

# Ancient History Sourcebook: Suetonius (c.69-after 122 CE): De Vita Caesarum: Caius Caligula (The Lives of the Caesars: Caius Caligula), written c. 110 CE

---

**I.** GERMANICUS, father of Gaius Caesar, son of Drusus and the younger Antonia, after being adopted by his paternal uncle Tiberius [4 A.D.], held the quaestorship [7 A.D.] five years before the legal age and passed directly to the consulship [12 A.D.] [*i.e.*, without holding any of the intermediate offices of the *cursus honorem*]. When the death of Augustus [14 A.D.] was announced, he was sent to the army in Germania, where it is hard to say whether his filial piety or his courage was more conspicuous; for although all the legions obstinately refused to accept Tiberius as emperor, and offered him the rule of the state, he held them to their allegiance. And later he won a victory over the enemy and celebrated a triumph [17 A.D.]. Then chosen consul for a second time [18 A.D.], before he entered on his term he was hurried off to restore order in the Orient, and after vanquishing the king of Armenia and reducing Cappadocia to the form of a province, died of a lingering illness at Antioch, in the thirty-fourth year of his age. There was some suspicion that he was poisoned; for besides the dark spots which appeared all over his body and the froth which flowed from his mouth, after he had been reduced to ashes his heart was found entire among his bones; and it is supposed to be a characteristic of that organ that when steeped in poison it cannot be destroyed by fire.

**II.** Now the belief was that he met his death through the wiles of Tiberius, aided and abetted by Gnaeus Piso. This man had been made governor of Syria at about that time, and realizing that he must give offence either to the father or the son, as if there were no alternative, he never ceased to show the bitterest enmity towards Germanicus in word and deed, even after the latter fell ill. In consequence Piso narrowly escaped being torn to pieces by the people on his return to Rome, and was condemned to death by the senate.

**III.** It is the general opinion that Germanicus possessed all the highest qualities of body and mind, to a degree never equalled by anyone; a

handsome person, unequalled valor, surpassing ability in the oratory and learning of Greece and Rome, unexampled kindness, and a remarkable desire and capacity for winning men's regard and inspiring their affection. His legs were too slender for the rest of his figure, but he gradually brought them to proper proportions by constant horseback riding after meals. He often slew a foeman in hand-to-hand combat. He pleaded causes even after receiving the triumphal regalia; and among other fruits of his studies he left some Greek comedies. Unassuming at home and abroad, he always entered the free and federate towns without lictors. Wherever he came upon the tombs of distinguished men, he always offered sacrifice to their shades. Planning to bury in one mound the old and scattered relics of those who fell in the overthrow of Varus, he was the first to attempt to collect and assemble them with his own hand. Even towards his detractors, whosoever they were and whatever their motives, he was so mild and lenient, that when Piso was annulling his decrees and maltreating his dependents, he could not make up his mind to break with him, until he found himself assailed also by potions and spells. Even then he went no farther than formally to renounce Piso's friendship in the old-time fashion, and to bid his household avenge him, in case anything should befall him.

**IV.** He reaped plentiful fruit from these virtues, for he was so respected and beloved by his kindred that Augustus (to say nothing of the rest of his relatives) after hesitating for a long time whether to appoint him his successor, had him adopted by Tiberius. He was so popular with the masses, that, according to many writers, whenever he came to any place or left one, he was sometimes in danger of his life from the crowds that met him or saw him off; in fact, when he returned from Germania after quelling the outbreak, all the cohorts of the praetorian guard went forth to meet him, although orders had been given that only two should go, and the whole populace, regardless of age, sex, or rank, poured out of Rome as far as the twentieth milestone.

**V.** Yet far greater and stronger tokens of regard were shown at the time of his death and immediately afterwards. On the day when he passed away the temples were stoned and the altars of the gods thrown down, while some flung their household gods into the street and cast out their newly born children. Even barbarian peoples, so they say, who were engaged in war with us or with one another, unanimously consented to a truce, as if all in common had suffered a domestic tragedy. It is said that some princes put off their beards and had their wives' heads shaved, as a token of the deepest mourning; that even the king of kings [of Parthia] suspended his exercise at hunting and the banquets with his grandees, which among the Parthians is a sign of public mourning.

**VI.** At Rome, when the community, in grief and consternation at the first report of his illness, was awaiting further news, and suddenly after nightfall a report at last spread abroad, on doubtful authority that he had recovered, a general rush was made from every side to the Capitol with torches and victims, and the temple gates were all but torn off, that nothing might hinder them in their eagerness to pay their vows. Tiberius was roused from sleep by the cries of the rejoicing throng, who all united in singing:--- "Safe is Rome, safe too our country, for Germanicus is safe." But when it was at last made known that he was no more, the public grief could be checked neither by any consolation nor edict, and it continued even during the festal days of the month of December [the Saturnalia]. The fame of the deceased and regret for his loss were increased by the horror of the times which followed, since all believed, and with good reason, that the cruelty of Tiberius, which soon burst forth, had been held in check through his respect and awe for Germanicus.

**VII.** He had to wife Agrippina, daughter of Marcus Agrippa and Julia, who bore him nine children. Two of these were taken off when they were still in infancy, and one just as he was reaching the age of boyhood, a charming child, whose statue, in the guise of Cupid, Livia dedicated in the temple of the Capitoline Venus, while Augustus had another placed in his bed chamber and used to kiss it fondly whenever he entered the room. The other children survived their father, three girls, Agrippina, Drusilla, and Livilla, born in successive years, and three boys, Nero, Drusus, and Gaius Caesar. Nero and Drusus were adjudged public enemies by the senate on the accusation of Tiberius.

**VIII.** Gaius Caesar was born the day before the Kalends of September in the consulship of his father and Gaius Fonteius Capito [August 31, 12 A.D.]. Conflicting testimony makes his birthplace uncertain. Gnaeus Lentulus Gaetulicus writes that he was born at Tibur, Plinius Secundus among the Treveri, in a village called Ambitarvium above the Confluence. Pliny adds as proof that altars are shown there, inscribed *For the Delivery of Agrippina*. Verses which were in circulation soon after he became emperor indicate that he was begotten in the winter-quarters of the legions: "He who was born in the camp and reared mid the arms of his country, Gave at the outset a sign that he was fated to rule." I myself find in the *Acta Publica* [the official publication of important events] that he first saw the light at Antium. Gaetulicus is shown to be wrong by Pliny, who says that he told a flattering lie, to add some luster to the fame of a young and vain-glorious prince from the city sacred to Hercules; and that he lied with the more assurance because Germanicus really did have a son born to him at Tibur, also called Gaius Caesar, of whose lovable disposition and untimely death I have already spoken. Pliny has erred in his chronology; for the historians of Augustus agree that Germanicus was not sent to Germany until the close of his consulship, when Gaius was

already born. Moreover, the inscription on the altar adds no strength to Pliny's view, for Agrippina twice gave birth to daughters in that region, and any childbirth, regardless of sex, is called *puerperium*, since the men of old called girls *puerae*, just as they called boys *puelli*. Furthermore, we have a letter written by Augustus to his granddaughter Agrippina, a few months before he died, about the Gaius in question (for no other child of the name was still alive at that time), reading as follows: "Yesterday I arranged with Talarius and Asillius to bring your boy Gaius on the fifteenth day before the Kalends of June, if it be the will of the gods. I send with him besides one of my slaves who is a physician, and I have written Germanicus to keep him if he wishes. Farewell, my own Agrippina, and take care to come in good health to your Germanicus." I think it is clear enough that Gaius could not have been born in a place to which he was first taken from Rome when he was nearly two years old. This letter also weakens our confidence in the verses, the more so because they are anonymous. We must then accept the only remaining testimony, that of the public record, particularly since Gaius loved Antium as if it were his native soil, always preferring it to all other places of retreat, and even thinking, it is said, of transferring thither the seat and abode of the empire through weariness of Rome.

