

GAIUS (CALIGULA)

12–41 CE

Emperor 37–41 CE

The actual name of the emperor often known as Caligula was Gaius Julius Caesar Germanicus. Ancient texts uniformly refer to him as Gaius. As an adult, he thought it insulting if someone tried to call him by his childhood nickname.

Gaius' sanity has always been in question. Suetonius was the first to use the expression "mental illness" with regard to him, although earlier authors wrote about a "confused mind" or "mad inconsistency." It was convenient for his successor to attribute the aberrations of his unsuccessful reign to madness, and too much time has passed for a proper diagnosis in any case. Despite this caution, it seems clear that Gaius struck his contemporaries and near contemporaries as unpredictable. This biography is somewhat different from Suetonius' others because of the nature of his source material, which consisted, to a large degree, of hostile anecdotes. He observes the young emperor through this scrim.

Although Suetonius always begins his biographies with the emperor's ancestry, this one devotes seven chapters to Gaius' father, Germanicus Julius Caesar. Germanicus had been in line for the throne at the time of his early death and is sometimes thought of as a "thirteenth Caesar." He was a popular figure, especially with the military. His large family, his sons and daughters and even his grandson, were involved in the power struggles that plagued the imperial family for fifty years after he died, until the Julio-Claudian line came to an end with Nero. The memory of Germanicus continued to influence events, and his reputation remained untarnished because he never had a chance to fail as emperor.

[1.1] Germanicus, the father of Gaius Caesar, the son of Drusus and Antonia the Younger, was adopted by his uncle Tiberius. He served as quaestor five years before he was of legal age and then

immediately became consul. He had been sent to command the army in Germany when the news arrived that Augustus had died¹ and that all of the legions were stubbornly refusing to accept Tiberius as their commander in chief. They pressed him to accept supreme power in the state, but he put an end to their unrest. It is uncertain whether he did this out of loyalty to family or a sense of greater obligation to the state. Later he defeated the enemy and celebrated a triumph.² [1.2] Made consul a second time, Germanicus was sent to settle affairs in the East before he entered office. After he had defeated the Armenian king and reduced Cappadocia to provincial status, he died following a long illness at Antioch in his thirty-fourth year. Poison was suspected, for in addition to the bruises that covered his body and the foam that came from his mouth, his heart was found undamaged among his cremated remains. (It is believed that the heart, by its very nature, cannot be consumed by fire if it has been contaminated by poison.) [2] Furthermore, he died (or so it was thought) because of the treachery of Tiberius and Tiberius' agent, Gnaeus Piso,³ who had charge of the province of Syria at the time. Piso did not hide the fact that he would have to give offense to one or the other, to father or son⁴ (as though this choice were an absolute necessity), and he attacked Germanicus incessantly with violent verbal abuse and actions even when he was ill. Because of this, when Piso returned to Rome, the populace almost tore him to pieces, and the senate condemned him to death.⁵

[3.1] It is agreed that Germanicus possessed all the blessings of body and mind to an extent that no one else ever had: he had extraordinary good looks and was exceptionally courageous; he was talented in both branches of eloquence and learning;⁶ he was unusually gracious and remarkably successful in his desire to win men's devotion

1. August 19, 14 CE.

2. Germanicus campaigned for three seasons in Germany with indecisive results before he returned to Rome for a triumph in 17 CE.

3. Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso, consul in 7 BCE; see *Tib.* 52.3.

4. He thought that if he supported Tiberius, he would wrong Germanicus and if he supported Germanicus, he would wrong Tiberius.

5. Piso committed suicide before the verdict on treason was pronounced. He was cleared of complicity in the death of Germanicus.

6. Greek and Latin.

and elicit their affection. (His thin legs did not fit this handsome impression so well, but they gradually filled out because he rode his horse frequently after eating.) He often struck down enemies in hand-to-hand combat. [3.2] He pleaded cases in court even after his triumph, and when he died, he left behind Greek comedies among his other writings. He behaved like an ordinary citizen both at home and abroad and entered free or allied municipalities without lictors. Whenever he came upon the graves of famous men, he performed funeral rites for their spirits. Intent on burying in a single mound the remains of the soldiers who had been massacred in the Varine disaster,⁷ he was the first to pick up with his own hands and collect the bones that had long lain scattered about. [3.3] Germanicus was so gentle and devoid of malice toward those who attacked him (whoever they were and whatever their motives) that it did not enter his mind to become incensed with Piso, who was rescinding his orders and harassing his dependents—until he learned that Piso was also attacking him with curses and poison. Even then he did nothing more than follow traditional practice; he renounced his bond of friendship with Piso and commissioned his household to avenge his death if anything should happen to him.

[4] Germanicus was very richly rewarded for his exemplary character. His family valued and loved him so that Augustus (not to mention his other relations), after hesitating for a long time about naming him his successor, gave him over to Tiberius by adoption. The common people held him in such favor that sometimes (as many writers report) whenever he came or went, his life was in danger because of the large number of people who crowded around him and followed him. For instance, all the cohorts of the praetorian guard came to meet him when he returned from Germany after suppressing the mutiny there, although only two had been ordered to leave the city. And men and women of every age and from every order of the Roman people poured out as far as the twentieth milestone.

[5] But much greater and more substantial evidence for the esteem in which he was held became apparent at his death and afterward. On the day he died,⁸ temples were stoned and the altars of the gods

7. 9 CE. The three legions under Publius Quinctilius Varus; see *Aug.* 23.1–2, *Tib.* 17.1.

8. October 10, 19 CE.

were overturned. Some men cast their *Lares* into the streets and left their legitimate infants to die. It is also reported that foreigners who were at war, whether with one another or with us, agreed to a cessation of hostilities as though they shared a private grief. Some kings of small principalities got rid of their beards and shaved their wives' heads as a token of deep suffering; and even the King of Kings⁹ left off hunting and dining with his nobles, a custom of mourning for Parthians. [6.1] Back at Rome, the citizenry was struck dumb with grief at the first report of his illness and waited for further news. Finally, in the evening, a rumor from an unknown source spread suddenly through the city: he had recovered. People came running to the Capitoline from every direction with torches and sacrificial victims. They almost tore the doors off the temple so that nothing would get in their way in their eagerness to fulfill the vows that they had made for his safety. Tiberius was awakened by the voices of the populace everywhere as they rejoiced and shouted together: "Safe is Rome! Safe our homeland! Germanicus is safe!" [6.2] When his death was finally confirmed, no comforting thoughts, no edicts could check the grief of the people who continued to mourn even through the December holidays.¹⁰ The savagery that Rome experienced in the years that followed added further to the praise for the dead Germanicus and to the love felt for him. Everyone who thought seriously about the matter concluded that Tiberius' cruelty that soon burst forth had been kept in check by his respect for Germanicus and by his fear of him.

[7] Germanicus was married to Agrippina, the daughter of Marcus Agrippa and Julia,¹¹ who bore him nine children. Two of these were carried off while still infants, and another, an unusually charming child, when he was a small boy. Livia dedicated a statue of him dressed as Cupid in the temple of the Capitoline Venus, and Augustus put another in his private chamber and kissed it whenever he entered. The other children survived their father. There were three females, Agrippina, Drusilla, and Livilla, born within a period of three years. There were also three males, Nero, Drusus,

9. A title often used for Eastern potentates. Here it refers to Artabanus III of Parthia.

10. The Saturnalia.

11. Augustus' daughter. The marriage was arranged in 4 CE.

and Gaius Caesar. The senate declared Nero and Drusus enemies of the state on charges introduced by Tiberius.¹²

[8.1] Gaius Caesar was born on the day before the Kalends of September in the year when his father and Gaius Fonteius Capito were consuls.¹³ Contradictory accounts make his birthplace uncertain: Gnaeus Lentulus Gaetulicus¹⁴ writes that he was born at Tibur¹⁵ and Pliny the Elder that it was at Ambitarium, a village that lies in the high ground above the junction of two rivers in the territory of the Treveri.¹⁶ To support his argument, Pliny adds that altars can be seen there with the inscription *ob puerperium Agrippinae*, "For the childbirth of Agrippina." An epigram that circulated soon after he became emperor claimed that he was born in the winter quarters of the legions:

Born in a military camp, reared amidst his country's arms:
This was the sign of an emperor to be.

[8.2] I, however, find in the public record that he was born at Antium.¹⁷ Pliny refutes Gaetulicus on the grounds that he was falsifying evidence in order to flatter the egotistical young emperor by appropriating to him merit that belonged to a city sacred to Hercules. Pliny further states that Gaetulicus advanced this falsehood with greater confidence because about a year earlier a son, also called Gaius Caesar, had indeed been born to Germanicus at Tibur. I have already noted this boy's childish charm and early death.¹⁸ [8.3] Pliny is proved wrong by chronology, for those who have written about the reign of Augustus agree that Germanicus was dispatched to Gaul

12. The conflict between Tiberius and the two eldest sons of Germanicus is described at *Tib.* 54.2-55.

13. August 31, 12 CE.

14. Gnaeus Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus, a commander in Lower Germany whom Gaius would replace. See *Cl.* 9.1, *Gal.* 6.2.

15. A town in the hills east of Rome, the site of an important temple of Hercules.

16. A Gallic tribe whose territory centered on the modern city of Trier. The rivers were probably the Rhine and Mosel, which meet at the modern city of Koblenz.

