Gaius Caesar Germanicus: The Irrational, Capable Administrator with Autocratic Tendencies

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Abstract

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A thesis presented to the Graduate Program in Ancient Greek and Roman Studies

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Gaius Caesar Germanicus was a Roman emperor who is often reviled as brutal and savage, or simply referred to as ‘the crazy one’. During his very brief but eventful reign, Rome experienced the terror of an individual with excessive power but little in the way of moral constraint. Gaius has long been viewed as one of the most intriguing and captivating of the emperors, and even modern scholarship tends to find it difficult to defend the variety of strange, terrifying, cruel, and often inexplicable stories and events that characterized Gaius’ reign.

Although recent scholarship has tended to attempt such a defense, this thesis does not attempt to defend Gaius, but rather to explain what kind of person he was. Too often, modern scholars are content to label Gaius as a single thing such as ‘crazy,’ or ‘monarchically inclined’, and ignore other aspects of his personality. This work, however, establishes a new viewpoint on Gaius: that he cannot be characterized by only one particular trait, but that he must be understood as a man of many different traits.

This thesis demonstrates that at different moments in his life, Gaius was many things: he had the intelligence and ability to be an effective administrator, and he handled several delicate issues with tact and skill. He was also demonstrably unbalanced; his mind was deeply affected
by many tragic and tumultuous events that occurred throughout his life. Finally, he eventually developed into an autocrat who wreaked havoc on Rome for some time before he was finally assassinated. By analyzing the events of his life, from his early years until his death, this thesis presents a close analysis of the varying influences that accounted for Gaius’ mental instability, as well as the results of that instability, while still recognizing that Gaius should be characterized by more than just his mental issues.
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Introduction

Gaius Caesar Germanicus (commonly referred to as ‘Caligula’), the third princeps of Rome, has long been considered one of the most controversial and captivating figures of Roman imperial history. Dozens of authors have attempted to interpret the mythos surrounding this enigma of a man, with the result being a massive quantity of works and ideas that attempt to explain the unique figure of Gaius. For some time, the accepted interpretation (in accordance with the primary sources) was that Gaius was some variant of insane.\(^1\) Theories range from a severe mental illness, to some sort of contracted disease, to a complete nervous breakdown. Recently, however, modern scholars have shied away from such an interpretation as being overly simplified and lacking solid evidence. Instead, many authors have tried to analyze and logically explain the events of Gaius’ short reign. This desire to logically explain Gaius’ reign has resulted in an outpouring of works defending Gaius and trying to rationalize his actions, a far different approach to the previous notions of insanity.\(^2\)

While it may true that simply calling Gaius insane is not a sufficient explanation for the complex and captivating life of the third princeps, it is also true that attempting to defend Gaius too extensively can be equally detrimental to an accurate interpretation. Discounting or trying to explain away large portions of the body of evidence that is available to us is a folly too often repeated in the works of the most preeminent authorities on Gaius. The tendency to assume that

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one story or another is too far-fetched, too ridiculous, or too improbable to be given serious merit comes down to an arbitrary value judgment and can thus distort our perception of Gaius’ life.

This study attempts to restore some faith in the primary sources, and instead of trying to rationalize or explain away some of the more horrific stories, it attempts to place them in a context that explains why or how they may have occurred. Far from defending Gaius, this study takes a new angle in looking at the princeps’ life and the factors that may have led to some of his bizarre and seemingly inexplicable behaviors. In writing such a work, I hope to be able to peel away some of the defensive walls erected around Gaius and expose pieces of his true nature, as attested by the available sources. Some stories in the sources can, of course, be reliably demonstrated to be either inaccurate or exaggerated, but many simply cannot be reliably discounted, and those are the stories that need some sort of explanation or context.