**IX.** His surname Caligula ["Little Boots"] he derived from a joke of the troops, because he was brought up in their midst in the dress of a common soldier. To what extent besides he won their love and devotion by being reared in fellowship with them is especially evident from the fact that when they threatened mutiny after the death of Augustus and were ready for any act of madness, the mere sight of Gaius unquestionably calmed them. For they did not become quiet until they saw that he was being spirited away because of the danger from their outbreak and taken for protection to the nearest town. Then at last they became contrite, and laying hold of the carriage and stopping it, begged to be spared the disgrace which was being put upon them.

**X.** He attended his father also on his expedition to Syria. On his return from there he first lived with his mother and after her banishment, with his great-grandmother Livia; and when Livia died [29 A.D.], though he was not yet of age, he spoke her eulogy from the rostra. Then he fell to the care of his grandmother Antonia and in the nineteenth year of his age he was called to Capreae [the Isle of Capri] by Tiberius, on the same day assuming the gown of manhood and shaving his first beard, but without any such ceremony as had attended the coming of age of his brothers. Although at Capreae every kind of wile was resorted to by those who tried to lure him or force him to utter complaints, he never gave them any satisfaction, ignoring the ruin of his kindred as if nothing at all had happened, passing over his own ill-treatment with an incredible pretence of indifference, and so obsequious towards his grandfather and his

household, that it was well said of him that no one had ever been a better slave or a worse master.

**XI.** Yet even at that time he could not control his natural cruelty and viciousness, but he was a most eager witness of the tortures and executions of those who suffered punishment, revelling at night in gluttony and adultery, disguised in a wig and a long robe, passionately devoted besides to the theatrical arts of dancing and singing, in which Tiberius very willingly indulged him, in the hope that through these his savage nature might be softened. This last was so clearly evident to the shrewd old man, that he used to say now and then that to allow Gaius to live would prove the ruin of himself and of all men, and that he was rearing a viper for the Roman people and a Phaethon for the world.

**XII.** Not so very long afterward Gaius took to wife Junia Claudilla, daughter of Marcus Silanus, a man of noble rank. Then appointed augur in place of his brother Drusus, before he was invested with the office he was advanced to that of pontiff; with strong commendation of his dutiful conduct and general character; for since the court was deserted and deprived of its other supports, after Seianus had been suspected of hostile designs and presently put out of the way, he was little by little encouraged to look forward to the succession. To have a better chance of realizing this, after losing Junia in childbirth, he seduced Ennia Naevia, wife of Macro, who at that time commanded the praetorian guard, even promising to marry her if he became emperor, and guaranteeing this promise by an oath and a written contract. Having through her wormed himself into Macro's favor, he poisoned Tiberius, as some think, and ordered that his ring be taken from him while he still breathed, and then suspecting that he was trying to hold fast to it, that a pillow be put over his face; or even strangled the old man with his own hand, immediately ordering the crucifixion of a freedman who cried out at the awful deed. And this is likely enough; for some writers say that Caligula himself later admitted, not it is true that he had committed parricide, but that he had at least meditated it at one time; for they say that he constantly boasted, in speaking of his filial piety, that he had entered the bedchamber of the sleeping Tiberius dagger in hand, to avenge the death of his mother and brothers; but that, seized with pity, he threw down the dagger and went out again; and that though Tiberius knew of this, he had never dared to make any inquiry or take any action.

**XIII.** [37 A.D.] By thus gaining the throne he fulfilled the highest hopes of the Roman people, or I may say of all mankind, since he was the prince most earnestly desired by the great part of the provincials and soldiers, many of whom had known him in his infancy, as well as by the whole body of the city populace, because of the memory of his father Germanicus and pity for a family that was all but extinct. Accordingly,

when he set out from Misenum, though he was in mourning garb and escorting the body of Tiberius, yet his progress was marked by altars, victims, and blazing torches, and he was met by a dense and joyful throng, who called him besides other propitious names their "star," their "chick," their "babe," and their "nursling."

**XIV.** When he entered the city, full and absolute power was at once put into his hands by the unanimous consent of the senate and of the mob, which forced its way into the Senate, and no attention was paid to the wish of Tiberius, who in his will had named his other grandson, still a boy, joint heir with Caligula. So great was the public rejoicing, that within the next three months, or less than that, more than a hundred and sixty thousand victims are said to have been slain in sacrifice.

A few days after this, when he crossed to the islands near Campania, vows were put up for his safe return, while no one let slip even the slightest chance of giving testimony to his anxiety and regard for his safety. But when he fell ill, they all spent the whole night about the Palace; some even vowed to fight as gladiators, and others posted placards offering their lives, if the ailing prince were spared. To this unbounded love of his citizens was added marked devotion from foreigners. Artabanus, for example, king of the Parthians, who was always outspoken in his hatred and contempt for Tiberius, voluntarily sought Caligula's friendship and came to a conference with the consular governor; then crossing the Euphrates, he paid homage to the Roman eagles and standards and to the statues of the Caesars.

**XV.** Gaius himself tried to rouse men's devotion by courting popularity in every way. After eulogizing Tiberius with many tears before the assembled people and giving him a magnificent funeral, he at once posted off to Pandateria and the Pontian islands, to remove the ashes of his mother and brother to Rome, and in stormy weather, too, to make his filial piety the more conspicuous. He approached them with reverence and placed them in the urns with his own hands. With no less theatrical effect he brought them to Ostia in a bireme with a banner set in the stern, and from there up the Tiber to Rome, where he had them carried to the Mausoleum [of Augustus] on two biers by the most distinguished men of the order of *equites*, in the middle of the day, when the streets were crowded. 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 single 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 *eques*, as his colleague in the consulship [37 A.D.]; adopted his brother Tiberius on

the day that he assumed the gown of manhood, and gave him the title of *Princeps Iuventutis* ["First of the Youth"--originally the title of the commander of the *equites* who were under forty-five and in active service; conferred on Caius and Lucius Caesar by Augustus, the title became the designation of the heir to the throne, and was later assumed by the emperors themselves]. 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: "Favor and good fortune attend Gaius Caesar and his sisters." With the same degree of popularity he recalled those who had been condemned to banishment; took no cognizance of any charges that remained untried from an earlier time; had all documents relating to the cases of his mother and brothers carried to the Forum and burned, to give no informer or witness occasion for further fear, having first loudly called the gods to witness that he had neither read nor touched any of them. He refused a note which was offered him regarding his own safety, maintaining that he had done nothing to make anyone hate him, and that he had no ears for informers.

