#) to the throne, awarded him territories in [Cilicia](#) and the vast sum of a million **sestertii**.¹⁶ In the end, Caligula did not hesitate to relieve him of his power.¹⁷

Finally, Caligula was extremely harsh to Gaius Cassius Longinus, proconsul of Asia in 40/41 AD.¹⁸ As he had received an oracle that he was going to be assassinated by someone named Cassius, he ordered to bring the proconsul to Rome to execute him, defying every law. In the end, Longinus was saved since Caligula was murdered by a certain Cassius¹⁹ who belonged to the Praetorian guard.

3. Personality: evaluation by his contemporaries and modern research

The evaluation of Caligula's reign is extremely difficult, taking into consideration its short duration as well. Furthermore, the preserved written sources provide inaccurate and exaggerated information, focusing on personal details, while modern research, based on contradictory interpretations of the events, intensifies the ambiguity. In addition, Caligula's extreme protestations are often highlighted by both the ancient sources and modern scholars, which results in ignoring many other aspects of his policy. For instance, only minute details are known about his planning programme or his institutional and administrative reforms.

The emperor is portrayed by ancient literary texts as a disturbed personality, suffering from megalomania. This trait has been highlighted to justify his political choices. Suetonius²⁰ in particular attributes his extreme actions to mental conditions. Dio Cassius goes even further and describes him as a paranoid,²¹ a view adopted by Seneca as well.²² Undoubtedly, his personality was greatly influenced by the morbid conditions he experienced from his childhood until his ascent to the throne. However, even the harsher critics underline the fact that Caligula was loved by the people while he was gaining political power and in the early years until the autumn of 37, when he suffered from a mysterious disease which not only altered his character and behaviour,²³ but also led him to act as a tyrant, not a Roman emperor. On the other hand it should be stressed that the ancient sources are biased against him since



they draw information from the emperor's contemporaries, who hated him and had every reason to describe his authority in a very negative way.

What is more, the negative assessment of Caligula by the ancient writers is influenced by other factors, irrelevant to the emperor's enigmatic personality. We should mention his bad relations with the Senate during the late years of his reign, which reinforced the rumours that the emperor was living surrounded by freedmen, gladiators and actors. Moreover, his often odd and inappropriate public behaviour, as well as his demand on worshipping him as a god, had a negative reflection on his image.²⁴ Ancient literary texts²⁵ report that he ordered the transportation of god statues famous for their religious and artistic value from Greece to Rome-including Zeus from Olympia-in order to remove their heads and replace them with new ones bearing his own features.

Caligula's policy towards the provinces was equally ambiguous, especially towards the minor kingdoms in the East. Some modern scholars view his moves cautious decisions taken to reinforce these areas, while others interpret them as spontaneous reactions stemming from friendships and personal relationships of the impulsive emperor.








There are some modern scholars who have tried to appraise Caligula in a positive light,²⁶ focusing more on the facts rather than his personality and studying more critically the literary sources. The trends of the ancient writers and the modern research do not allow for safe conclusions to be drawn upon Caligula's rule. The emperor remained on the throne for only four years, amidst assassinations and scandals; his contemporaries portrayed him as an inhuman and paranoid tyrant. Caligula remains one of the most enigmatic persons of his period.

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1. The most important ancient sources on Caligula's reign are: Suet., *Calig.*; D.C. 59; Ph., *In Flaccum* and *Legatio ad Gaium*; J., *AJ* 19.1-211.
 2. In 37, 39, 40 and 41 AD.
 3. Ph., *Legatio ad Gaium* 14.22.
 4. His wives were successively Junia Claudilla, Livia Orestilla, Lolia Paulina, Milonia Caesonia. He had a daughter with the latter named Julia Drusilla.
 5. His wife and daughter were also murdered.
 6. The smallest hill in Rome, an important religious centre of the ancient city.
 7. *IGRR* IV, 145=SIG3, 798.
 8. *InsPriene* 142II.
 9. D.C. 59.4.4.
 10. D.C. 59.28.1
 11. D.C. 59.28.1. It is unknown whether the emperor was worshipped at an individual temenos in the wider area or if he had the intention to house his cult as equal with Apollo in the temple at Didyma. However, there is clear evidence of construction work at the temple of Apollo during his period. See Herrmann, P., 'Ein Tempel für Caligula in Milet?', *IstMitt* 39 (1989), p.191-6; Magie, D., *Roman Rule in Asia Minor. To the End of the Third Century after Christ* (Princeton-New Jersey 1950), p.1366, note 46.
 12. *IGRR* IV, 145.



13. *IGRR* IV, 464.
14. On the issue of Caligula's policy towards client kingdoms see Wardle, D., 'Caligula and the client kings', *CQ* 42 (1992), pp. 437-43.
15. Mithridates was restored to the throne by Claudius, Caligula's heir.
16. That was probably taxes collected while Commagene belonged to the Roman Empire.
17. Antioch's authority was finally restored by Claudius.
18. D.C. 59.29.3; Suet., *Calig.* 57.
19. Suet., *Calig.* 58. D.C. 59.29.5.
20. Suet., *Calig.* 51.1.
21. D.C. 59.23.4, 59.26.5.
22. Seneca, *De Clem.* 1.25.2.
23. Suet., *Calig.* 22. See D.C. 59.3.1; J., *AJ* 18.256; Ph., *Legatio ad Gaium* 13-14.
24. That tendency was revealed when he deified his beloved sister Drusilla after her death in 38.
25. Suet., *Calig.* 12.
26. Since the early 20th century many scholars have tried to present a more positive figure of Caligula by denying to accept the atrocities reported by the sources and to interpret the emperor's actions as deriving from his paranoia. See Yavetz, Z., 'Caligula, Imperial Madness and Modern Historiography', *Klio* 78 (1996), pp. 105-29.

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Webliography :

	Caligula
http://www.usask.ca/antiquities/coins/caligula.html	

Glossary :

	consul, -lis
An official of the Roman state. In the period of the Republic, it was the highest military and political office: two consuls were elected each year. The consular office survived into the Imperial period (and further into the early Byzantine period), becoming a honorary post.	
	magister equitum
The highest equestrian rank, the commander of the cavalry forces.	
	praetorian prefect (praefectus praetorio)
Commander of the emperor's bodyguard under the principate. During the regne of Constantine I the praetorian prefect becomes a dignitary responsible for the administrative unit called the prefecture, which was subdivided into dioceses. In 400 A.D. there were four such praetorian prefectures, of Oriens, of Illyricum, of Italia and Africa and of Gallia. The praetorian prefects were second only to the emperor. The praetorian prefect of Oriens was the mightiest among prefects. His office is for the last time mentioned in 680.	
	senate, the
The top political body of the Roman state. During the early Republic, it was represented by the council of the consuls, the top archons of the roman state. Later on, its power and responsibilities increased. As a result, it became the main governmental body of Rome. However, during the Imperial period, the responsibilities of the senate were restricted.	
	sestertius or sesterce
Ancien Roman coin	