This study provides potentially viable explanations for how or why some of these stories and accounts occurred by analyzing the events of Gaius’ life. Gaius was not just insane, nor can he easily be defended as a fair and just princeps. Rather, Gaius was a unique combination of a mentally unbalanced, but still efficient ruler who descended into autocracy. His formative years and the multitude of stresses that he underwent across many stages of his life caused him to become mentally unstable. Even though he proved himself to be capable of running the empire with efficiency and clarity of mind, the continued stress of rule and his mental instability caused him to become irrational and illogical. That irrationality, in turn, led to a decline in his administrative capacity, and a corresponding increase of his autocratic tendencies, regardless of the consequences.
Chapter 1
Turbulent Upbringing

Gaius was born on August 31st, 12 C.E., to Agrippina the Elder and Germanicus. Both of his parents had strong connections to the imperial family; Agrippina was the granddaughter of Augustus (the current emperor) and Germanicus was the nephew and adopted son of Tiberius. Their heavy involvement in the political maneuverings of the imperial family would affect the lives of all their children, and would eventually lead Gaius to the throne.³ But long before Gaius was to become involved in the affairs of his family, Germanicus had already been playing a key role in both the political and military spheres of the empire. He is touted by Suetonius as one of the most famous Romans of his day: well-known, well-respected, and well-loved across almost the entire empire.⁴ Germanicus’ fame would later prove to be a defining factor in Gaius’ life, and in fact his various appointments (first as governor of the Gallic provinces, and then as leader of a mission to the east) were the reason that Gaius’ early years were spent largely on the move, away from Rome.⁵

For the first few years after he was born, Gaius apparently lived with Augustus in the imperial household at Rome. When he was about two, he was sent by Augustus to live with his mother. Augustus also sent one of his personal doctors with the young boy as he was concerned about Gaius’ health. This concern that Augustus evidently displayed is the first of several indications in the sources that Gaius had various medical problems at different points of his life.⁶

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³ Barrett, pp. 4-6
⁵ Barrett, p. 7
⁶ Suetonius, Cal. 8
But whatever may have afflicted the young Gaius soon passed, and he went with his mother to live in the army camps of his father’s command in Gaul. Gaius would spend his early years in and out of these camps, with his father, mother, and the rest of his family. What exactly he saw there and what he might have experienced or learned is difficult to say for sure.

Evidently, however, he was a favorite among the troops. According to Tacitus, his mother would dress him up in a miniature army uniform and parade him around the camp.\(^7\) This display apparently earned him the nickname “Caligula” (which means “little boots”), a nickname that seems to have stuck, but one that he disliked fiercely.\(^8\)

Exactly what kind of effect growing up in a military camp would have had on Gaius is difficult to determine. He was very young, and this makes it hard to say if he would have even remembered anything he saw, heard, or experienced in the camps. But if he did remember one thing, it must have been an event that proved to be one of the most trying moments for his family. In 14 C.E. Augustus died and left Tiberius as his heir apparent. The transition went well in Rome, but stirred up riots among several of the legions in Gaul. Germanicus was brought in to deal with the issue, although he seems to have struggled with handling the mutineers.

Sometime during this crisis, Germanicus arranged for Agrippina and Caligula to leave the camp for their own protection. Whether they were in any real danger or not is hard to say, as there are several different stories of what happened.\(^9\) In one story, as they were leaving the camp, Agrippina and Caligula were seized by the soldiers and held hostage. They were eventually

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\(^8\) Seneca, Annaeus, L. *Minor Dialogues: Together with the Dialogue on Clemency*, trans. Aubrey Stewart. London: George Bell and Sons, 1900. Google Books, 2008. 2.19. Seneca is the only primary source we have that claims that Gaius disliked his nickname. In the introduction of his work “The Emperor Gaius”, however, J.P.V.D. Balsdon explains that no surviving numismatic or inscriptive evidence bears the nickname, indicating it was not used officially. He goes on to explain why he chooses to refer to Caligula as Gaius, and why he sympathizes with Gaius’ apparent dislike for the name. (Balsdon, p. xvi)