**XVI.** He banished from the city the sexual monsters called *spintriae*, barely persuaded not to sink them in the sea. The writings of Titus Labienus, Cremutius Cordus, and Cassius Severus, which had been suppressed by decrees of the senate, he allowed to be hunted up, circulated, and read, saying that it was wholly to his interest that everything which happened be handed down to posterity. He published the accounts of the empire, which had regularly been made public by Augustus, a practice discontinued by Tiberius. He allowed the magistrates unrestricted jurisdiction, without appeal to himself. He revised the lists of the Roman *equites* strictly and scrupulously, yet with due moderation, publicly taking their horses from those guilty of any wicked or scandalous set, but merely omitting to read the names of men convicted of lesser offences. To lighten the labor of the jurors, he added a fifth division to the previous four. He tried also to restore the suffrage to the people by reviving the custom of elections. He at once paid faithfully and without dispute the legacies named in the will of Tiberius, though this had been set aside, as well as in that of Julia Augusta, which Tiberius had suppressed. He remitted the tax of a two-hundredth on auction sales in Italy; made good to many their losses from fires; and whenever he restored kings to their thrones, he allowed them all the arrears of their taxes and their revenue for the meantime---for example, to Antiochus of Commagene, a hundred million sesterces that had accrued to the Treasury. To make it known that he encouraged every kind of noble action, he gave eight hundred thousand sesterces to a freedwoman, because she had kept silence about the guilt of her patron, though subjected to the utmost torture. Because of these acts, besides other honors, a golden shield was voted him, which was to be borne every year to the Capitol on an appointed day by the colleges of priests, escorted by the senate, while boys and girls of

noble birth sang the praises of his virtues in a choral ode. It was further decreed that the day on which he began to reign should be called the *Parilia*, as a token that the city had been founded a second time.

**XVII.** He held four consulships, one from the Kalends of July for two months [37 A.D.], a second from the Kalends of January for thirty days [39 A.D.], a third up to the Ides of January [40 A.D.], and the fourth until the seventh day before the Ides of the same month [41 A.D.]. Of all these only the last two were continuous. The third he assumed at Lugdunum without a colleague, not as some think, through arrogance or disregard of precedent, but because at that distance from Rome he had been unable to get news of the death of the other consul just before the day of the Kalends. He twice gave the people a largess of three hundred sesterces each, and twice a lavish banquet to the senate and the equestrian order, together with their wives and children. At the former of these he also distributed togas to the men, and to the women and children scarves of red and scarlet. Furthermore, to make a permanent addition to the public gaiety, he added a day to the Saturnalia, and called it *Juvenalis*.

**XVIII.** He gave several gladiatorial shows, some in the amphitheater of Taurus and some in the Saepta, in which he introduced pairs of African and Campanian boxers, the pick of both regions. He did not always preside at the games in person, but sometimes assigned the honor to the magistrates or to friends. He exhibited stage-plays continually, of various kinds and in many different places, sometimes even by night, lighting up the whole city. He also threw about gift-tokens of various kinds, and gave each man a basket of victuals. During the feasting he sent his share to a Roman *equus* opposite him, who was eating with evident relish and appetite, while to a senator for the same reason he gave a commission naming him praetor out of the regular order. He also gave many games in the Circus, lasting from early morning until evening, introducing between the races now a baiting of panthers and now the manoeuvres of the game called *Troy*; some, too, of special splendor, in which the Circus was strewn with red and green, while the charioteers were all men of senatorial rank. He also started some games off-hand, when a few people called for them from the neighboring balconies as he was inspecting the outfit of the Circus from the Gelotian house.

**XIX.** Besides this, he devised a novel and unheard of kind of pageant; for he bridged the gap between Baiae and the mole at Puteoli, a distance of about thirty-six hundred paces, by bringing together merchant ships from all sides and anchoring them in a double line, after which a mound of earth was heaped upon them and fashioned in the manner of the Appian Way. Over this bridge he rode back and forth for two successive days, the first day on a caparisoned horse, himself resplendent in a crown of oak leaves, a buckler, a sword, and a cloak of cloth of gold; on the second, in the dress

of a charioteer in a car drawn by a pair of famous horses, carrying before him a boy named Dareus, one of the hostages from Parthia, and attended by the entire praetorian guard and a company of his friends in Gallic chariots. 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. But when I was a boy, I used to hear my grandfather say that the reason for the work, as revealed by the emperor's confidential courtiers, was that Thrasyllus the astrologer had declared to Tiberius, when he was worried about his successor and inclined towards his natural grandson, that Gaius had no more chance of becoming emperor than of riding about over the gulf of Baiae with horses.

**XX.** He also gave shows in foreign lands, Athenian games at Syracuse in Sicily, and miscellaneous games at Lugdunum in Gallia; at the latter place also a contest in Greek and Latin oratory, in which, they say, the losers gave prizes to the victors and were forced to compose eulogies upon them, while those who were least successful were ordered to erase their writings with a sponge or with their tongue unless they elected rather to be beaten with rods or thrown into the neighboring river.

**XXI.** He completed the public works which had been half finished under Tiberius, namely the temple of Augustus and the theater of Pompeius. He likewise began an aqueduct in the region near Tibur and an amphitheater beside the Saepta, the former finished by his successor Claudius, while the latter was abandoned. At Syracuse he repaired the city walls, which had fallen into ruin through lapse of time, and the temples of the gods. He had planned, besides, to rebuild the palace of Polycrates at Samos, to finish the temple of Didymaeon Apollo at Ephesus, to found a city high up in the Alps, but, above all, to dig a canal through the Isthmus in Greece, and he had already sent a chief centurion to survey the work.

**XXII.** 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 *Pius* ["Pious"], *Castrorum Filius* ["Child of the Camp"], *Pater Exercituum* ["Father of the Armies"] and *Optimus Maximus Caesar* ["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." And he came near assuming a crown at once and changing the semblance of a principate into the form of a monarchy. 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; for after giving orders that such statues of the gods as were especially famous for their sanctity or their artistic merit, including that of Jupiter of Olympia, should be brought from Greece, in

order to remove their heads and put his own in their place, he built out a part of the Palace as far as the Forum, and making the temple of Castor and Pollux its vestibule, he often took his place between the divine brethren, and exhibited himself there to be worshipped by those who presented themselves; and some hailed him as Jupiter Latiaris. 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 honor. The victims were flamingoes, peacocks, black grouse, guinea-hens and pheasants, offered day by day each after its own kind. At night he used constantly to invite the full and radiant moon to his embraces and his bed, while in the daytime he would talk confidentially with Jupiter Capitolinus, now whispering and then in turn putting his ear to the mouth of the god, now in louder and even angry language; for he was heard to make the threat: "Lift me up, or I'll lift you." But finally won by entreaties, as he reported, and even invited to live with the god, he built a bridge over the temple of the Deified Augustus, and thus joined his Palace to the Capitol. Presently, to be nearer yet, he laid the foundations of a new house in the court of the Capitol.

**XXIII.** He did not wish to be thought the grandson of Agrippa, or called so, because of the latter's humble origin; and he grew very angry if anyone in a speech or a song included Agrippa among the ancestors of the Caesars. He even boasted that his own mother was born in incest, which Augustus had committed with his daughter Julia; and not content with this slur on the memory of Augustus, he forbade the celebration of his victories at Actium and off Sicily by annual festivals, on the ground that they were disastrous and ruinous to the Roman people. He often called his great-grandmother Livia Augusta "a Ulysses in petticoats," and he had the audacity to accuse her of low birth in a letter to the senate, alleging that her maternal grandfather had been nothing but a decurion of Fundi; whereas it is proved by public records that Aufidius Lurco held high offices at Rome. When his grandmother Antonia asked for a private interview, he refused it except in the presence of the praefect Macro, and by such indignities and annoyances he caused her death; although some think that he also gave her poison. After she was dead, he paid her no honor, but viewed her burning pyre from his dining-room. He had his brother Tiberius put to death without warning, suddenly sending a tribune of the soldiers to do the deed; besides driving his father-in-law Silanus to end his life by cutting his throat with a razor. His charge against the latter was that Silanus had not followed him when he put to sea in stormy weather, but had remained behind in the hope of taking possession of the city in case he should be lost in the storm; against Tiberius, that his breath smelled of an antidote, which he had taken to guard against being poisoned at his hand. Now as a matter of fact, Silanus was subject to sea-

sickness and wished to avoid the discomforts of the voyage, while Tiberius had taken medicine for a chronic cough, which was growing worse. As for his uncle Claudius, he spared him merely as a laughingstock.