17. A town on the coast south of Rome, a retreat for the imperial family.

18. See chapter 7.

after his consulship was over and after Gaius had already been born. Nor does the inscription on the altar give any support at all to Pliny's position, since Agrippina gave birth to daughters twice in that part of the world. Furthermore, any birth is called a *puerperium*, without distinction of gender, because in the past girls were often called *puerae*, just as boys were called *puelli*.¹⁹ [8.4] There is also a letter Augustus wrote to his granddaughter Agrippina a few months before he died. It concerns the Gaius I am writing about, for at that time no other small child with the same name was still alive: "Yesterday I arranged for Talerius and Asillius²⁰ to serve as escorts for the boy Gaius on the fifteenth day before the Kalends of June²¹—if the gods be willing. Furthermore, I am sending with him a doctor from among my slaves, and I have written Germanicus that he may keep him if he wishes. Farewell, my Agrippina, and take care that you reach your Germanicus safe and sound." [8.5] I think that it is entirely clear that Gaius could not have been born in a place to which he was taken from the city for the first time when he was almost two years old. The same considerations of chronology destroy the reliability of the epigram, and they do so the more easily because it is anonymous. And so we must defer to the authority of the public record, which remains our only reliable witness. Its testimony is corroborated by the special delight that Gaius took in Antium; he always preferred that town to all other places of retreat, as if it were his native soil. It is alleged that when he grew tired of the city, he intended to transfer there the seat of empire itself.

[9] Gaius got the nickname Caligula²² from banter that went around the camp where he was being reared with the troops and dressed in the clothes of an ordinary soldier. The depth of the devoted affection that this upbringing gained him became particularly clear when the army rioted after the death of Augustus. It was the sight of Gaius and Gaius alone that had influence on the soldiers who were fast careening out of control. They did not stop until they

19. Suetonius introduces linguistic evidence to argue that the word *puerperium* can refer to either male or female births by noting that girls could be called by the feminine form of the word for "boy" and boys could be called by the masculine form of the word for "girl."

20. Evidently members of Augustus' household staff, probably freedmen.

21. May 18, 14 CE.

22. A diminutive form of *caligae*, military boots.

realized that he was being removed from the danger of mutiny and trusted to the care of a nearby town. Then, finally, they were sorry for their actions. They took hold of the wagon carrying him to keep it from moving on and begged to be relieved of the disgrace that his departure would cause them.

[10.1] Gaius also accompanied his father on his Syrian assignment. When he returned to Rome, he lived first with his mother and then, when she was sent into exile, stayed on with his great-grandmother Livia Augusta. When Livia died, he delivered her cology from the rostra, at that time still wearing the *toga praetextata*. He then moved into his grandmother Antonia's household, and when he was in his nineteenth year, Tiberius summoned him to Capri.²³ There, he put on the adult toga and shaved for the first time, both on the same day, but without the ceremony that had attended the initiation of his brothers into public life. [10.2] On Capri there were those who used every kind of devious trick to coax him and put pressure on him to air his grievances, but he never rose to the bait. It was as if he had forgotten the disasters that had befallen his family, and he acted as if nothing had happened to any of them. His pretense was incredible when he also ignored the wrongs that he had suffered himself. He was so subservient to his grandfather Tiberius and to those in his court that it was said, quite rightly, "There has never been a better servant or a worse master."

[11] But not even during this period was Gaius able to control his cruel nature and disgraceful appetites. He attended the torture and execution of condemned people and spent his nights visiting cheap taverns and brothels disguised in a wig and women's clothing. He worked energetically to become proficient at the stage arts of dancing and singing. Tiberius quite willingly tolerated his acquiring these skills because he hoped that they would soften the rough edges of his character. The keen-witted old man had come to understand Gaius so thoroughly that he made these predictions on a number of occasions: "If Gaius lives, it will mean my own death and the end of everyone else." And: "I am nurturing a viper for the Roman people and a Phaethon²⁴ for the world."

23. Tiberius had retreated from Rome to the island of Capri in 27 CE; see *Tib.* 40–41.

24. Phaethon, the exemplar of a youth in over his head, drove the chariot of the sun too close to the earth and damaged the world.

[12.1] Gaius soon married Junia Claudilla, the daughter of Marcus Silanus,²⁵ a ranking member of the aristocracy. Next he was named *augur* to take the place of his brother Drusus, but before he assumed office, he was promoted to a senior priesthood on the strong recommendation of the loyalty he had shown his family and as its rising member. With the court totally devoid of anyone else to prop up the imperial house and Sejanus²⁶ even then under suspicion and soon to be destroyed, he was gradually led to hope for the principate. [12.2] To support this hope, Gaius seduced Ennia Naevia, the wife of Macro,²⁷ at that time in charge of the praetorian cohorts; Junia had died in childbirth. Gaius promised to marry Ennia should he become emperor, and he guaranteed this promise by sworn oath and in writing. He used her to work his way into a close relationship with Macro and then poisoned Tiberius (as some think) and ordered the signet ring to be pulled from the emperor's finger while he was still alive. When Tiberius gave a slight sign that he wanted to keep it, Gaius had a pillow put over his face and, for good measure, strangled him with his own hands.²⁸ (A freedman was immediately crucified when he protested that this was a wicked crime.) [12.3] And it may well be true (some writers record it) that Gaius later confessed, not to actual parricide but to parricide that he had on one occasion surely intended to carry out. For when he was calling attention to the dutifulness that he showed his family (something he did constantly), he boasted that he had entered the bedroom of the sleeping Tiberius, dagger in hand, intent on avenging the deaths of his mother and brothers, but that overcome by pity, he had thrown away his weapon and retreated. Although Tiberius was aware of what had happened, he dared neither to investigate nor pursue the matter.

[13] After Gaius had become emperor in this less than commendable way, he was the answer to the prayers of the Roman people, or should I say, of all humankind.²⁹ He was the prince that most

25. Marcus Junius Silanus, suffect consul in 15 CE; see 23.3.

26. Lucius Aelius Sejanus, Tiberius' powerful praetorian prefect who fell in 31 CE; see *Tib.* 65.

27. Lucius Naevius Sutorius Macro. Tiberius had used him to get rid of Sejanus.

28. See *Tib.* 73.2 for other versions of the death of Tiberius.

29. He became emperor on March 18, 37 CE.

provincials and most of the soldiers had longed for because many had known him when he was a small child. But the entire population of Rome also awaited him eagerly, for they remembered his father Germanicus and pitied his family that had been almost completely wiped out. And so when he left Misenum,³⁰ even though he was escorting Tiberius' funeral train dressed as a mourner, his journey took him past altars, sacrificial victims, and flaming torches, and he was met by a dense crowd of happy well-wishers. They called him "shining star," "chick," "little boy," and "dear child," as well as names that promised good luck. [14.1] When Gaius entered Rome, the senate validated the desires of the unruly mob that was breaking into the senate house by granting him all the powers of state immediately. Tiberius' wishes were ignored; in his will he had made his other grandson, still wearing the *toga praetextata*,³¹ coheir with Gaius. Gaius' assumption of power was greeted with public rejoicing so widespread that within the next three months, or even less, more than 160,000 animals are said to have been sacrificed for him.

[14.2] When Gaius crossed over to the islands lying off Campania³² a few days later, prayers were raised for his return, and no one let pass even the slightest opportunity to display concern for his safety. And then when Gaius fell ill and all-night vigils were being held around the Palatine, some promised to fight as gladiators if the ailing emperor recovered and others promised to exchange their lives for his, and they posted notices to that effect. [14.3] Foreigners added their own significant devotion to the great affection that the citizens of Rome felt for him. Artabanus, king of the Parthians, for example, who never made a secret of his hatred and contempt for Tiberius, sought friendship with Gaius of his own accord, entered into discussion with the consular legate, and crossed the Euphrates to pay homage to the Roman eagles and the military standards that carried portraits of the Caesars.

[15.1] Gaius did his own share of stirring enthusiastic support in the people by bidding for popularity in every way he could. His tears flowed freely when he praised Tiberius before a public assembly.

30. Where Tiberius died.

31. Tiberius Gemellus, the survivor of the twins born to Tiberius' biological son Drusus in 20 CE.

32. More properly lying off Latium. His purpose was to bring back the ashes of his mother and brother; see 15.1.

He buried him with impressive pomp and then hurried quickly to Pandataria and the Pontian islands to retrieve the ashes of his mother and brother. The wild storm raging at the time made this show of piety more conspicuous. He approached their remains with reverence and placed their ashes in urns with his own hands. With the same sense of theater, he sailed to Ostia in a bireme, a military banner flying from its stern, and from there up the Tiber to Rome. He had the most prominent members of the equestrian order carry the urns to the Mausoleum on separate stretchers, at midday when a large crowd was on hand. He provided for funeral sacrifices to be made for them every year with due ceremony. For his mother he was even more generous; there were chariot races and a ceremonial carriage to carry her image in the circus procession. [15.2] In memory of his father, he named the month of September "Germanicus." And then, for his grandmother Antonia, he gathered all the honors that Livia Augusta had ever received and had the senate award them to her by a single action. His uncle Claudius, still a Roman knight, he made his colleague in the consulship. His brother Tiberius Gemellus he adopted on the day that the young man received the toga of manhood, and he called him Prince of the Youth.³³ [15.3] As for his sisters, he saw to it that they were included in every oath of allegiance: "I shall hold neither myself nor my children more dear than I hold Gaius and his sisters." Similar words introduced the consuls' proposals to the senate: "May goodwill and good fortune attend Gaius Caesar and his sisters."