\(^9\) Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Tacitus all provide different versions of the event.
released unharmed (first Agrippina and then Gaius sometime later) and then finally Germanicus was able to end the crisis.\textsuperscript{10}

With the mutinous forces quelled and Tiberius’ position on the throne secure, Germanicus next led his troops on a few campaigns against different Germanic tribes with varying results. Finally, after several significant successes, he was recalled to Rome by Tiberius and returned to celebrate a splendid triumph. Gaius was about five years old when he arrived in Rome with his family to partake in the triumph, where he rode in the chariot alongside his siblings and their father.\textsuperscript{11} The triumphal procession would have been the first time Gaius had been in Rome since he was two years old, and given that it seems unlikely he remembered much from his previous time in the city at such a young age, his entrance in the chariot was presumably one of his earliest memories of Rome.\textsuperscript{12}

Gaius and his family’s stay in Rome was short, lasting only the rest of the year, and then Germanicus was sent off by Tiberius on an important mission to the east.\textsuperscript{13} Tensions between Rome and the Parthian Empire were rising (in particular there were problems in Armenia, Cappadocia, and Commagene), and Germanicus was given powers to travel to the east and deal with the issues.\textsuperscript{14} But Germanicus’ travel east was more than just a mission; he and his family were also touring around and visiting cities all across the eastern empire. As they traveled, they left a trail in the form of coins and inscriptions, which indicates that both Germanicus and Agrippina were hailed in several places as deities,\textsuperscript{15} a detail that the young Gaius would surely

\textsuperscript{11} Tacitus, \textit{Ann.} p. 97
\textsuperscript{12} Adams, Geoff W. \textit{The Roman Emperor Gaius ‘Caligula’ and his Hellenistic Aspirations}. Florida: BrownWalker Press, 2007, p. 83
\textsuperscript{13} Barrett, p. 12
\textsuperscript{14} Adams, pp. 83-84
\textsuperscript{15} Winterling, p. 21
have picked up on and perhaps remembered later in his life. Germanicus and his family started
their journey at Nicopolis, then proceeded to Actium and Athens. At Athens Germanicus
displayed his reverence for Greek customs, and he had honors heaped upon him by the people.\textsuperscript{16}
Clearly he held the customs of the Greek world in some esteem, to have purposely adhered to
their cultural practices while visiting. After they had finished in Athens, they continued their tour
into Asia Minor. They visited Perinthus and Byzantium, and then made their way to the ancient
site of Ilium (Troy).\textsuperscript{17}

After visiting Ilium, they stopped in a city called Assos, where Gaius apparently made
some sort of declaration to the people that has been preserved in an inscription. Evidently when
Gaius ascended to the Principate, the city of Assos sent him a decree of loyalty, asking him to
care for the city as he had promised when he visited. This instance of Gaius as a young diplomat
is incredible, given that he was only about six years old when he visited Assos.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that he
made such an impression seems to show that even at a young age he had some sort of oratorical
or diplomatic skill that impressed the people of Assos.

After leaving Assos, Germanicus traveled with his family to different areas in the east,
including Armenia, where Germanicus crowned a new king, as well as Cappadocia and
Commagene, where he saw to the reorganization of pieces of the Roman administrative
apparatus.\textsuperscript{19} Germanicus then took his family to Egypt. He had administrative business there, but
was also interested in seeing the historical sites.\textsuperscript{20} He was greeted in Egypt with much adulation,

\textsuperscript{16} Barrett, p. 13
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p. 13
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 13
\textsuperscript{19} Winterling, p. 21
\textsuperscript{20} Tacitus, \textit{Ann.}, p. 110
and hailed as a hero when he helped them solve problems with their food supply. Additionally, because of his success, he was hailed as a god by many small communities in the area.  

After Germanicus was finished in Egypt he returned to Syria, where he suddenly became ill and died. On his deathbed, he was convinced that he had been poisoned by Piso, the governor of Syria who he had been begrudgingly working with, and Germanicus made his entourage promise to bring his perceived assailant to justice. Agrippina certainly believed he had been poisoned, and after he had been cremated, she set off for Italy to seek revenge for her husband’s death.  