**XXIV.** 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 honor so highly, but often prostituted them to his favorites; so that he was the reader 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.

**XXV.** It is not easy to decide whether he acted more basely in contracting his marriages, in annulling them, or as a husband. At the marriage of Livia Orestilla to Gaius Piso, he attended the ceremony himself, gave orders that the bride be taken to his own house, and within a few days divorced her; two years later he banished her, because of a suspicion that in the meantime she had gone back to her former husband. Others write that being invited to the wedding banquet, he sent word to Piso, who reclined opposite to him: "Don't take liberties with my wife," and at once carried her off with him from the table, the next day issuing a proclamation that he had got himself a wife in the manner of Romulus and Augustus. When the statement was made that the grandmother of Lollia Paulina, who was married to Gaius Memmius, an ex-consul commanding armies, had once been a remarkably beautiful woman, he suddenly called Lollia from the province, separated her from her husband, and married her, then in a short time he put her away, with the command never to have intercourse with anyone. Though Caesonia was neither beautiful nor young, and was already mother of three daughters by another, besides being a woman of reckless extravagance and wantonness, he loved her not only more

passionately but more faithfully, often exhibiting her to the soldiers riding by his side, decked with cloak, helmet and shield, and to his friends even in a state of nudity. He did not honor her with the title of wife until she had borne him a child, announcing on the selfsame day that he had married her and that he was the father of her babe. This babe, whom he named Julia Drusilla, he carried to the temples of all the goddesses, finally placing her in the lap of Minerva and commending to her the child's nurture and training. And no evidence convinced him so positively that she was sprung from his own loins as her savage temper, which was even then so violent that she would try to scratch the faces and eyes of the little children who played with her.

**XXVI.** It would be trivial and pointless to add to this an account of his treatment of his relatives and friends, Ptolemy, son of king Juba, his cousin (for he was the grandson of Marcus Antonius by Antonius' daughter Selene), and in particular Macro himself and even Ennia, who helped him to the throne; all these were rewarded for their kinship and their faithful services by a bloody death. He was no whit more respectful or mild towards the senate, allowing some who had held the highest offices to run in their togas for several miles beside his chariot and to wait on him at table, standing napkin in hand either at the head of his couch, or at his feet. Others he secretly put to death, yet continued to send for them as if they were alive, after a few days falsely asserting that they had committed suicide. When the consuls forgot to make proclamation of his birthday, he deposed them, and left the state for three days without its highest magistrates. He flogged his quaestor, who was charged with conspiracy, stripping off the man's clothes and spreading them under the soldiers' feet, to give them a firm footing as they beat him. He treated the other orders with like insolence and cruelty. Being disturbed by the noise made by those who came in the middle of the night to secure the free seats in the Circus, he drove them all out with cudgels; in the confusion more than twenty Roman *equites* were crushed to death, with as many matrons and a countless number of others. At the plays in the theater, sowing discord between the people and the equites, he scattered the gift tickets ahead of time, to induce the rabble to take the seats reserved for the equestrian order. At a gladiatorial show he would sometimes draw back the awnings when the sun was hottest and give orders that no one be allowed to leave; then removing the usual equipment, he would match worthless and decrepit gladiators against many wild beasts, and have sham fights between householders who were of good repute, but conspicuous for some bodily infirmity. Sometimes too he would shut up the granaries and condemn the people to hunger.

**XXVII.** The following are special instances of his innate brutality. When cattle to feed the wild beasts which he had provided for a gladiatorial show were rather costly, he selected criminals to be devoured, and

reviewing the line of prisoners without examining the charges, but merely taking his place in the middle of a colonnade, he bade them be led away "from baldhead to baldhead." A man who had made a vow to fight in the arena if the emperor recovered, he compelled to keep his word, watched him as he fought sword in hand, and would not let him go until he was victorious, and then only after many entreaties. Another who had offered his life for the same reason, but delayed to kill himself, he turned over to his slaves, with orders to drive him through the streets decked with sacred boughs and fillets, calling for the fulfilment of his vow, and finally hurl him from the embankment. Many men of honorable rank were first disfigured with the marks of branding-irons and then condemned to the mines, to work at building roads, or to be thrown to the wild beasts; or else he shut them up in cages on all fours, like animals, or had them sawn asunder. Not all these punishments were for serious offences, but merely for criticizing one of his shows, or for never having sworn by his *Genius*. He forced parents to attend the executions of their sons, sending a litter for one man who pleaded ill health, and inviting another to dinner immediately after witnessing the death, and trying to rouse him to gaiety and jesting by a great show of affability. He had the manager of his gladiatorial shows and beast-baitings beaten with chains in his presence for several successive days, and would not kill him until he was disgusted at the stench of his putrefied brain. He burned a writer of Atellan farces alive in the middle of the arena of the amphitheatre, because of a humorous line of double meaning. When a Roman *eques* on being thrown to the wild beasts loudly protested his innocence, he took him out, cut off his tongue, and put him back again.

**XXVIII.** Having asked a man who had been recalled from an exile of long standing, how in the world he spent his time there, the man replied by way of flattery: "I constantly prayed the gods for what has come to pass, that Tiberius might die and you become emperor." Thereupon Caligula, thinking that his exiles were likewise praying for his death, sent emissaries from island to island to butcher them all. Wishing to have one of the senators torn to pieces, he induced some of the members to assail him suddenly, on his entrance into the Senate, with the charge of being a public enemy, to stab him with their styluses, and turn him over to the rest to be mangled; and his cruelty was not sated until he saw the man's limbs, members, and bowels dragged through the streets and heaped up before him.

**XXIX.** He added to the enormity of his crimes by the brutality of his language. He used to say that there was nothing in his own character which he admired and approved more highly than what he called his "lasting power", that is, his shameless impudence [a sexual innuendo]. When his grandmother Antonia gave him some advice, he was not satisfied merely not to listen but replied: "Remember that I have the right

to do anything to anybody." When he was on the point of killing his brother, and suspected that he had taken drugs as a precaution against poison, he cried: "What! an antidote against Caesar?" After banishing his sisters, he made the threat that he not only had islands, but swords as well. An ex-praetor who had retired to Anticyra for his health, sent frequent requests for an extension of his leave, but Caligula had him put to death, adding that a man who had not been helped by so long a course of hellebore needed to be bled. On signing the list of prisoners who were to be put to death later, he said that he was clearing his accounts. Having condemned several Gauls and Greeks to death in a body, he boasted that he had subdued Gallograecia.