[15.4] Equally popular were Gaius' pardon of the condemned and his restoration of exiles. He dismissed all criminal charges pending from the preceding reign. He collected in the Forum the written documents that had to do with the cases against his mother and brothers, and he burned them so that no informer or witness would have reason to be afraid in the future. But first, in a loud voice, he called the gods to witness that he had neither read nor touched any of the documents. When a note warning him of danger was handed to him, he refused to take it, maintaining that he had done nothing to make anyone hate him. And he said that he would not give ear to informers.

33. Both were grandsons of Tiberius. Latin can use "brother" to mean "cousin." The choice of the word here is ironic in view of Gaius' later treatment of Gemellus. See *Cal.* 23.3, 29.1.

[16.1] Gaius removed the *spintriae*³⁴ from Rome; it was only with difficulty that he was persuaded not to drown these performers of obscene acts in the depths of the sea. He allowed the writings of Titus Labienus, Cordus Crematius, and Cassius Severus,³⁵ banned by order of the senate, to be located, owned, and read. He said, "It is very much in my interest that what has happened be made known to future generations." He made available the state's financial records. Augustus had posted these routinely, but Tiberius had discontinued the practice. [16.2] He allowed magistrates to dispense justice free from interference and without appealing to him. He reviewed the order of Roman knights strictly and carefully but with restraint; he took away the horses of those tainted by scandal or disgrace in full view of the public, but the names of those guilty of lesser offenses were merely omitted when the roll was read. To lighten the workload of jurors, he added a fifth jury panel to the four that already existed. He tried to restore voting rights to the citizen body by reviving the traditional electoral assemblies.

[16.3] Even though Tiberius' will was suppressed, Gaius immediately paid its bequests in full, honestly and without quibbling. He also honored the bequests in Julia Augusta's³⁶ will that Tiberius had held back. He abolished the tax of half of one percent on auctioned property in Italy and compensated many for property that they had lost from fire. Whenever he returned a kingdom to its prince, Gaius awarded him both the income from taxes and the revenue collected in the intervening years. Antiochus of Commagene,³⁷ for instance, received 100 million sesterces. [16.4] So as to increase the belief that he was an advocate for every kind of good behavior, he gave 800,000 sesterces to a freedwoman because she had kept silent about a crime committed by her former master, despite the fact that she was subjected to relentless torture. In recognition of these measures, he was voted, among other honors, a golden shield that members of the important priesthoods were to carry to the Capitol on a specified day every year. The senate followed in procession, as did boys and

34. See *Tib.* 43.1.

35. Writers who wrote under Augustus and were critical of the principate.

36. Augustus' wife Livia.

37. Commagene was a Roman province from 18 CE until Gaius restored it to the status of client kingdom in 37.

girls of noble families singing a hymn in praise of his goodness. A further decree named the day on which he came to power "Parilia,"³⁸ in token, as it were, of the city's second founding.

[17.1] He was consul four times, the first time from the Kalends of July for two months, the second time for thirty days from the Kalends of January, the third until the Ides of January, and the fourth until the seventh day before the Ides of the same month. The last two consulships fell in sequential years.³⁹ He began the third by himself in Lugdunum,⁴⁰ not, as some think, because he was arrogant and failed to follow precedent but because he was not in Rome and could not know that his colleague had died just before the Kalends.

[17.2] Twice he made gifts of 300 sesterces to each citizen, and twice he gave lavish feasts for the senate and the equestrian order and for their wives and children as well. At the second of these banquets he also gave presents, togas to the men and bands of cloth dyed shades of purple to the women and young people. And to keep the public happy in the future, he added a day to the Saturnalia and called it the Day for Youth.

[18.1] Gaius produced a number of gladiatorial contests, sometimes in the amphitheater of Taurus, sometimes in the Saepta, and he included troops of African and Campanian boxers, the best available from each region. He did not always preside in person at these shows but sometimes gave the task to elected officials or to his friends. [18.2] He regularly presented theatrical productions of various kinds at a range of sites. They sometimes even took place at night with the whole city lit up. He tossed out tokens that could be redeemed for various prizes and distributed baskets of delicacies to individuals. At one feast he sent his own portion of food around to a Roman knight who was sitting opposite him and laughing and eating with great gusto. To a senator who was enjoying himself the same way, he sent a document in which he named him praetor out of the regular order.⁴¹ [18.3] He produced a great many circus games as well, and these lasted from morning until evening. Sometimes

38. A spring agricultural festival celebrated as Rome's birthday.

39. Suetonius is in error. The last three fell in sequential years: July and August of 37 CE; January of 39; January 1-13, 40; January 1-7, 41.

40. Modern Lyon.

41. His name would be at the top of the list of candidates, and his election would be certain.

between races there were beast hunts featuring African cats and sometimes a performance of the Game of Troy. There were special races when red and green sand was spread over the racetrack⁴² and all the chariot drivers were senators. Gaius also started unscheduled races when a few people in the nearby stands asked him for them while he was watching preparations for the Circus from the Gelotiana.⁴³

[19.1] In addition to these spectacles, he invented a new kind, never heard of before. He bridged the distance between Baiae and the breakwater at Puteoli, a space of about 3,600 paces, by gathering merchant ships from everywhere and anchoring them in a double line. Earth was piled on top and a road like the Appian Way constructed. [19.2] Gaius traveled over the bridge and then back again on two consecutive days. On the first he rode a decorated warhorse and looked splendid with his crown of oak leaves,⁴⁴ his shield and sword, and a golden cloak; on the second, he was dressed as a race driver and drove a chariot drawn by a pair of his horses that everyone recognized. With him he had the boy Darius, one of the Parthian hostages, and he was escorted by a column of praetorians and a group of his friends in war chariots of their own. [19.3] I know that many have thought that Gaius got the idea for this bridge from a desire to rival Xerxes, who was admired for bridging the shorter span of the Hellespont. Others have thought that he was trying to frighten Germany and Britain, where he was contemplating conquest, with the report of some kind of massive building project. But when I was a boy, I used to hear my grandfather say that court insiders gave as the reason that the astrologer Thrasyllus had made this promise to Tiberius, who was worried about his successor and leaning toward his biological grandson:⁴⁵ "Gaius will no more become emperor than he will ride about over the bay of Baiae with his horses."

42. The racing teams were named by their colors: green, blue, red, and white. Gaius favored the Greens and the Reds, which were evidently subordinate to the Greens.

43. Apparently a building on the Palatine Hill, possibly part of the palace complex.

44. The oak leaf crown was an important reward for saving the life of a Roman citizen.

45. Tiberius Gemellus.

[20] Gaius also produced games abroad, Attic games at Syracuse in Sicily and an assortment at Lugdunum in Gaul. The latter included a competition of Greek and Latin oratory in which we are told that the losers were forced to award prizes to the winners and compose speeches praising them. But the contestants who had been received especially badly were ordered to erase what they had written using their tongues as a sponge—unless they preferred to be beaten by rods or plunged into the nearby river.

[21] Gaius completed work on some public buildings left unfinished by Tiberius, the temple of Augustus and the theater of Pompey. He also began work on an aqueduct that had its source in the region of Tibur and on an amphitheater next to the Saepta. His successor, Claudius, completed the first of these projects but stopped work on the second. At Syracuse, Gaius rebuilt the city wall that had collapsed from age and restored the temples of the gods. He had intended to restore the royal palace of Polycrates⁴⁶ on the island of Samos, finish the shrine to Apollo at Didyma near Miletus,⁴⁷ and found a city on an alpine ridge. But his most ambitious project was to dig through the isthmus in the province of Achaia,⁴⁸ and he had already sent a *primipilaris* to make a survey of the worksite.

[22.1] So far, this has been about an emperor—so to speak. What is left is about a monster.

Gaius had acquired a number of descriptive names (he was called “dutiful,” “child of the camp,” “father of the armies,” and “best and greatest Caesar”⁴⁹) by the time he chanced to hear kings who had come to Rome to pay him their respects arguing at dinner about their noble lineages. He shouted out, “Let there be one lord, one king!”⁵⁰ At that moment he came close to putting on the royal diadem and turning what had the appearance of a principate into the reality of a monarchy. [22.2] But assured that his eminence surpassed that of both emperors and kings, he began, from then on, to claim divine majesty for himself. Arrangements were made to bring statues of the gods from Greece, the statues most famous for the reverence

46. A tyrant of the sixth century BCE.

47. A city on the coast of Asia, opposite Samos.

48. The Isthmus of Corinth.

49. A play on Optimus Maximus Jupiter = “Best and Greatest Jupiter.”

50. Homer, *Iliad* 2.204.

they inspired or for their artistic excellence, among them the Jupiter from Olympia.⁵¹ Gaius intended to remove their heads and replace them with his own. He extended a section of the palace complex on the Palatine into the Forum and remodeled the temple of Castor and Pollux as its entrance hall. He often stood motionless in the middle, between the statues of the divine brothers, and offered himself as an object for adoration to those who approached. Some greeted him as Jupiter Latiaris.⁵²

[22.3] Gaius set up a temple for the worship of his own divine essence; he gave it priests and authorized the sacrifice of unusual victims. The temple held a golden statue that looked just like him, and every day it was dressed in clothes like the ones he was wearing himself. All the richest men competed for the priesthoods by campaigning and running up the bidding. The victims were flamingos, peacocks, black grouse, two kinds of guinea fowl, and pheasants—a different species sacrificed on each successive day. [22.4] To cap this, at night when the moon was full and shining brightly, he would over and over again invite the goddess into his embrace and into his bed. But during the day he made a habit of speaking privately with Jupiter Capitolinus, sometimes whispering to him and listening to his reply, but sometimes speaking quite loudly in an angry voice; he could be heard threatening, “Either you lift me, or I’ll lift you!”⁵³ The god on his own initiative invited the emperor to come live with him and finally convinced him to do so—as Gaius claimed, for he joined the Palatine and Capitoline hills with a bridge stretched across the roof of the temple of the Divine Augustus.⁵⁴ To be closer yet, he soon laid the foundations of a new house in front of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

[23.1] Gaius did not want to be thought of as the grandson of Agrippa⁵⁵ or called by his name because of this ancestor’s undistinguished origin; he became incensed if anyone inserted Agrippa into the genealogy of the Caesars in either a speech or a poem. He

51. It never arrived; see 57.1.

52. The temple of Jupiter Latiaris stood on the Alban Mount outside Rome; ovations, lesser triumphs, were celebrated there.