She brought her family with her, and their lengthy tour of the east concluded in the tragic death of Germanicus.  

When the family eventually arrived back in Italy, they found that an incredible tension had risen in Rome over the death of Germanicus. When he had died, the people had become angry and had blamed Tiberius for orchestrating his demise. Allegedly, Tiberius had felt threatened by Germanicus’ popularity, seeing him as a potential rival to power, and had ordered him to be killed. Regardless of whether these rumors were true, the Roman people displayed a substantial outpouring of grief. On their return to Italy with Germanicus’ ashes, Agrippina and her family were met in Brindisi by a massive crowd of mourners. Several cohorts of Praetorian Guards escorted the family onward, and the emperor’s son Drusus, as well as Claudius (Germanicus’ brother), the consuls, the Senate, and a multitude of citizens, came all the way to Tarracina to receive the family. When they arrived in Rome, Germanicus was interred in the mausoleum of Augustus, and throngs of people poured out into the streets for his funeral.

21 Adams, p. 92  
22 Barrett, p. 15  
23 Suetonius, Cal. 2  
24 Winterling, pp. 21-22  
25 Ibid, p. 2
Thus, Gaius childhood came crashing to a close, for from this moment on he would be thrust into the center of events as his family vied for political power on the stage of the imperial household. Up until this point, Gaius had lived a life of turbulence, without any single place to permanently call home. His early experiences, especially those in the army camps, must have had a tremendous impact on his young mind. In particular, the events at the death of Augustus and ascension of Tiberius may well have had a strong impact on Gaius. In fact, a story from later in Gaius’ life reveals the potential extent of that impact. According to Suetonius, many years later when Gaius was emperor and was out on campaign in Gaul and Britain,

“...he planned, in a sudden access of cruelty, to massacre the legionaries who, at the news of Augustus’ death, had mutinously besieged both his father Germanicus, their commander, and himself, still only a baby.”

Apparently, he was dissuaded from this plan, but settled for a decimation of the offending legions (which he failed to carry out). This story seems strange, as by the time Gaius was considering this, almost none of the members of the legions would have been left from the time of the kidnapping. Regardless, Gaius’ clearly either remembered the incident or had heard the story told many times and knew what had occurred. Even if he did not actually carry out any kind of punishment, the event must have weighed strongly on his mind for him to even consider the possibility. This episode could well have marked one of the darkest moments in Gaius’ young life.

The rest of Gaius’ childhood stands in stark contrast to the early disturbances, as he experienced a variety of more positive events. When he first returned to Rome from Gaul, Gaius was at the center of a massive outpouring of attention in his father’s triumph. The splendor of the event, the adoration of the crowd, and the magnanimity of the affair must have resonated deeply.

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26 Suetonius, Cal, 48
27 Winterling, p. 119
with him. Here he saw for the first time what a man could achieve in Rome with the adoration of the people. This event would have been spectacular to witness, and even more amazing to be a part of, and even if Gaius only remembered pieces of it, those pieces may have been some of the best memories from his childhood.

Gaius also experienced the level of adoration one could expect as a Roman general in the east. Germanicus’ interest in the Hellenistic culture and history of the east during his family’s tour is evident in his deference to eastern customs, and if Gaius did in fact pick up any trace of his father’s love for Hellenistic culture, that love could have later influenced his unique style of autocracy. In particular, Germanicus’ reception in Egypt clearly gave Gaius a specific interest in that province, which might have been what later prompted him to make plans to move the capital of the empire from Rome to Alexandria.28

Germanicus’ influence on Gaius’ life, however, ended abruptly with his death. The impact of that death on the young Gaius must have been extreme. Gaius had witnessed his father fall at the height of his power, when he had seemed to be untouchable. Whether Germanicus had been poisoned or not is irrelevant, as his family believed he had been, and that belief must have strengthened the impact of his death on Gaius. Germanicus’ death was the biggest loss Gaius had experienced up until that point, and it must have had a major impact on his mind. Seeing his father seemingly poisoned by someone with whom he had been working, and knowing there was nothing he could do about it, must have placed a huge strain on Gaius. Furthermore, his mother’s drive to claim revenge continued to destabilized the balance of Gaius’ upbringing by involving his whole family with imperial politics to a greater degree than ever before.

