

detect these, at least as far as the situation of the ruling class was concerned; and in the provinces too, although the general high standard of responsible government was usually maintained, a certain frozen sluggishness took over. Like many other ancient writers, however, Tacitus believed that all human personalities remain unchangeably the same from birth to death, and that if a man's actions did not always exhibit that personality this was only because he was sometimes able to conceal it. Thus in his view Tiberius must be wholly bad (the historian could not help thinking of DOMITIAN, under whom he himself had lived); the many good actions which he manifestly performed could only be attributed to sinister hypocrisy.

The complex and cunningly balanced Principate bequeathed by Augustus must have been more than almost any man could inherit with comfort. Yet Tiberius declared, 'I treat all his actions and words as if they had the force of law', for he knew it was too late for the autocratic machinery to be moved into reverse. His reign was a bridge between the personal system of Augustus and the formally established imperial system of the future; it was a period of cautious consolidation. Nevertheless, Tiberius himself remained permanently uncomfortable, since at heart he was a Republican like his ancestors. He was too honest a man to accept an unwelcome situation with a good grace, and he felt a deep distrust of too many of the senators with whom he had to work.

It was during Tiberius' reign that Jesus Christ undertook his mission in Galilee (part of Herod Antipas' client-principedom of Galilee-Peraea), and was subsequently crucified in Jerusalem (in the Roman province of Judaea). When, according to the Evangelists, Jesus requested that a 'penny' should be brought to him, and, after asking whose image and inscription it bore, pronounced that people should 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's', the coin must have been a *denarius* bearing the portrait and titles of Tiberius.



## GAIUS (CALIGULA)

37-41

GAIUS (Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus) (37-41), the third son of Germanicus and Agrippina the elder, was born at Antium in 12. While he was with his parents on the German frontier, between the ages of two and four, the miniature military boots or *caligae* that he was given to wear earned him the nickname 'Caligula'.

During his eighteenth and nineteenth years his mother and two elder brothers were arrested, subsequently meeting their deaths. Gaius, however, was appointed to be a priest in 31, and a quaestor in 33; and the emperor TIBERIUS, with whom he lived at Capreae from 32 onwards, appointed him and Tiberius Gemellus (son of Drusus the younger) as joint heirs of his property, while letting it be known that he expected Gaius eventually to succeed him. Gaius was however given no further administrative training. When Tiberius died in 37, there were rumours that Gaius had smothered, strangled or poisoned him, but these stories need not be believed, since his death by natural causes had in any case been imminent.

Supported by the praetorian prefect Macro, Gaius was immediately hailed as *princeps* by the senate. Moreover, as soon as he returned to Rome, the senators seem to have proposed that the Assembly should vote him, in one comprehensive measure, the totality of the imperial powers; and his predecessor's will was declared invalid so that Gaius might inherit the whole of his property, without granting Gemellus a share. But it was the army, above all, that loved the house of Germanicus to which he belonged, and it also pleased the soldiers when he honoured the memories of his relatives who had come to such unpleasant ends. As for Tiberius, the man responsible for these tragedies, Gaius duly celebrated his funeral, but in deference to the general lack of regret for his death quietly dropped an initial request for his deification, and began referring to him in the abusive language which he customarily employed.

His grandmother Antonia the younger, the widow of Nero Drusus, who might have been a restraining influence on the young emperor, died on 1 May. Then in October Gaius fell gravely ill, and according to the Jewish philosopher Philo – who was far from prejudiced in his favour – his popularity throughout the Empire was so extensive that the news caused great public distress and anxiety. He recovered, but Philo may have been right to suggest that he was never the same man again. In 38 he put his principal supporter, the praetorian prefect Macro, to death; and Tiberius Gemellus, who seemed a potential rival, suffered a similar fate. Moreover, Marcus Junius Silanus – the father of the first of Gaius' four wives – was driven to suicide. These developments alarmed the senate, and in January 39, Gaius announced to them that he was going to revive the treason trials, so painfully remembered from the time of Tiberius; the latter's memory, in consequence, enjoyed an official rehabilitation.