53. Homer, *Iliad* 23.724, where wrestling is the context.

54. The temple evidently stood in the low land between the two hills.

55. Marcus Agrippa.

even claimed that his mother had been conceived in an incestuous coupling of Augustus with his daughter Julia. Not content with this attack on Augustus, he forbade the victories at Actium and off the coast of Sicily to be celebrated as formal holidays but declared them terrible disasters for the Roman people. [23.2] His great-grandmother Livia Augusta he often called a "Ulysses in matron's dress,"⁵⁶ and he even had the nerve to write the senate a letter in which he alleged that she came from an undistinguished family. He claimed that she was descended from a maternal grandfather who had been a local magistrate at Fundi,⁵⁷ although it is certain on the evidence of the public record that Aufidius Lurco served as a magistrate at Rome. When his grandmother Antonia asked for a private interview, he refused to talk with her unless the praetorian prefect Macro was present as well. Insults and unpleasant experiences like this caused her death, but some think that he also gave her poison. He did not honor her when she was dead but watched her funeral pyre burn from his dining room.

[23.3] Gaius had his unwary brother Tiberius⁵⁸ killed by a military tribune sent to take him by surprise, and he forced his father-in-law Silanus to kill himself by cutting his throat with a razor. He made charges to explain both murders: Silanus had not gone with him when he set out to sea in foul weather but had stayed behind in hope of taking control of the city if something happened to him in the storm. Tiberius smelled of an antidote to poison that he had supposedly taken to protect himself from Gaius. But, in fact, Silanus had avoided sea travel because it was unpleasant for him and caused nausea, and Tiberius had taken medicine for a persistent and worsening cough. As for his uncle Claudius, Gaius only kept him alive to make him the butt of his jokes.

[24.1] Gaius made a habit of having sex with all of his sisters, and at a large banquet he placed each of them in turn on the couch just below him, while his wife reclined on the couch above.⁵⁹ He is

56. Sly cunning was associated with Ulysses (Odysseus).

57. See *Tib.* 5.

58. Tiberius Gemellus; for "brother," see note on 15.2.

59. The host (in this case, the emperor) took the upper position on the lowest couch. His wife lay below him on the same couch and the guest of honor at the lowest place on the middle couch. Gaius rotated his sisters through the wife's position and gave his wife the seat of honor.

thought to have violated the virginity of Drusilla before he came of age; his grandmother Antonia, in whose house they were being reared together, once caught him in bed with her. Gaius took Drusilla away from her husband, the consular Lucius Cassius Longinus, and installed her openly as his wife. When he fell ill, he named her heir to both his goods and to the empire. [24.2] And when she died,⁶⁰ he declared a period of mourning during which it was a capital offense to laugh, bathe, or dine with one's parents, wife, or children. Unable to bear his grief, he left the city suddenly at night and traveled quickly across Campania. He went to Syracuse and then returned again just as quickly after growing a beard and letting his hair grow long. And never afterward, however important the question at hand, not even when addressing the people or before the troops, did he swear an oath except by the godhead of Drusilla. [24.3] As for his other sisters, he desired them less intensely and accorded them less honor to the point that he often made them available to his stable of male prostitutes. He did this so that it would be easier to find them guilty at the trial of Marcus Lepidus when they were charged with adultery and complicity in the plot against him.⁶¹ Gaius not only made public the documents that all of the conspirators had signed and that he had gotten hold of through ruse and sexual entrapment; he also dedicated to Mars the Avenger three swords that had been readied for his death and put with them an explanatory inscription.

[25.1] It is difficult to say whether Gaius' behavior was more disgusting when he married, when he divorced, or when he kept a wife. Livia Orestilla was being married to Gaius Piso when the emperor, who was himself attending the ceremony, ordered the bride brought to his own house. He divorced her within a few days and two years later sent her into exile because she had apparently resumed relations with her former husband in the interval. Others say that at the wedding feast he sent a message to Piso, who was reclining opposite him: "Don't have sex with my wife!" He immediately took her away from the banquet with him and the next day issued a proclamation declaring, "I have married after the example of Romulus and

60. June 10, 38 CE.

61. Gaius had Drusilla married to Marcus Aemilius Lepidus after taking her from her first husband. At first Lepidus supported Gaius, but in 39 CE he was condemned for treason and executed.

Augustus.⁶² [25.2] Lollia Paulina was the wife of Gaius Memmius, a man of consular rank with a military command.⁶³ When Gaius heard that her grandmother had been very beautiful in her day, he all of a sudden summoned Lollia from the province, got her in his bed (her husband acted the pimp), then quickly sent her away and barred her from having sexual intercourse with anyone ever again. [25.3] Caesonia was not especially attractive nor was she young, and she was already the mother of three daughters by another man, but Gaius loved this woman of boundless sexual appetite more passionately and more faithfully than he did the others. He showed her off to the troops as she rode next to him dressed in a cloak and carrying an Amazon's shield and helmet; he even let his friends see her bare-breasted.⁶⁴ He did not honor her with the name of wife until after she had given birth but declared that he had become, on one and the same day, a husband and the father of a baby girl. [25.4] He paraded the child, whom he named Julia Drusilla, through the temples of all the goddesses and then placed her in the lap of Minerva and entrusted her to the goddess' care and instruction. He thought that there was no more convincing proof of his paternity than the fiercely aggressive behavior that she displayed, even at a young age, when she used her savage little fingers to go after the faces and eyes of the children she played with. [26.1] It would be pointless to add to this dreary list, to describe the way he treated his other relations and his friends, Ptolemy, for instance, the son of King Juba, who was his cousin (he too was a grandson of Mark Antony through his daughter Selene), and significantly, even Macro and Ennia, who had helped him become emperor. A bloody death awaited all of them, either recompense for the family connection or in payment for their good offices.

[26.2] Gaius was just as disrespectful and harsh toward the senate. He permitted some who had held the highest offices to run beside his war chariot for several miles dressed in their togas. Or he let them attend him when he ate; they stood, dressed as slaves, sometimes at the head of his dining couch, sometimes at the foot. Others he

62. Legend has it that the first Romans took wives from the Sabines by force. Augustus took Livia from her former husband; see *Aug.* 62.2.

63. Publius (Gaius is incorrect) Memmius Regulus commanded legions in Moesia, Macedonia, and Achaia.

64. Amazons had to be unencumbered in order to fight.

murdered in secret but continued to summon as if they were still living. A few days later he would lie, saying that they had killed themselves. [26.3] He removed the consuls from office when they forgot to give public notice of his birthday, and for a period of three days Rome had no government. When his quaestor was implicated in a conspiracy, he had him flogged. The clothes stripped from him were put under the feet of the soldiers so that they would have firmer footing when they beat him.

[26.4] He dealt with the other strata of Roman society with this same arrogance and inappropriate force. Once when he was disturbed during the night by the noise of the crowd filling up the free seats in the Circus, he had all of them driven out with clubs. More than twenty Roman knights were crushed to death in the panic as were an equal number of respectable women and countless others. He started a fight between the common people and equestrians at a theatrical performance when he opened up the section reserved for knights too early and the rabble took the places for themselves. [26.5] Sometimes at gladiatorial contests, when the sun was very hot, he pulled back the awning shading the spectators and refused to let anyone leave. He did away with the usual arrangements for the gladiatorial games and instead sent into the arena emaciated beasts, totally contemptible old gladiators, and in place of comic fighters, respectable heads of households who had noticeable disabilities of some sort. And he sometimes made the people starve by closing the granaries.