**XXX.** He seldom had anyone put to death except by numerous slight wounds, his constant order, which soon became well-known, being: "Strike so that he may feel that he is dying." When a different man than he had intended had been killed, through a mistake in the names, he said that the victim too had deserved the same fate. He often uttered the familiar line of the tragic poet [Accius, *Trag.*, 203]: --- "Let them hate me, so they but fear me." He often inveighed against all the senators alike, as adherents of Seianus and informers against his mother and brothers, producing the documents which he pretended to have burned, and upholding the cruelty of Tiberius as forced upon him, since he could not but believe so many accusers. He constantly tongue-lashed the equestrian order as devotees of the stage and the arena. Angered at the rabble for applauding a faction which he opposed, he cried: "I wish the Roman people had but a single neck," and when the brigand Tetrinius was demanded, he said that those who asked for him were Tetriniuses also. Once a band of five *retiarium* in tunics, matched against the same number of *secutores*, yielded without a struggle; but when their death was ordered, one of them caught up his trident and slew all the victors. Caligula bewailed this in a public proclamation as a most cruel murder, and expressed his horror of those who had had the heart to witness it

**XXXI.** He even used openly to deplore the state of his times, because they had been marked by no public disasters, saying that the rule of Augustus had been made famous by the Varus massacre, and that of Tiberius by the collapse of the amphitheatre at Fidenae, while his own was threatened with oblivion because of its prosperity, and every now and then he wished for the destruction of his armies, for famine, pestilence, fires, or a great earthquake.

**XXXII.** His acts and words were equally cruel, even when he was indulging in relaxation and given up to amusement and feasting. While he was lunching or revelling capital examinations by torture were often made in his presence, and a soldier who was an adept at decapitation cut off the heads of those who were brought from prison. At Puteoli, at the dedication

of the bridge that he contrived, as has been said, after inviting a number to come to him from the shore, on a sudden he had them all thrown overboard; and when some caught hold of the rudders of the ships, he pushed them off into the sea with boathooks and oars. At a public banquet in Rome he immediately handed a slave over to the executioners for stealing a strip of silver from the couches, with orders that his hands be cut off and hung from his neck upon his breast, and that he then be led about among the guests, preceded by a placard giving the reason for his punishment. When a *murmillo* from the gladiatorial school fought with him with wooden swords and fell on purpose, he stabbed him with a real dagger and then ran about with a palm-branch, as victors do. Once when he stood by the altar dressed as a *popa* and a victim was brought up, he raised his mallet on high and slew the *cultrarius*. At one of his more sumptuous banquets he suddenly burst into a fit of laughter, and when the consuls, who were reclining next him, politely inquired at what he was laughing, he replied: "What do you suppose, except that at a single nod of mine both of you could have your throats cut on the spot?"

**XXXIII.** As a sample of his humor, he took his place beside a statue of Jupiter, and asked the tragic actor Apelles which of the two seemed to him the greater, and when he hesitated, Caligula had him flayed with whips, extolling his voice from time to time, when the wretch begged for mercy, as passing sweet even in his groans. Whenever he kissed the neck of his wife or sweetheart, he would say: "Off comes this beautiful head whenever I give the word." He even used to threaten now and then that he would resort to torture if necessary, to find out from his dear Caesonia why he loved her so passionately.

**XXXIV.** He assailed mankind of almost every epoch with no less envy and malice than insolence and cruelty. He threw down the statues of famous men, which for lack of room Augustus had moved from the court of the Capitol to the Campus Martius, and so utterly demolished them that they could not be set up again with their inscriptions entire; and thereafter he forbade the erection of the statue of any living man anywhere, without his knowledge and consent. He even thought of destroying the poems of Homer, asking why he should not have the same privilege as Plato, who excluded Homer from his ideal commonwealth. More than that, he all but removed the writings and the busts of Vergil and of Titus Livius from all the libraries, railing at the former as a man of no talent and very little learning, and the latter as a verbose and careless historian. With regard to lawyers too, as if intending to do away with any practice of their profession, he often threatened that he would see to it, by Heaven, that they could give no advice contrary to his wish.

**XXXV.** He took from all the noblest of the city the ancient devices of their families, from Torquatus his collar, from Cincinnatus his lock of hair,

from Gnaeus Pompeius the surname Magnus belonging to his ancient race. After inviting Ptolemy, whom I have mentioned before, to come from his kingdom, and receiving him with honor, he suddenly had him executed for no other reason than that when giving a gladiatorial show, he noticed that Ptolemy on entering the theatre attracted general attention by the splendor of his purple cloak. Whenever he ran across handsome men with fine heads of hair [for he himself was bald], he disfigured them by having the backs of their heads shaved. There was a certain Aesius Proculus, son of a chief centurion, called *Collosseros* [ "Giant Love" ] because of his remarkable size and handsome appearance; this man Caligula ordered to be suddenly dragged from his seat in the amphitheater and led into the arena, where he matched him first against a Thracian and then against a heavy-armed gladiator; when Proculus was victor in both contests, Caligula gave orders that he be bound at once, clad in rags, and then put to death, after first being led about the streets and exhibited to the women. In short, there was no one of such low condition or such abject fortune that he did not envy him such advantages as he possessed. Since the king of Nemi [the priest of Diana at Nemi, who must be a fugitive slave and obtain his office by slaying his predecessor] had now held his priesthood for many years, he hired a stronger adversary to attack him. When an *essedarius*[a gladiator who fought from a chariot] called Porius was vigorously applauded on the day of one of the games for setting his slave free after a victory, Caligula rushed from the amphitheater in such haste that he trod on the fringe of his toga and went headlong down the steps, fuming and shouting: "The people that rule the world give more honor to a gladiator for a trifling act than to their deified emperors or to the one still present with them."

**XXXVI.** He respected neither his own chastity nor that of anyone else. He is said to have had unnatural relations with Marcus Lepidus, the pantomimic actor Mnester, and certain hostages. Valerius Catullus, a young man of a consular family, publicly proclaimed that he had violated the emperor and worn himself out in commerce with him. To say nothing of his incest with his sisters and his notorious passion for the concubine Pyrallis, there was scarcely any woman of rank whom he did not approach. These as a rule he invited to dinner with their husbands, and as they passed by the foot of his couch, he would inspect them critically and deliberately, as if buying slaves, even putting out his hand and lifting up the face of anyone who looked down in modesty; then as often as the fancy took him he would leave the room, sending for the one who pleased him best, and returning soon afterward with evident signs of what had occurred, he would openly commend or criticize his partner, recounting her charms or defects and commenting on her conduct. To some he personally sent a bill of divorce in the name of their absent husbands, and had it entered in the public records.

**XXXVII.** In reckless extravagance he outdid the prodigals of all times in ingenuity, inventing a new sort of baths and unnatural varieties of food and feasts; for he would bathe in hot or cold perfumed oils, drink pearls of great price dissolved in vinegar, and set before his guests loaves and meats of gold, declaring that a man ought either to be frugal or Caesar. He even scattered large sums of money among the people from the roof of the Basilica Julia for several days in succession. He also built Liburnian galleys with ten banks of oars, with sterns set with gems, parti-colored sails, huge spacious baths, colonnades, and banquet-halls, and even a great variety of vines and fruit trees; that on board of them he might recline at table from an early hour, and coast along the shores of Campania amid songs and choruses. He built villas and country houses with utter disregard of expense, caring for nothing so much as to do what men said was impossible. So he built moles out into the deep and stormy sea, tunnelled rocks of hardest flint, built up plains to the height of mountains and razed mountains to the level of the plain; all with incredible dispatch, since the penalty for delay was death. To make a long story short, vast sums of money, including the 2,700,000,000 sesterces which Tiberius Caesar had amassed, were squandered by him in less than the revolution of a year.