Rumours of disloyalty soon began to reach him; and a recently retired governor of Pannonia was compelled to commit suicide. Gaius had been planning to revive the expansionist enterprises of his father Germanicus across the Rhine. But before he left the capital he learnt that, as soon as he reached Moguntiacum, the very influential army commander in Upper Germany, Cnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus, was planning to have him assassinated. Nevertheless, in September 39 the emperor departed suddenly for the north. Among those who accompanied him were a strong detachment of the praetorian guard, his two surviving sisters Julia Agrippina (Agrippina the younger) and Julia Livilla, and Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (widower of his third sister Julia Drusilla and regarded as his likely successor). But soon after they arrived in Germany, Lepidus, as well as Gaetulicus, was put to death, and Agrippina the younger and Julia Livilla were banished, while Gaius seized their property for himself.

Gaius spent the following winter in the Rhine camps and Gaul. But neither his German expedition nor a proposed crossing to Britain (still independent nearly a century after Julius Caesar's two landings) materialized. Tall stories recounted how he bade the troops pick up seashells on the shores of the Channel. But Gaius was no doubt eager to get back to Rome, where the senate, as he knew, had now become dangerously alienated. Even before his arrival in Italy he began harassing them by letter, ordering prosecutions in connexion with Gaetulicus' plot; and when during the summer he arrived in the neighbourhood of the capital, he failed to notify them of his return as courtesy demanded. Meanwhile the senate for their part, after granting him the honour of an Ovation for his imaginary victories, voted that whenever he attended one of their meetings, he should be permitted to introduce a military bodyguard into the building and should be seated upon a lofty, inaccessible platform.

At least three further conspiracies were very soon launched against his life. A group of Romans claiming to be motivated by philosophical, Stoic principles was duly proceeded against. More serious, however, was Gaius' suspicion that

the joint praetorian prefects, Marcus Arrecinus Clemens and an unknown colleague, were planning his assassination. Alarmed at being openly taxed with this intention Clemens, and perhaps the other commander as well, joined a party of disgusted and terrified senators in a serious plot. Their agent appointed to perform the act was a senior praetorian officer Cassius Chaerea, whom Gaius had mocked for effeminacy. On 24 January 41, in a corridor underneath the palace on the Palatine Hill, he and two military colleagues fell on the emperor. Some of his German personal guards rushed up, but were too late to save his life. Then a praetorian soldier stabbed Caesonia, his fourth wife, to death, and another smashed their baby daughter's head against a wall.

Gaius' concept of imperial rule had been quite different from the carefully hidden autocracy of his two predecessors. Perhaps influenced by eastern friends, notably a Jewish potentate Julius Agrippa, he was impatient of such concealments, and willing to rule and appear as a despot, like monarchs of the Hellenistic world. Large brass coins issued during the reign name his three sisters, Agrippina the younger, Julia Drusilla and Julia Livilla, who are shown standing with the attributes of goddesses like deified Ptolemaic queens. The first and last-named of these three were later disgraced; but after Julia Drusilla, whom Gaius particularly loved, had died in 38 she was officially deified by the state – the first Roman woman ever to receive this honour.

When Gaius expressed pride in his own inflexibility, his words must have surprised his hearers, who had seen his alarmingly rapid changes of temper and mood. But what he had in mind was this persistent determination to sweep away the Augustan, pseudo-Republican façade. Spectacular gestures demonstrating Gaius' new and more grandiose concept of the imperial office included the construction of a bridge of ships – two or three miles long – across the Bay of Naples, enabling him to claim that, like a new Neptune, he had ridden across the waters. At Rome, too, he came very close to recognition as a god in his own lifetime, though the coinage did not reflect this revolutionary innovation.

The same question of deification created a serious crisis in the east, among the Jews. At Alexandria in 38, members of the large Jewish community had become involved in large-scale, violent fighting against the Greek majority of the inhabitants, who rejected the Jews' claim to full citizenship of the city. This conflict brought about the first serious pogrom known to history, during the course of which pagan gangs forced their murderous way into the synagogues to set up statues of the emperor. In 40, each of the two parties sent a delegation to Rome to plead its case. Philo, who led the Jewish mission, has left us a vivid account of what happened. The Jews tried to explain to the emperor that, although their religious principles made it impossible for them to sacrifice *to* him, they were always very glad to sacrifice *for* him, which indeed they regularly did. Gaius responded with the remark that failure to recognize his divinity seemed not so much criminal as lunatic. But now news reached the