28 Suetonius, Cal. 49
In contrast to the darkness of Germanicus’ death, the outpouring of support from the people cannot have been missed by the young Gaius. He saw his father’s legacy, and the people that loved him expressing their grief over his death. He also bore witness to the overarching power of the princeps to eliminate potential rivals to throne; even if Tiberius was innocent, the people in the city blamed him for Germanicus’ death, and Gaius must have heard those rumors as well. He saw that the emperor could do whatever he needed to do in order to keep a secure grip on power, and that no amount of popularity was sufficient to protect someone from imperial intrigue. For the young Gaius, “…his father’s death was a major turning point in his life…” and indeed “Such an outpouring of grief and adoration for Germanicus would certainly have had an effect upon him [Gaius]…” The death of Germanicus, and the reception he received at Rome may well have stuck with Gaius for the rest of his life. He may only have been seven years old, but such a major event with so much fanfare and chaos surrounding his family would probably have been one of Gaius’ most significant and formative experiences.

Once Gaius and his family had returned to Rome from the east, they would remain there for the next several years. Gaius’ two older brothers Drusus and Nero became quite close to Tiberius and were considered to be the preeminent choices for succession. Agrippina, on the other hand, was at constant odds with the imperial household. This tension was inflamed by the Praetorian Prefect Sejanus, who sought to eliminate any potential rivals to his power. Sejanus tried several different tactics to inflame Tiberius against Agrippina and her sons, and when Tiberius left Rome for Capri in 26 C.E., Sejanus took the opportunity to move against Drusus

29 Winterling, p. 22
30 Adams, p. 97
31 Barrett, p. 19
32 Ibid, p. 19
and Nero.  

Exactly how this played out, and in what order, is a matter of some confusion. What is certain, however, is that at some point around 27 C.E., Agrippina was placed on house arrest in Herculaneum, and Gaius was sent to live with his great-grandmother Livia. 

Apparently, he there learned “…that guile and cunning could achieve more in Imperial Rome than the kind of head-on attack his mother had employed.” Unfortunately for Gaius, that lesson came far too late to be of any use to his family.

Over the next few years Sejanus increasingly persecuted Gaius’ family, targeting Drusus and Nero as well as Agrippina. Finally, amidst some confusion and controversy in the Senate, both Nero and Agrippina were declared public enemies and exiled to a small island. Drusus’ fate was to be similar, as he soon was arrested on unknown charges and imprisoned beneath the Imperial palace on the Palatine hill. Gaius was suddenly the last male member of his family in the city (he did have three sisters who also survived), but at eighteen years old he was still relatively young and therefore remained safe from Sejanus.

Around that time, Gaius’ life changed again when Livia died in 29 C.E., before Drusus was imprisoned. Gaius was sent with his sister Drusilla (and possibly his sister Livilla) to live with yet another powerful woman from the imperial household: his grandmother Antonia. 

The time he spent with Antonia most likely had a strong impact on his impressions of Hellenistic culture. In fact, it seems that at the time Antonia was also housing three sons of client kings, and when he became princeps Gaius demonstrated a strong connection with them by giving each of them a client kingdom to rule. This connection, which clearly shows his positive perception of

33 Barrett, p. 20
34 Ibid, pp. 20-22
35 Ibid, p. 22
36 Ibid, pp. 22-26
37 Ibid, p. 24
38 Ibid, p. 24
eastern client kings, must have been forged when Gaius was living with them in Antonia’s house. In addition, Antonia was the daughter of Marc Antony (known for his eastern affiliations), and she had multiple connections with different rulers from the east, such as the ruling house of Mauretania. While Gaius was living with her he was probably exposed to a variety of eastern visitors and strongly influenced by the culture that he encountered. In fact, it seems that

“In view of her [Antonia’s] strong eastern connections it is quite likely that her acceptance of such eastern monarchs (and their offspring) would have in turn encouraged Caligula’s already strong fascination with ‘oriental’ culture, adding to the previous influences of Germanicus.”