**XXXVIII.** Having thus impoverished himself, from very need he turned his attention to pillage through a complicated and cunningly devised system of false accusations, auction sales, and imposts. He ruled that Roman citizenship could not lawfully be enjoyed by those whose forefathers had obtained it for themselves and their descendants, except in the case of sons, since "descendants" ought not to be understood as going beyond that degree; and when certificates of the deified Julius and Augustus were presented to him, he waved them aside as old and out of date. He also charged that those estates had been falsely returned, to which any addition had later been made from any cause whatever. If any chief centurions since the beginning of Tiberius' reign had not named that emperor or himself among their heirs, he set aside their wills on the ground of ingratitude; also the testaments of all others, as null and void, if anyone said that they had intended to make Caesar their heir when they died. When he had roused such fear in this way that he came to be named openly as heir by strangers among their intimates and by parents among their children, he accused them of making game of him by continuing to live after such a declaration, and to many of them he sent poisoned dainties. He used further to conduct the trial of such cases in person, naming in advance the sum which he proposed to raise at each sitting, and not rising until it was made up. Impatient of the slightest delay, he once condemned in a single sentence more than forty who were accused on different counts, boasting to Caesonia, when she woke after a nap, of the great amount of business he had done while she was taking her afternoon sleep. Appointing an auction, he put up and sold what was left from all the shows, personally soliciting bids and running them up so high, that some

who were forced to buy articles at an enormous price and were thus stripped of their possessions, opened their veins. A well-known incident is that of Aponius Saturninus; he fell asleep on one of the benches, and as the auctioneer was warned by Gaius not to overlook the praetorian gentleman who kept nodding to him, the bidding was not stopped until thirteen gladiators were knocked down to the unconscious sleeper at nine million sesterces.

**XXXIX.** When he was in Gaul and had sold at immense figures the jewels, furniture, slaves, and even the freedmen of his sisters who had been condemned to death, finding the business so profitable, he sent to the city for all the paraphernalia of the old palace, seizing for its transportation even public carriages and animals from the bakeries; with the result that bread was often scarce at Rome and many who had cases in court lost them from inability to appear and meet their bail. To get rid of this furniture, he resorted to every kind of trickery and wheedling, now railing at the bidders for avarice and because they were not ashamed to be richer than he, and now feigning regret for allowing common men to acquire the property of princes. Having learned that a rich provincial had paid those who issued the emperor's invitations two hundred thousand sesterces, to be smuggled in among the guests at one of his dinner-parties, he was not in the least displeased that the honor of dining with him was rated so high; but when next day the man appeared at his auction, he sent a messenger to hand him some trifle or other at the price of two hundred thousand sesterces and say that he should dine with Caesar on his personal invitation.

**XL.** He levied new and unheard of taxes, at first through the publicans and then, because their profit was so great, through the centurions and tribunes of the praetorian guard; and there was no class of commodities or men on which he did not impose some form of tariff. On all eatables sold in any part of the city he levied a fixed and definite charge; on lawsuits and legal processes begun anywhere, a fortieth part of the sum involved, providing a penalty in case anyone was found guilty of compromising or abandoning a suit; on the daily wages of porters, an eighth; on the earnings of prostitutes, as much as each received for one embrace; and a clause was added to this chapter of the law, providing that those who had ever been prostitutes or acted as panders should be liable to this public tax, and that even matrimony should not be exempt.

**XLI.** When taxes of this kind had been proclaimed, but not published in writing, inasmuch as many offences were committed through ignorance of the letter of the law, he at last, on the urgent demand of the people, had the law posted up, but in a very narrow place and in excessively small letters, to prevent the making of a copy. To leave no kind of plunder untried, he opened a brothel in his palace, setting apart a number of rooms and

furnishing them to suit the grandeur of the place, where matrons and freeborn youths should stand exposed. Then he sent his pages about the fora and basilicas, to invite young men and old to enjoy themselves, lending money on interest to those who came and having clerks openly take down their names, as contributors to Caesar's revenues. He did not even disdain to make money from play, and to increase his gains by falsehood and even by perjury. Having on one occasion given up his place to the player next him and gone into the courtyard, he spied two wealthy Roman knights passing by; he ordered them to be seized at once and their property confiscated and came back exultant, boasting that he had never played in better luck.

**XLII.** But when his daughter was born, complaining of his narrow means, and no longer merely of the burdens of a ruler but of those of a father as well, he took up contributions for the girl's maintenance and dowry. He also made proclamation that he would receive New Year's gifts, and on the Kalends of January took his place in the entrance to the Palace, to clutch the coins which a throng of people of all classes showered on him by handfuls and lapfuls. Finally, seized with a mania for feeling the touch of money, he would often pour out huge piles of gold pieces in some open place, walk over them barefooted, and wallow in them for a long time with his whole body.

**XLIII.** He had but one experience with military affairs or war, and then on a sudden impulse; for having gone to Mevania to visit the river Clitumnus and its grove, he was reminded of the necessity of recruiting his body-guard of Batavians and was seized with the idea of an expedition to Germania. So without delay he assembled legions and auxiliaries from all quarters, holding levies everywhere with the utmost strictness, and collecting provisions of every kind on an unheard of scale. Then he began his march and made it now so hurriedly and rapidly, that the praetorian cohorts were forced, contrary to all precedent, to lay their standards on the pack-animals and thus to follow him; again he was so lazy and luxurious that he was carried in a litter by eight bearers, requiring the inhabitants of the towns through which he passed to sweep the roads for him and sprinkle them to lay the dust.

**XLIV.** On reaching his camp, to show his vigilance and strictness as a commander, he dismissed in disgrace the generals who were late in bringing in the auxiliaries from various places, and in reviewing his troops he deprived many of the chief centurions who were well on in years of their rank, in some cases only a few days before they would have served their time, giving as a reason their age and infirmity; then railing at the rest for their avarice, he reduced the rewards given on completion of full military service to six thousand sesterces. 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 Senate, and not to deliver it to anyone except the consuls, in the temple of Mars the Avenger, before a full meeting of the senate.

**XLV.** Presently, finding no one to fight with, he had a few Germans of his body-guard taken across the river and concealed there, and word brought him after luncheon with great bustle and confusion that the enemy were close at hand. Upon this he rushed out with his friends and a part of the praetorian cavalry to the woods close by, and after cutting the branches from some trees and adorning them like trophies, he returned by torchlight, taunting those who had not followed him as timorous and cowardly, and presenting his companions and the partners in his victory with crowns of a new kind and of a new name, ornamented with figures of the sun, moon and stars, and called *exploratoriae*. Another time some hostages were taken from a common school and secretly sent on ahead of him, when he suddenly left a banquet and pursued them with the cavalry as if they were runaways, caught them, and brought them back in fetters, in this farce too showing immoderate extravagance. On coming back to the table, when some announced that the army was assembled, he urged them to take their places just as they were, in their coats of mail. He also admonished them in the familiar line of Vergil to "bear up and save themselves for better days." Meanwhile he rebuked the absent senate and people in a stern edict because "while Caesar was fighting and exposed to such dangers they were indulging in revels and frequenting the theatres and their pleasant villas."

**XLVI.** 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 [the lighthouse at Alexandria]. Then, promising the soldiers a gratuity of a hundred denarii each, as if he had shown unprecedented liberality, he said, "Go your way happy; go your way rich."

**XLVII.** Then turning his attention to his triumph, in addition to a few captives and deserters from the barbarians he chose all the tallest of the Gauls, and as he expressed it, those who were "worthy of a triumph," as well as some of the chiefs. These he reserved for his parade, compelling

them not only to dye their hair red and to let it grow long, but also to learn the language of the Germans and assume barbarian names. He also had the triremes in which he had entered the Ocean carried overland to Rome for the greater part of the way. He wrote besides to his financial agents to prepare for a triumph at the smallest possible cost, but on a grander scale than had ever before been known, since the goods of all were at their disposal.