[27.1] Here are some of the things Gaius did that best illustrate his innate cruelty: Since the cattle purchased to feed the wild beasts being readied for the arena were quite expensive, he selected criminals for the beasts to rip apart instead. Standing no closer than the middle of the colonnade, he examined a row of prisoners, ignored the charges against them, and ordered them to be led off "from baldhead to baldhead."⁶⁵ [27.2] He exacted payment of the vow made by the man who had promised to fight as a gladiator in return for his recovery. He watched him fight and did not let him leave the arena until he had won his contest and begged repeatedly to be let go. When a second man (the one who had promised to give his life for the same reason) hesitated, Gaius handed him over to his slaves, ordering them to demand fulfillment of the vow. Carrying a ceremonial branch and wearing a sacred headband, the man was driven

65. The phrase illustrates Gaius' capricious cruelty.

through the neighborhoods of Rome until he was forced headlong from the rampart surrounding the city.⁶⁶ [27.3] Gaius condemned many men of the upper class to the mines or roadwork or to face the beasts in the arena, and he first disfigured them by branding them like criminals. Or he shut them up in cages on all fours like animals or cut them in two with a saw. Not all of these were punished for serious crimes but because they had criticized the games that he presented or because they had never taken an oath in the name of his Genius.⁶⁷ [27.4] He forced fathers to be present at the executions of their sons and sent a litter to fetch one who begged off because he was ill. Another father he invited to dinner immediately after he had witnessed his son's punishment and, all affability, tried to get him to laugh and joke. He had his curator of gladiatorial games and beast fights beaten with chains in his presence day after day, but he did not have him killed until he was disgusted by the smell of his decaying brain. He burned to death the author of an Atellan farce in the middle of the amphitheater because he had written a line with double meaning. When a Roman knight whom he had thrown to the beasts shouted out that he was innocent, Gaius retrieved him but then sent him back again with his tongue cut out.

[28] He asked a man recalled after a long exile how he had spent his time away. The man replied, trying to flatter, "I always prayed to the gods that Tiberius would die and that you would become emperor—and that's what happened." This made Gaius think that the people whom he had himself exiled were praying for his death in the same way, and he dispatched agents around the islands to kill them all. When he very much wanted to have a senator torn to pieces, he instructed other senators to attack him without warning as he was entering the senate house and to call him an enemy of the state, and then, once they had stabbed him with their styluses, to hand him over to others to be dismembered. He was not satisfied until he saw the man's body parts, legs, and entrails dragged through the neighborhoods of the city and piled up in front of him.

[29.1] Gaius' vicious words made his brutal deeds worse. He used to say that there was nothing he liked better or found more laudable in his own character than (I use his word) his *adiatrepsia*, that is,

66. Their vows are described at 14.2. The second man was made a sacrificial victim.

67. The divine spirit within him.

his "shamelessness."⁶⁸ When his grandmother Antonia gave him advice, he said to her—as if ignoring her were not enough—"Keep this in mind: I can do anything I want to anyone I want." About to kill his brother whom he suspected of taking medicine to make himself resistant to poison, he asked, "Is there an antidote for Caesar?" When he sent his sisters into exile, he threatened, "I not only have islands; I have swords as well." [29.2] A praetor who had retreated to Anticyra for his health petitioned once too often to extend his leave of absence from Rome. When Gaius ordered him killed, he added, "Bloodletting is necessary in a case where a course of hellebore as long as this has proved useless."⁶⁹ Whenever he signed execution orders for prisoners who were to be put to death on the tenth day after their convictions, he would say that he was "balancing the books." He boasted that he had "subdued Gallograecia"⁷⁰ when a number of Gauls and Greeks were found guilty at the same time. [30.1] He rarely allowed anyone to be executed other than by repeated small thrusts of the knife; his instruction never varied and became notorious: "Strike so that he can feel that he is dying!" When the wrong man was executed because of mistaken identity, he said that the dead man deserved to be punished, too. He was constantly shouting the proverbial line from tragedy: "Let them hate—provided they fear!"⁷¹

[30.2] Gaius would often lash out at the entire senate, calling them dependents of Sejanus and informants against his mother and his brothers. He produced the documents that he had pretended to burn⁷² and defended Tiberius' cruelty to his family as necessary since there had been so many accusers that he had to believe them. He frequently castigated the equestrians, rebuking them for their devotion to the stage and arena. Furious with the crowd when it pre-

68. The Greek word may have been Gaius' coinage. If taken positively, it means "steadfastness" but spun negatively, "stubbornness." "Shamelessness" may be Suetonius' interpretation.

69. Anticyra was a spa in Greece known for a medicinal herb, hellebore, that was useful as a purgative, among other things. A praetor was allowed to be away from Rome for a total of only ten days during the year when he was in office.

70. Another name for Galatia.

71. Tiberius is alleged to have uttered a version of this line; see *Tib.* 59.2.

72. See 15.4.

ferred another gladiator to his favorite, he shouted, "Would that the Roman people had a single neck!" And when the people demanded that the bandit Tetrinius appear in the arena, he said that those who were demanding him were Tetriniuses themselves. [30.3] A group of five *retarii* wearing tunics surrendered to five *secutores* without much of a struggle. They had been ordered killed when one of them picked up his trident and slaughtered all the winners.⁷³ Gaius deplored this and issued an edict in which he termed it a very savage brand of murder and expressed his disgust at those who had been able to endure the sight. [31] He even complained openly about the age in which he lived, because it had not been marked by disasters felt by the population as a whole: Augustus' principate had been memorable for the disaster of Varus, that of Tiberius by the collapse of the viewing stands at Fidenae. The prosperity of the present time threatened to cast his own reign into oblivion, and he repeatedly expressed a wish for military disaster, famine, plague, fires, or an earthquake somewhere.

[32.1] Gaius' actions and his speech were just as cruel when he was not attending to duty, when he was amusing himself and enjoying the pleasures of the table. Often when he was at lunch or a celebration, he would watch important investigations being carried out under torture or else a soldier expert at decapitation cutting off the heads of some of the prisoners. At the ceremony that opened the bridge at Puteoli (we have already mentioned this structure that he invented),⁷⁴ he invited a large number of people to leave the shore and join him but then suddenly threw them all overboard, and the ones who grabbed hold of the rudders he pushed into the water with poles and oars. [32.2] When a slave took a strip of silver from a dining couch at a public banquet in Rome, Gaius turned him over to an executioner on the spot, and he was paraded through the company of diners with his hands cut off and hung in front of him around his neck and with a placard going ahead that gave the reason for his punishment. Once when he and a novice training as a *murmillo* in the gladiatorial school were sparring with wooden swords, his opponent intentionally assumed the posture of surrender. Gaius stabbed him with a real dagger and ran about with a palm branch like a victorious

73. Those who surrendered were at the mercy of the crowd and the person presiding.

74. See chapter 19.

gladiator. [32.3] On another occasion, Gaius was waiting, dressed as the priest's assistant, when a sacrificial victim was being brought to the altar. He lifted his mallet high and made the assistant holding the knife his victim. And once he burst out laughing at an elaborate dinner party; when the consuls sitting next to him were curious and asked what he was laughing at, he said, "What? Only that a nod from me could have the throat of either of you slit instantly."

[33] Here are some witty things that he said: He stood next to a statue of Jupiter and asked the tragic actor Apelles which of them he thought was greater. When the actor hesitated, he had him cut to pieces with whips. When Apelles pleaded for mercy, Gaius praised his voice from time to time and said that it was very sweet, even when he groaned. Whenever he kissed the neck of his wife or a mistress, he added, "This neck, beautiful as it is, will be severed the minute I give the order." And finally, he sometimes bragged, "I will find out from my wife Caesonia why I love her so—even if it takes the rack."

[34.1] With envy and spite that equaled his arrogance and cruelty, Gaius assaulted virtually the whole of humankind—whenever they had lived. He toppled the statues of famous men that Augustus had removed from the crowded Capitoline precinct to the Campus Martius, and he scattered their pieces so thoroughly that they could not be set up again with the proper identifications. And he kept the statue or likeness of any living man from being raised anyplace ever again without his approval and sponsorship. [34.2] He even considered banishing the poems of Homer and asked, "Why can't I do what Plato did, when he banned him from the state that he invented?"⁷⁵ But he came close to removing the writings of both Virgil and Livy and their images from all the libraries. He criticized the first for lack of talent and insufficient learning, the second for wordiness and careless research. As for the jurists, in order to get rid of their expertise altogether, he would boast, "By god, I will see to it that they can offer no opinion that is not just."⁷⁶ [35.1] From individuals of high rank Gaius took honorific tokens that had belonged to their families for a long time: he took the torque from Torquatus, curls from Cincinnatus, and from Gnaeus Pompey, the nickname

75. Plato described his ideal state in the *Republic*.

76. Gaius was ostensibly the arbiter of what was "just."

The Great, which he had inherited from his ancestor.⁷⁷ Ptolemy, whom I mentioned earlier,⁷⁸ was summoned from his kingdom and received with honor. Then Gaius killed him without warning merely because he noticed that the splendid purple cloak Ptolemy was wearing had attracted the attention of the spectators when he took his seat at a gladiatorial contest at which Gaius himself was presiding. [35.2] Whenever he encountered men who were handsome and had generous heads of hair, he spoiled their good looks by having the backs of their heads shaved. There was a man named Aesius Proculus, the son of a *primipilaris*, who had the nickname Colosseros⁷⁹ because of his exceptional size and handsome appearance. Gaius dragged him precipitously from his seat at the games, forced him into the arena, and matched him first with a Thracian gladiator and then with a *hoplomachus*. He won both contests, but Gaius ordered him tied up at once and paraded through all the neighborhoods of the city dressed in rags and displayed to the women. Then he had his throat cut.

[35.3] In short, there was no one whose circumstances were so degraded, no one whose lot was so mean, that Gaius did not object to what advantages he had. Because the king of Nemi⁸⁰ had already held his priesthood for a number of years, Gaius found a stronger champion to depose him. Once at a gladiatorial show, when the crowd applauded an *essedarius* named Porius enthusiastically because he had set free the slave who was his driver after a successful fight, Gaius rushed from the stands so fast that he tripped on the hem of his toga and went headlong down the steps. Furious, he shouted, "A people that is the master of nations accords more honor to a gladiator on the cheapest of pretexts than to their deified emperors or to their present emperor—me!"