capital of ominous events taking place in Judaea itself, among the mixed Greek and Jewish population of Jamnia. The Jews of the town destroyed an altar the Greeks had set up in honour of the emperor, and this prompted Gaius to decree that the country's places of worship should all be converted into shrines of the imperial cult. So instructions were sent to Publius Petronius, the governor of Syria, to commission a statue of Gaius in the guise of Jupiter (Zeus) and to set it up in the Jerusalem temple. Although recognizing that this would lead to a national rebellion and mass-martyrdom, Petronius started to collect a legionary army to enforce the imperial order. Meanwhile Gaius was finally persuaded by his Jewish friend Julius Agrippa to cancel the command; and his assassination followed not long afterwards.

According to the biographer Suetonius, Gaius was very tall and extremely pale, with an unshapely body and very thin neck and legs. His eyes and temples were hollow, his forehead broad and grim, his hair thin and entirely gone from the top of his head, though his body was hairy. Because of his baldness and hairiness, he was said to have declared it a capital offence for anyone either to look down upon him as he passed in the street or to mention goats in any context. He worked hard to make his naturally forbidding features even more repulsive by practising grimaces in front of the mirror. He was passionately devoted to the circus and the stage (and enjoyed the riotous parties they involved), preoccupations which caused him to neglect state affairs to a damaging and perilous extent. The rumours about his sex life suggest startlingly versatile habits, including sadism, homosexuality and incestuous conduct with his sisters. Suetonius diagnosed a case of both physical and mental sickness, noting that the emperor suffered from acute insomnia, was sometimes scarcely able to move his limbs or think, and oscillated wildly between a confident love of vast crowds and a timid hankering after total solitude. He could also get extremely excited and angry. Philo believed that these troubles arose from the illness from which he suffered early in his reign as a result of over-indulgence. He has also been variously described as epileptic, schizoid, schizophrenic and a chronic alcoholic, and his system was said to have been ruined by an aphrodisiac given him by his last wife Caesonia. However, there is not sufficient evidence to enable any of these diagnoses to be accepted.

In spite of his unbalanced personality, Gaius evidently possessed considerable talents. It is true that his frantic energy was not matched by application or persistence; but his powers as an orator, for example, were impressive. His numerous epigrammatic utterances, too, showed a scathing and sceptical lucidity and realism, and his literary criticism displayed similar disconcerting qualities: Homer, Virgil and Livy all became victims of his venomous tongue. So did the philosopher Seneca the younger, described by Gaius as 'mere sand without lime' – who was able to retaliate after Gaius' death by depicting him in the worst possible light.



## CLAUDIUS

41–54

CLAUDIUS (Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus) (41–54) was born at Lugdunum in 10 BC. He was the youngest son of Nero Drusus (the brother of TIBERIUS) and of Antonia the younger (daughter of the triumvir Marcus Antonius and Octavia). Handicapped by ill-health and alarming uncouthness, which seemed to signify a retarded mind, he received no public distinction from AUGUSTUS except an augurate, and held no official post under Tiberius. His nephew GAIUS, when he became emperor, gave him a consulship as his own colleague in AD 37 but otherwise treated him with disrespect.

After Gaius had been murdered, Claudius fled to an apartment of the palace and hid himself among the curtains of a balcony. But he was discovered by a praetorian guardsman and taken to the praetorian camp, where the men hailed him as emperor, apparently upon the initiative of the joint prefects of the guard, of whom one at least had taken a hand in the assassination of Gaius. At this juncture the senators were still deliberating about what should be done next: even the impracticable idea of restoring the Republic came under discussion. However, they soon fell in line with the praetorians' initiative and granted Claudius all the imperial powers – though he never ceased to resent their initial hesitation, and they for their part never forgave him for having taken the decision out of their hands. It was to be the first of many occasions on which their right to select a new occupant of the throne was brushed aside.

Claudius was also the first emperor to make the praetorian guardsmen a large gift when they proclaimed his accession, thus creating another ominous precedent for the future. Moreover, with a frankness which none of his successors ever equalled, he issued gold and silver coins pronouncing explicitly that it was to the guardsmen and their officers that he owed his throne. One of these series commemorated the oath of allegiance they had sworn him (*PRAETORIANI RECEPti in fidem*), and another set of issues,