**XLVIII.** Before leaving the province he formed a design of unspeakable cruelty, that of butchering the legions that had begun the mutiny years before just after the death of Augustus, because they had beleagured his father Germanicus, their leader, and himself, at the time an infant; and though he was with difficulty turned from this mad purpose, he could by no means be prevented from persisting in his desire to decimate them. Accordingly he summoned them to an assembly without their arms, not even wearing their swords, and surrounded them with armed horsemen. But seeing that some of the legionaries, suspecting his purpose, were stealing off to resume their arms, in case any violence should be offered them, he fled from the assembly and set out for the city in a hurry, turning all his ferocity upon the senate, against which he uttered open threats, in order to divert the gossip about his own dishonor. He complained among other things that he had been cheated of his fairly earned triumph; whereas a short time before he had himself given orders that on pain of death no action should be taken about his honors.

**XLIX.** Therefore, when he was met on the road by envoys from that distinguished body, begging him to hasten his return, he roared, "I will come, and this will be with me," frequently smiting the hilt of the sword which he wore at his side. He also made proclamation that he was returning, but only to those who desired his presence, the equestrian order and the people, for to the senate he would never more be fellow-citizen nor prince. He even forbade any of the senators to meet him. Then giving up or postponing his triumph, he entered the city on his birthday in an ovation; and within four months he perished, having dared great crimes and meditating still greater ones. For he had made up his mind to move to Antium, and later to Alexandria, after first slaying the noblest members of the two orders. That no one may doubt this, let me say that among his private papers two books were found with different titles, one called *The Sword* and the other *The Dagger*, and both containing the names and marks of identification of those whom he had doomed to death. There was found besides a great chest full of divers kinds of poisons, which they say were later thrown into the sea by Claudius and so infected was it as to kill the fish, which were thrown up by the tide upon the neighboring shores.

**L.** He was very tall and extremely pale, with an unshapely body, but very-thin neck and legs. His eyes and temples were hollow, his forehead broad

and grim, his hair thin and entirely gone on the top of his head, though his body was hairy. Because of this to look upon him from a higher place as he passed by, or for any reason whatever to mention a goat, was treated as a capital offence. While his face was naturally forbidding and ugly, he purposely made it even more savage, practicing all kinds of terrible and fearsome expressions before a mirror. He was sound neither of body nor mind. As a boy he was troubled with the falling sickness [presumably epilepsy], and while in his youth he had some endurance, yet at times because of sudden faintness he was hardly able to walk, to stand up, to collect his thoughts, or to hold up his head. He himself realized his mental infirmity, and thought at times of going into retirement and clearing his brain. It is thought that his wife Caesonia gave him a drug intended for a love potion, which, however, had the effect of driving him mad. He was especially tormented with sleeplessness; for he never rested more than three hours at night, and even for that length of time he did not sleep quietly, but was terrified by strange apparitions, once, for example, dreaming that the spirit of the Ocean talked with him. Therefore, weary of lying in bed wide awake during the greater part of the night, he would now sit upon his couch, and now wander through the long colonnades, crying out from time to time for daylight and longing for its coming.

**LI.** I think I may fairly attribute to mental weakness the existence of two exactly opposite faults in the same person, extreme assurance and, on the other hand, excessive timorousness. For this man, who so utterly despised the gods, was wont at the slightest thunder and lightning to shut his eyes, to muffle up his head, and if they increased, to leap from his bed and hide under it. In his journey through Sicily, though he made all manner of fun of the miracles in various places, he suddenly fled from Messana by night, panic-stricken by the smoke and roaring from Aetna's crater. Full of threats as he was also against the barbarians, when he was riding in a chariot through a narrow defile on the far side of the Rhine, and someone said that there would be no slight panic if the enemy should appear anywhere, he immediately mounted a horse and hastily returned to the bridges. Finding them crowded with camp servants and baggage, in his impatience of any delay he was passed along from hand to hand over the men's heads. Soon after, hearing of an uprising in Germania, he made preparations to flee from the city and equipped fleets for the purpose, finding comfort only in the thought that the provinces across the sea would at any rate be left him, in case the enemy should be victorious and take possession of the summits of the Alps, as the Cimbri, or even of the city, as the Senones had once done. And it was this, I think, that later inspired his assassins with the idea of pretending to the riotous soldiers that he had laid hands on himself in terror at the report of a defeat.

**LII.** 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.

**LIII.** As regards liberal studies, he gave little attention to literature but a great deal to oratory, and he was as ready of speech and eloquent as you please, especially if he had occasion to make a charge against anyone. For when he was angry, he had an abundant flow of words and thoughts, and his voice and delivery were such that for very excitement he could not stand still and he was clearly heard by those at a distance. When about to begin an harangue, he threatened to draw the sword of his nightly labors, and he had such scorn of a polished and elegant style that he used to say that Seneca, who was very popular just then, composed "mere school exercises," and that he was "sand without lime." He had the habit, too, of writing replies to the successful pleas of orators and composing accusations and defences of important personages who were brought to trial before the senate; and according as his stylus had run most easily, he brought ruin or relief to each of them by his speech, while he would also invite the equestrian order by proclamation to come in and hear him.

**LIV.** Moreover, he devoted himself with much enthusiasm to arts of other kinds and of great variety, appearing as a Thracian gladiator, as a charioteer, and even as a singer and dancer, fighting with the weapons of actual warfare, and driving in circuses built in various places; so carried away by his interest in singing and dancing that even at the public performances he could not refrain from singing with the tragic actor as he delivered his lines, or from openly imitating his gestures by way of praise or correction. Indeed, on the day when he was slain he seems to have ordered an all-night vigil for the sole purpose of taking advantage of the licence of the occasion to make his first appearance on the stage. Sometimes he danced even at night, and once he summoned three consulars to the Palace at the close of the second watch, and when they arrived in great and deathly fear, he seated them on a stage and then on a sudden burst out with a great din of flutes and clogs, dressed in a cloak and a tunic reaching to his heels, and after dancing a number went off again. And yet varied as were his accomplishments, the man could not swim.

**LV.** Toward those to whom he was devoted his partiality became madness. He used to kiss Mnester, an actor of pantomimes, even in the theatre, and if anyone made even the slightest sound while his favorite was dancing, he had him dragged from his seat and scourged him with his own hand. When a Roman *equus* created a disturbance, he sent a centurion to bid him go without delay to Ostia and carry a message for him to King Ptolemy in Mauretania; and its purport was this: "Do neither good nor ill to the man whom I have sent you." He gave some Thracian gladiators command of his German body-guard. He reduced the amount of armor of the *murmillones* [a type of gladiator]. When one Columbus had won a victory, but had suffered a slight wound, he had the place rubbed with a poison which he henceforth called *Columbinum*; at least that name was found included in his list of poisons. He was so passionately devoted to the green faction [in the Circus races] that he constantly dined and spent the night in their stables, and in one of his revels with them he gave the driver Eutyclus two million sesterces in gifts. He used to send his soldiers on the day before the games and order silence in the neighborhood, to prevent the horse *Incitatus* from being disturbed. Besides a stall of marble, a manger of ivory, purple blankets and a collar of precious stones, he even gave this horse a house, a troop of slaves and furniture, for the more elegant entertainment of the guests invited in his name; and it is also said that he planned to make him consul.