77. Decimus Junius Silanus Torquatus was descended from Augustus through Julia the Younger; the torque was a collar, a military decoration. Gnaeus Pompey was a descendant of Pompey the Great, distantly related to Gaius through Augustus' first wife. The legendary Cincinnatus got his nickname from his curly hair, but no obvious person is referred to here. This may be a joke referring to Gaius' thinning hair.

78. See 26.1.

79. "Large love."

80. A priest of the goddess Diana, normally a runaway slave, who was safe in his position until deposed by another slave.

[36.1] Gaius had no regard for decency in his own sexual behavior nor for that of anyone else. He is said to have had sex with Marcus Lepidus,⁸¹ with Mnester the pantomimist, and with certain hostages, and to have traded off roles with them.⁸² Valerius Catullus, a young man from a consular family, bragged to everyone that he had sodomized Gaius and that he was exhausted from sharing his bed. In addition to incest with his sisters and a notorious affair with the prostitute Pyralis, Gaius had difficulty keeping his hands off any woman of good reputation. [36.2] He would invite them to dinner along with their husbands, look them over as they passed by the foot of his couch, and assess them with the deliberation of a slave trader. He even used his hand to lift the face of any who looked down out of shame. And then, whenever it suited him, he called aside one whom he found especially attractive and left the dining room. A little later he would return, still showing traces of recent sex, and either praise his partner to the general company or find fault with her, enumerating the good or bad features of her body and her performance in bed. He took the initiative of sending notices of divorce to some of them using their husbands' names,⁸³ and he had the proceedings recorded that way in the daily register.

[37.1] The ingenuity with which Gaius managed his extravagant lifestyle exceeded that of all other spendthrifts. He thought up a new way to enjoy the baths and contrived very strange kinds of food and feasts, for he wanted to bathe in hot and cold perfumed oils, taste the most expensive pearls dissolved in vinegar, and set before his guests bread and cooked foods made of gold. He said, "A man has a choice: he can be stingy or be a Caesar."⁸⁴ Several days in succession he threw a considerable amount of money to the crowd from the roof of the Basilica Julia. [37.2] He built large Liburnian galleys with ten banks of oars. They had decks studded with precious stones, awnings of different colors, spacious baths and colonnades and banquet rooms, and all sorts of vines and fruit trees. He spent the day lounging on these as he coasted the shores of Campania,

81. His brother-in-law; see 24.3.

82. They took turns with the male and female roles.

83. Husbands could initiate divorce on grounds of adultery.

84. A relative was named Licinius Crassus Frugi; a Latin word for stingy is *frugi*.

entertained by singing and instrumental music. When it came to building mansions and country houses, he threw restraint to the winds and wanted to do nothing more than what was said could not be done. [37.3] Piers were built out onto the deep and menacing sea, the toughest bedrock was tunneled, level fields were heaped up like mountains, and mountain ranges were leveled by digging trenches. All this was done with unbelievable speed, since delay was punished by death. Without belaboring the details: Gaius spent a very large amount of money in a single year, 2,700 million sesterces, the entire sum he had inherited from Tiberius Caesar.

[38.1] With his resources exhausted and himself in need, Gaius turned to all sorts of ingenious plunder: He raised false legal issues, auctioned off his property, and imposed taxes. He claimed that those whose ancestors had obtained Roman citizenship for themselves and their descendants did not rightly hold it unless they were the sons of those who had acquired it, for the idea of "descendant" should not be understood as extending beyond that relationship. He dismissed as old and out of date the military discharges issued by the Divine Julius or the Divine Augustus. [38.2] He argued that a census report was invalid if any addition at all was later made to it for any reason.⁸⁵ He declared "undutiful," and thus invalid, the wills that *primipilares* had made from the beginning of Tiberius' reign if they did not include either Tiberius or himself as heir. He did the same with the wills of other people, declaring them null and void if the testator said that he intended to make Caesar an heir when he died but did not follow through. Fearing this, strangers anticipated the outcome and named Gaius an heir among the people they knew well, and fathers included his name among those of their children. Gaius accused such people of mocking him if they kept on living after making their intention known and sent many of them sweets laced with poison. [38.3] He presided over court proceedings that involved cases of this sort. First he calculated how much money he would raise by taking a case to trial, and then, when he reached his goal, he dismissed court. He refused to put up with even the slightest delay and once condemned more than forty people accused of a variety of crimes in a single judgment. He woke up Caesonia, who was sleeping, and bragged, "How much I have accomplished while you were taking a nap!"

85. The census included financial information.

[38.4] He held an auction and put on the block what was left over from all the entertainments that he had sponsored.⁸⁶ He bid the prices up himself and got them so high that some buyers opened their veins when they had been forced to exhaust their resources making expensive purchases. A notorious incident involved Aponius Saturninus, who dozed off while attending a sale. Gaius cautioned the auctioneer not to overlook the man of praetorian rank whose head kept nodding, and before the bidding was over, thirteen gladiators had been knocked down to him for 9 million sesterces without his knowing it. [39.1] After Gaius had held an auction in Gaul and sold at a very high price the personal property, household furnishings, slaves, and even the freedmen that belonged to his condemned sisters, his greed prompted him to bring from the city the contents of the old palace of Augustus. Hired wagons and the mules that turned millstones were pressed into service to transport the furniture. As a result, bread was often scarce at Rome, and a large number of litigants lost their cases because they could not present themselves in court in person on the appointed date. [39.2] When it came to selling these furnishings, there was no limit to Gaius' guile and flattery. First he accused individuals of being greedy and of not feeling shame because they were richer than he; then he pretended that he was embarrassed about making the property of the imperial house available to private individuals. When he learned that a wealthy provincial had paid 200,000 sesterces to the stewards in charge of his invitation list to slip him into one of his banquets, he was not unhappy that the honor of his table carried so high a price. The next day, when the man was attending an auction, Gaius sent someone to hand him a small trinket with a price tag of 200,000 sesterces and to convey to him that he would dine with Caesar at the emperor's invitation.

[40] Gaius levied new taxes that had never before been heard of. At first he used tax farmers to collect them but later, because they were bringing in so much money, centurions and tribunes of the praetorian guard. No source of revenue or segment of the population fell beneath his notice when he imposed some kind of tax. A specific fixed amount was levied on cooked food everywhere in the city. On lawsuits and court judgments, wherever they were initiated, the tax was one-fortieth of the money at stake, and a penalty was attached if it was shown that someone had settled out of court or dropped his

86. This included gladiators who had survived the arena.

suit. From porters he took one-eighth of their daily profits and from the wages of prostitutes, the amount earned from one customer. An addendum to the lead paragraph of the law stipulated that both those who had been prostitutes and those who had kept brothels were subject to the tax and that they remained liable even if they married. [41.1] Taxes like these were imposed but not posted, and there were many failures to pay, since no one knew what had been stipulated. Finally, in response to the angry demands of the people, Gaius posted the legislation but had it written in very small letters and hung in a place extremely difficult to access so that no one could transcribe it.

In order not to miss any opportunity for the spoils he thought his due, he established a brothel on the Palatine. He fitted out a large number of cubicles in an elegant style appropriate to the special location, and there respectable married women and freeborn young men were to be displayed. He sent representatives around the markets and assembly places to invite young and old alike to the pleasures of his establishment. When they arrived, money was made available to them (at interest), and scribes were on hand to record their names for all to see as contributors to Caesar's income. [41.2] There was no source of revenue that he thought unseemly, even dicing. But he found more profit in deception, not to mention outright lies. He once gave up his turn at a game of dice to the person sitting next to him and went into the courtyard of the house where they were playing. When he saw two wealthy knights passing by, he immediately ordered them arrested and their property seized, and then he returned to the game, gloating and boasting that he had never enjoyed a more profitable throw of the dice.

[42] But when his daughter was born, he complained that he was poor since the responsibilities of parenthood had now been added to those of empire, and he accepted contributions for the little girl's maintenance and dowry. He announced that he would receive New Year's gifts and stood on the porch of the temple of the Capitoline Jupiter on the Kalends of January to receive them. A crowd representative of every social class placed their small offerings before him, pouring them out from full hands and from the folds of their togas. He was eventually seized by a desire actually to touch his money, and he walked back and forth barefoot over the huge piles of gold coins spread out over a large area and rolled around on them for a long time.

[43] Only once was Gaius concerned with military affairs or involved in actual fighting and then it was by accident. When he had journeyed to Mevania⁸⁷ to visit the river Clitumnus and its sacred grove, he was advised by the oracle to fill out the ranks of his bodyguard of Batavians,⁸⁸ who were accompanying him, and he conceived the idea of mounting an expedition against the Germans. He did not delay but called in legions and auxiliary troops from all quarters, imposed a heavy draft of new forces everywhere, amassed supplies of all kinds in quantities never seen before, and set out on his march. He was sometimes in such a hurry that the praetorian cohorts had to load their standards on pack animals and follow along after them, contrary to their normal practice. But at other times his journey was so leisurely and comfortable that he traveled in a sedan chair carried by eight bearers, and he ordered the inhabitants of the municipalities through which they passed to sweep the roads and sprinkle them with water on account of the dust. [44.1] When he arrived at the camp,⁸⁹ he was eager to prove that he was a strict and energetic general. He dismissed in disgrace the officers who had not brought the auxiliary forces in from their various posts quickly enough. He reviewed the troops and got rid of senior centurions on the grounds that they were of advanced age and in poor physical condition, although many were in fact experienced veterans, some only a few days short of retirement. He complained that the rest were greedy, and he reduced retirement benefits to 6,000 sesterces for those eligible.