**LVI.** During this frantic and riotous career several thought of attempting his life. But when one or two conspiracies had been detected and the rest were waiting for a favorable opportunity, two men made common cause and succeeded, with the connivance of his most influential freedmen and the officers of the praetorian guard; for although the charge that these last were privy to one of the former conspiracies was false, they realised that Caligula hated and feared them. In fact, he exposed them to great odium by once taking them aside and declaring, drawn sword in hand, that he would kill himself, if they too thought he deserved death; and from that time on he never ceased accusing them one to the other and setting them all at odds. When they had decided to attempt his life at the exhibition of the Palatine games, as he went out at noon, Cassius Chaerea, tribune of a cohort of the praetorian guard, claimed for himself the principal part; for Gaius used to taunt him, a man already well on in years, with voluptuousness and effeminacy by every form of insult. When he asked for the watch word Gaius would give him "Priapus" or "Venus," and when Chaerea had occasion to thank him for anything, he would hold out his hand to kiss, forming and moving it in an obscene fashion.

**LVII.** His approaching murder was foretold by many prodigies. The statue of Jupiter at Olympia, which he had ordered to be taken to pieces and moved to Rome, suddenly uttered such a peal of laughter that the scaffolding collapsed and the workmen took to their heels; and at once a

man called Cassius turned up, who declared that he had been bidden in a dream to sacrifice a bull to Jupiter. The Capitol at Capua was struck by lightning on the Ides of March, and also the room of the doorkeeper of the Palace at Rome. Some inferred from the latter omen that danger was threatened to the owner at the hands of his guards; and from the former, the murder of a second distinguished personage, such as had taken place long before on that same day. The soothsayer Sulla, too, when Gaius consulted him about his horoscope, declared that inevitable death was close at hand. The lots of Fortune at Antium warned him to beware of Cassius, and he accordingly ordered the death of Cassius Longinus, who was at the time proconsul of Asia, forgetting that the family name of Chaerea was Cassius. The day before he was killed he dreamt that he stood in heaven beside the throne of Jupiter and that the god struck him with the toe of his right foot and hurled him to earth. Some things which had happened on that very day shortly before he was killed were also regarded as portents. As he was sacrificing, he was sprinkled with the blood of a flamingo, and the pantomimic actor Mnester danced a tragedy which the tragedian Neoptolemus had acted years before during the games at which Philip king of the Macedonians was assassinated. In a farce called *Laureolus*, in which the chief actor falls as he is making his escape and vomits blood, several understudies so vied with one another in giving evidence of their proficiency that the stage swam in blood. A nocturnal performance besides was rehearsing, in which scenes from the lower world were represented by Egyptians and Aethiopians.

**LVIII.** On the ninth day before the Kalends of February [January 24, 41 A.D.], at about the seventh hour he hesitated whether or not to get up for luncheon, since his stomach was still disordered from excess of food on the day before, but at length he came out at the persuasion of his friends. In the covered passage through which he had to pass, some boys of good birth, who had been summoned from Asia to appear on the stage, were rehearsing their parts, and he stopped to watch and encourage them; and had not the leader of the troop complained that he had a chill, he would have returned and had the performance given at once. From this point there are two versions of the story: some say that as he was talking with the boys, Chaerea came up behind, and gave him a deep cut in the neck, having first cried, "Take that," and that then the tribune Cornelius Sabinus, who was the other conspirator and faced Gaius, stabbed him in the breast [part of the ritual at the sacrifice was that the slayer raised his axe with the question "Shall I do it?" to which the priest replied "Take that"]. Others say that Sabinus, after getting rid of the crowd through centurions who were in the plot, asked for the watchword, as soldiers do; and that when Gaius gave him "Jupiter," he cried "So be it," [another formula at a sacrifice was "receive the fulfillment of your omen", *i.e.*, in naming Jupiter, the god of the thunderbolt and sudden death], and as Gaius looked around, he split his jawbone with a blow of his sword. As he lay upon the

ground and with writhing limbs called out that he still lived, the others dispatched him with thirty wounds; for the general signal was " Strike again." Some even thrust their swords through his privates. At the beginning of the disturbance his bearers ran to his aid with their poles [with which they carried his litter], and presently the Germans of his body-guard, and they slew several of his assassins, as well as some inoffensive senators.

**LIX.** He lived twenty-nine years and ruled three years, ten months and eight days. His body was conveyed secretly to the gardens of the Lamian family, where it was partly consumed on a hastily erected pyre and buried beneath a light covering of turf; later his sisters on their return from exile dug it up, cremated it, and consigned it to the tomb. Before this was done, it is well known that the caretakers of the gardens were disturbed by ghosts, and that in the house where he was slain not a night passed without some fearsome apparition, until at last the house itself was destroyed by fire. With him died his wife Caesonia, stabbed with a sword by a centurion, while his daughter's brains were dashed out against a wall.

**LX.** One may form an idea of the state of those times by what followed. Not even after the murder was made known was it at once believed that he was dead, but it was suspected that Gaius himself had made up and circulated the report, to find out by that means how men felt towards him. The conspirators too had not agreed on a successor, and the senate was so unanimously in favor of re-establishing the republic that the consuls called the first meeting, not in the senate house, because it had the name Julia, but in the Capitol; while some in expressing their views proposed that the memory of the Caesars be done away with and their temples destroyed. Men further observed and commented on the fact that all the Caesars whose forename was Gaius perished by the sword, beginning with the one who was slain in the times of Cinna [Gaius Julius Caesar Strabo, slain in 87 B.C.---though the Dictator's father died a natural death, as did also Gaius Caesar, grandson of Augustus].

---

**Source:**

From: *Suetonius*, 2 vols., trans. J. C. Rolfe, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, and London: William Henemann, 1920), Vol. I, pp. 405-497.

Scanned by: J. S. Arkenberg, Dept. of History, Cal. State Fullerton. Prof. Arkenberg has modernized the text.

The following changes to the printed text of Suetonius were made by Prof Arkenberg.;

- Text was modernized in several ways.
- While many of the annotations are those of J. C. Rolfe, many are Prof Arkenberg's, based on more recent knowledge of Roman life (and several of Rolfe's ones too were changed.)
- Roman names were substituted for most of the provinces (Hispania for Spain), for example, to avoid the impression by some people that Caesar might have been visiting Madrid, or that when he went to Britain (as Rolfe has the spelling), he was going London to visit the queen!
- Roman proper names were substituted throughout (Pompeius for Pompey, Marcus Antonius for Mark Antony). The familiar ones are fine for Shakespeare, but this isn't Shakespeare.
- Latin names and terms in preference to Rolfe's practice of using British terms (thus, "plebeians" or "the people" instead of "the commons", or "the Senate" instead of "the House")
- "Legal cases" or "lawsuits" were substituted for what Rolfe called "taking the assizes".
- Rolfe's annotations were altered to bring out the sexual aspect of many remarks (found more in Julius than in Caligula) and jeers of the time (eg., in Caligula, Rolfe has Caligula boasting of his "uprightness" when the reference is to the staying power of his erection...)

---

This text is part of the [Internet Ancient History Sourcebook](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Unless otherwise indicated the specific electronic form of the document is copyright. Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. No representation is made about texts which are linked off-site, although in most cases these are also public domain. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

© Paul Halsall, October 1998

[mailto:halsall@murray.fordham.edu?subject=Ancient History Document](mailto:halsall@murray.fordham.edu?subject=Ancient%20History%20Document)