[44.2] But the only thing that came of all this was the surrender of Adminius, the son of the British king Cynobellinus. Adminius deserted to the Romans after he and a small band of followers had been banished by his father. Gaius claimed that the whole island had been handed over to him, sent a splendid victory announcement to Rome, and instructed the praetorians who carried it to continue in their carriage all the way to the Forum and the curia and not to deliver their message except to the consuls in the temple of Mars

87. About a hundred miles north of Rome, known for its temple and oracle.

88. From Batavia, at the mouth of the Rhine.

89. The headquarters of the army of Upper Germany at Mogontiacum (modern Mainz).

with the full senate present.⁹⁰ [45.1] Then, since no real opportunity for war had presented itself, he ordered a small number of German prisoners moved across the Rhine and concealed in ambush. He then had it reported to him with as much show of panic as possible (after he had finished lunch) that the enemy was close at hand. This was done, and he rushed out into the adjacent forest with his companions and some of the mounted praetorians. They cut down trees, arranged them into a trophy, and then returned by torchlight. He censured those who had not followed him, calling them lazy cowards, but rewarded those who had accompanied him and shared in his victory. Their reward was a new kind of military crown, decorated with images of the sun and moon and stars. He gave it a new name, the "explorer's crown."⁹¹

[45.2] On a second occasion, a number of hostages were taken from an elementary school and sent secretly on ahead. Gaius abruptly left a banquet that he was attending, chased down the children with the cavalry, and brought them back in chains, pretending that they were prisoners who had been recaptured. Another piece of theater also went beyond conventional decorum: when he returned to the dinner table and soldiers arrived to report that the last of the hostages had been rounded up, he urged the soldiers to take places on the dining couches, just as they were, still wearing their chain mail. He reminded them of a familiar line from Virgil, admonishing them to "bear up and save themselves for better times."⁹² [45.3] And while he was acting out these charades, he rebuked the senate and the people left behind in Rome with a particularly stern edict: "While Caesar is exposing himself to great danger in combat, you enjoy banquets that last all day and races and the theater and your pleasant country retreats."

[46] Lastly, on the pretense that he was going to bring his war to an end, he drew up a battle line on the shore of the ocean and put catapults and siege engines into position. No one knew or could even guess what he had in mind when he suddenly ordered the soldiers to pick up seashells and fill their helmets and the folds of their clothing. He called these "the spoils of the ocean owed to the Capitoline and

90. Vehicular traffic was prohibited in Rome during daylight hours.

91. An "explorer" might only be one who cleared a path for the emperor.

92. Virgil, *Aeneid* 1.207.

the Palatine." To mark his victory, he built a high tower from which light would shine at night to guide ships on their way as if from a lighthouse. When he proclaimed that each man would receive a bonus of a hundred denarii, he acted as if his bounty surpassed every previous act of generosity. He said, "Depart happy! Depart rich!"

[47] Gaius turned his attention from these adventures to concentrate on his triumph. In addition to prisoners and barbarian renegades, he chose for his parade the tallest of the Gauls, those "worthy of a triumph" (as he often said), and some of the nation's prominent men. He not only made them grow their hair and dye it red but made them learn the German language and take foreign names as well. He ordered the triremes he had used for his excursion on the ocean transported to Rome, overland for the better part of the journey. He wrote to his agents and instructed them to arrange a triumph at the least possible outlay to himself but to make it the greatest ever held, since they had access to the wealth of all men.

[48.1] Before Gaius left the province, he devised an unspeakably cruel plan: he would butcher wholesale the legions that had mutinied after the death of Augustus long ago. He remembered that they had obstructed the passage of their general, his father Germanicus, and himself, who had been a small child at that time.⁹³ It was with difficulty that he was kept from executing this reckless scheme, but his determination to decimate the legions could not be stopped. And so he summoned the legions to assemble unarmed, without even their swords, and he surrounded them with armed cavalry. [48.2] But when he saw that they had gotten wind of what was in store for them and that a large number were slipping away to get their weapons in case violence erupted, he ran from the parade ground and headed for the city at once.

He turned all of his vindictive feelings against the senate, threatening them openly in order to deflect attention from the rumors of the devastating humiliations that he had suffered. He complained (among other things) that they had cheated him of a proper triumph, although only a short time earlier he had warned them to make no plans to honor him, under penalty of death. [49.1] And so, when representatives of that distinguished order came to meet him on his journey and begged him to hurry back, he shouted in the loudest voice he could, "I shall come! I shall come! And this will be with

93. The army of Lower Germany; see chapter 9.

me!" and he struck over and over again the hilt of the sword he was wearing. He issued an edict to this effect: "I am returning but only for those who want me, the equestrian order and the ordinary people. To the senate I will no longer be either fellow citizen or emperor." [49.2] He even barred any member of the senate from meeting him. Whether it was because he was abandoning the idea of a triumph or postponing it, he entered the city on his birthday with an ovation.⁹⁴

Gaius was dead within four months. He had dared to commit serious crimes and was contemplating even worse, since he planned to kill the most important members of each order and then to go to live first at Antium and after that, at Alexandria. [49.3] So that no one may question this, two lists with different titles were found among his private papers. One was headed "sword," the other "dagger,"⁹⁵ and both contained the names of people marked for death. There was also discovered a large chest filled with various kinds of poison. Claudius would later sink this in the sea, and it is said that its contents tainted the water and killed fish that the tide washed up on the nearby shore.

[50.1] Gaius was tall in stature, pale in complexion, and ill proportioned of body with a very skinny neck and legs. He had hollows about his eyes and temples, a broad scowling forehead, and thin hair, with none at all on the top of his head. He was hairy everywhere else. It was therefore held a capital offense to look down on him from a higher vantage point as he passed by or to say the word "goat" for any reason whatsoever. His face was naturally forbidding and repulsive, and he gave it a terrifying expression on purpose by practicing all sorts of horrible, menacing looks in front of a mirror.

[50.2] He suffered from poor health, both in body and in mind. When he was a child, he was subject to epileptic seizures, and as a youth, although he possessed a degree of physical endurance, he would suddenly become so weak that he could scarcely walk, stand, collect his thoughts, or hold himself upright. He was aware of his mental disorder and sometimes considered withdrawing from the court and clearing his mind. His wife Caesonia allegedly gave him

94. August 31, 40 CE. An ovation was a lesser triumph awarded for minor military accomplishments.

95. Some to be executed openly by the sword and others assassinated with a dagger.

a drug meant to be a love potion, but it made him mad instead. [50.3] He was plagued by insomnia, for he did not sleep more than three hours a night and not even then was his rest quiet. His sleep was filled with terrors and strange imagining. Once, for instance, he dreamed that he saw the spirit of the sea speaking with him. And so, because he grew tired of lying awake in bed for much of the night, he sometimes sat on his couch, sometimes wandered through the long colonnades, and over and over again summoned forth daylight and waited for it to come.

[51.1] Quite correctly I think, I attribute his mental illness to the presence of two very different character flaws in a single person: overwhelming self-confidence and, conversely, excessive fear. For Gaius, despite the great contempt that he felt for the gods, routinely shut his eyes tight and covered his head at the least hint of thunder and lightning. If the storm grew worse, he jumped out from under the covers and hid under the bed.⁹⁶ When he was visiting Sicily, he made fun of the marvelous stories told about the place but fled from Messina suddenly in the middle of the night, because he was frightened by the smoke and rumblings coming from the summit of Mount Etna. [51.2] He made threats against the barbarians, but when he was riding in his war chariot on the far side of the Rhine, passing through narrow defiles and surrounded by a densely packed column of soldiers, he heard someone say that if the enemy should appear, their ranks would be thrown into great disorder. He instantly mounted a horse and rode quickly back to the bridge, which he found crowded with camp attendants and baggage. He was unwilling to wait and so was handed back across the river over the heads of the men. [51.3] When he heard about an uprising in Germany, he made preparations to leave Rome and arranged for a fleet in which he could escape. He took comfort in the fact that at least the provinces across the sea would be left for him if the German tribes were victorious and seized the alpine peaks as the Cimbri had once done, or even the city as had the Senones.⁹⁷ I think it was this fear that later gave Gaius' assassins the idea for the story that they fabricated for the benefit of the soldiers rampaging after his death, the story that

96. Augustus and Tiberius were also afraid of thunder; see *Aug.* 90, *Tib.* 69.

97. Gallic tribes. The Cimbri had crossed the Alps at the end of the second century BCE, and the Senones sacked Rome in 390 BCE.

he had killed himself because he was terrified when he heard about a battle that had gone bad.

[52] Gaius invariably furnished himself with clothing, footwear, and other articles that were neither traditional nor suitable for a Roman citizen—let alone for a man—or even for a human being. He went out in public in embroidered, gem-studded cloaks and wore bracelets and garments with sleeves. He sometimes dressed in women's clothing made of silk. On one occasion he would appear in Greek sandals or boots, on another, in the kind of boots worn by elite members of the praetorian guard, and sometimes in women's slippers. He was often seen sporting a golden beard and carrying in his hand an emblem of divinity: a lightning bolt, a trident, or a caduceus. He also appeared dressed as Venus. Even before his military campaign, he wore the regalia of a triumphing general and sometimes the breastplate of Alexander the Great, which he had removed from his tomb.

[53.1] He paid little attention to liberal studies but a great deal to rhetoric. He had eloquence enough and a ready tongue, particularly when he had to accuse someone. Words and thoughts came to him when he was angry as did the ability to enunciate clearly and to project his voice. This made him too excited to stand still and enabled people to hear him from a long way off. [53.2] When he began to argue a case, he would threaten to "draw the weapon honed by his nighttime labors." He was so contemptuous of writing that was too smooth and polished that he said of Seneca, then at the height of his popularity, that he composed "mere exercises" and that he was like "sand without lime." He would write rebuttals to successful legal arguments made by orators and compose accusations and defenses in important cases being tried before the senate. According to where his pen wandered, his opinion brought the weight of the law down on the defendant or relieved him of its burden. He also summoned the equestrian order by edict to come listen to him expound.

[54.1] But Gaius pursued all kinds of other studies with great enthusiasm. He trained as a Thracian gladiator, a chariot driver, and even a singer and a dancer. He sparred with real weapons, drove his chariot in the circuses that had been built in many parts of the city, and was so transported by the pleasure of singing and dancing that even at public entertainments he could not refrain from singing along with the tragic actor on the stage and imitating the gestures of the mime. It was as though he were approving or correcting the

performance as everyone watched. [54.2] The only reason he proclaimed an all-night festival on the day he died seems to have been to create the opportunity for himself to make his stage debut under the license that that hour allowed. Sometimes he danced at night, too. He once summoned three men of consular rank to the Palatine in the second watch and positioned them where they could see the stage. They were terrified and expected the worst. Then, with a loud racket of flutes and clappers, out sprang Gaius, dressed in a cloak and a tunic that reached his ankles. He performed his dance and left the stage. But for all his mastery of other skills, he did not know how to swim.

[55.1] Gaius showed irrational preference toward all his favorites. He would kiss Mnester even during performances, and if anyone made even the least bit of noise when the mime was dancing, he ordered the offender dragged off and beat him personally. When a knight was causing trouble, Gaius had a centurion instruct him to go to Ostia at once and then deliver a written message from himself to King Ptolemy in Maurctania. This was the message: "If I have sent someone to you, do nothing to him either good or bad."⁹⁸

[55.2] He put Thracian gladiators in charge of his German bodyguards and reduced the armor of the *murmillo*s. He put poison on the wound of a slightly injured gladiator whose name was Columbus, despite the fact that he had won his fight, and after that he called the poison columbinum. It was found, without question, among other poisons, so labeled in Gaius' own handwriting. Gaius was so slavishly devoted to the Green faction that he dined often in their clubhouse and then spent the night. At one wild victory party, he gave his driver Eutyclus, among other gifts, 2 million sesterces. [55.3] As for his horse Incitatus, he routinely had soldiers enforce silence in the neighborhood the day before a race so that the animal would not be disturbed. In addition to a marble stable and an ivory stall, as well as purple saddlecloths and collars studded with precious stones, he gave the horse a house, slaves, and furniture so that guests invited in his name would be received more elegantly. And it is said that he intended to name him to the consulship.

[56.1] While Gaius was behaving in this wild and violent manner, a number of people found the courage to mount an attack against

98. A mean joke on the knight who assumed he was carrying his own death sentence.

him. But after one or two plots had been detected and others put on hold because opportunity had not presented itself, two men joined in a conspiracy that succeeded with the help of Gaius' most important freedmen and the praetorian prefects. The latter joined the plot because they knew that the emperor suspected and despised them. They had been accused, wrongly, of being party to a conspiracy, and Gaius had quickly singled them out and created a great deal of animosity toward them when he drew his sword and declared, "I will take my own life if you too think that I deserve to die." From then on, he never stopped accusing each of them to the other and pitting them against one another.

[56.2] When it was decided to strike Gaius at the Palatine Games⁹⁹ as he left his seat for the midday break, Cassius Chaerea, tribune of a praetorian cohort, insisted on the leading role for himself. Gaius had been in the habit of disparaging Chaerea with all sorts of insults, calling him a man too old for military service and weak and effeminate. Sometimes when Chaerea asked for the watchword of the day, the emperor gave him "Priapus" or "Venus." And sometimes when Chaerea was expressing his thanks for something, Gaius made his hand into an obscene gesture, waved it around, and offered it to be kissed.

[57.1] Many omens anticipated the coming murder. The statue of Jupiter at Olympia, which Gaius had decided to have disassembled and taken to Rome, suddenly laughed so loudly that the scaffolding collapsed and the workmen ran away. At that very moment, a man named Cassius arrived on the scene, claiming that he had been ordered in a dream to sacrifice a bull to Jupiter. [57.2] On the Ides of March lightning struck both the temple of Jupiter on the Capitol at Capua and the chamber of the palace steward on the Palatine. Some interpreted the second of these portents as a sign that danger would come to their master from those who protected him, and the first as indicating that the murder of another important person would take place like the one that had taken place on that day in the past. Also, when Gaius consulted the astrologer Sulla about his horoscope, he learned that certain death was imminent. [57.3] The oracle at the temple of Fortune at Antium warned him to beware of Cassius, and

99. Held on the Palatine Hill in honor of the Divine Augustus; they traditionally began on January 17 and lasted for five days; Gaius may have added three more.

so he had Cassius Longinus, the proconsul serving in Asia at that time, killed; he forgot that Chaerea was also named Cassius. On the day before he died, he dreamed that he stood in heaven next to the throne of Jupiter and that the god kicked him with the big toe of his right foot and he fell headlong to the earth. Things that had chanced to happen a little earlier on the day itself were also thought omens. [57.4] When Gaius was sacrificing he was sprayed with the blood of a flamingo. The mime Mnester danced the tragedy that the tragic actor Neoptolemus had acted long ago at the games when King Philip of Macedon was killed. At a performance of the pantomime "Laureolus," the lead actor fell and vomited blood as he rushed off the stage; many of the supporting actors competed to display their skill, and the stage was covered with blood. An entertainment was being made ready for that night, in which Egyptians and Ethiopians were to present the story of the gods of the lower world.

[58.1] On the ninth day before the Kalends of February, at about the seventh hour,¹⁰⁰ Gaius left the games. He had hesitated about getting up and going to lunch since his stomach remained unsettled from too much food the day before. But at last, at the urging of his friends, he left. In the covered way through which he had to pass, he encountered some boys of noble birth who had been brought from Asia to perform on the stage. They were getting ready to go on, and he stopped to watch them and to wish them well. If the leader of the troop had not said that he was feeling cold, Gaius would have gone back and had them presented on stage at once.

[58.2] From this point on, there are two versions of the story: some report that while Gaius was talking with the boys, Chaerea slashed his neck from behind with a violent blow of his sword, first shouting, "Do it!"¹⁰¹ Then the tribune Cornelius Sabinus, the other conspirator, stabbed him in the chest from the front. Others report that Sabinus first got Gaius away from the crowd with the help of centurions who were in on the plot and then asked him for the watchword in conformance with military protocol. When Gaius gave "Jupiter," Chaerea shouted, "Take it back!"¹⁰² The emperor looked

100. The early afternoon of January 24, 41 CE.

101. His words, *Hoc age*, were those of a priest ordering a sacrifice to begin; see *Gai.* 20.1.

102. *Accipe ratum!* Gaius will get his watchword back; Jupiter will punish him.

around, and Chaerea sliced through his jaw with a thrust of his sword. [58.3] The rest of the praetorians finished the job, inflicting thirty wounds on him as he lay on the ground with his limbs drawn up to protect himself as he cried out, "I am alive." The watchword for all of them was, "Again!" Some even drove their swords into his genitals. At the first sign of a disturbance, Gaius' litter-bearers came running, bringing their poles for weapons. Then came his German bodyguards, who killed some of the assassins and some innocent senators as well.

[59] Gaius lived twenty-nine years and was emperor for three years, ten months, and eight days. His body was taken secretly to the Lamian gardens, and it was partially burned on an improvised funeral pyre there and buried in a shallow grave. Later, when his sisters returned from exile, they had it dug up, cremated, and properly buried. All agree that before this took place, ghosts disturbed the sleep of the garden's guards, and in the house in which he had lain dead, no night passed without the appearance of something terrible until the house itself burned down. Gaius' wife Caesonia perished with him. She was stabbed by a centurion's sword, and their daughter was dashed against a wall.

[60] Events that followed may also be able to give an idea of the atmosphere in Rome at that time. When news of the murder circulated, it was not immediately believed, and a suspicion arose that Gaius himself had invented the rumor that he had been killed and had spread it abroad so as to learn by this ruse what people thought of him. The conspirators had not fixed on the principate for anyone, and the senate was so united in declaring its independence that when the consuls convened the first meeting, it was not in the senate house (the building was called the Curia Julia) but on the Capitoline. Some of the senators expressed the opinion that the memory of the Caesars should be erased and their temples destroyed. It was thought especially significant and so noted that all the Caesars who had the first name Gaius had perished by the sword, beginning with one killed in the time of Cinna.