The rapid removal of Gaius’ family, as well as the constant shifting from home to home, must have been a strong destabilizing factor for Gaius. He was just going through adolescence, and at a time in his life when he needed stability and mentoring he was instead left without any kind of balance. He did have both Livia and Antonia, as well as his sisters, so any potential impact on his mental state could have been mitigated by the guidance he received from them. Unfortunately, however, Gaius’ family was still in the crosshairs of Sejanus and Gaius found himself constantly surrounded by danger.

While Gaius’ age did prevent him from coming under direct attack by Sejanus, that does not mean that Gaius was entirely unaffected. He could do nothing except watch as his family was attacked around him. He must have realized that attempting to prevent their fate would have caused him to share it with them. The strain on his adolescent mind must have been enormous. Not only was he surrounded by enemies (in particular Sejanus) who wanted his family gone, but he had no power to do anything about it. In conjunction with the turmoil he had experienced

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40 Adams, p. 112
earlier in his life, this new layer of danger could easily have had a negative impact on his mental state.

The danger with which Gaius was confronted showed no signs of abating as he grew older. After Gaius turned nineteen, he left Antonia’s house and was summoned to Capri by Tiberius, where he would live with the emperor until Tiberius’ death in 37 C.E. Tiberius had apparently decided to groom Gaius as a potential successor. Gaius received the *toga virilis* (the sign of manhood), as well as appointments to a few minor offices. Gaius was set on a path to political advancement, but it is unclear what exactly his relationship with Tiberius may have been. What is clear, however, is that “A new phase of life began for Caligula, but one that was no less dangerous than before.” Winterling believes that Gaius was in constant danger on Capri, primarily from Tiberius’ closest advisors. They were most likely hostile towards Gaius, and that hostility would probably have been apparent to the young man. Suetonius gives insight into their attempts to undermine Gaius by stating that “The courtiers tried every trick to force him [Gaius] into making complaints against Tiberius – always, however, without success.” This indicates that Gaius had essentially gone from one quite dangerous spot in Rome to another equally dangerous one on Capri. The effects of the continually corrosive experiences on his ability to trust and feel at ease with those around him had to have been quite severe. In a remarkable show of shrewd intelligence, however, Gaius was able to keep himself alive and in

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41 To receive the *toga virilis* at nineteen was highly unusual, as it was typically conferred on men at a much younger age. Barrett agrees with an explanation given by Willrich that the delay in Gaius’ receiving the *toga virilis* was because Tiberius wanted to avoid the potential danger that Gaius might become too arrogant or believe he was strongly favored by the emperor. (Barrett, p. 27)
42 Barrett, p. 27
43 Winterling, p. 39
44 Ibid, p. 39
45 Suetonius, *Cal.* 10
Tiberius’ good graces during his time on Capri. He even managed to outwit the courtiers who tried to remove him from Tiberius’ favor.46

Even though Gaius managed to keep himself safe, Capri was full of other challenges and dangerous pitfalls besides just those he encountered from the machinations of the courtiers. For instance, we know that after the death of Sejanus, people were monitored closely for their response to guilty sentences or executions to see if they had indicated any kind of hostility towards the emperor. While we do not have much information regarding the potential of executions being held on Capri (save for a few references in Tacitus), this intense scrutiny could very well have been applied to the young Gaius (hence why the courtiers were trying to trick him into complaining about Tiberius). In particular, such scrutiny would have been utilized when Gaius learned of the deaths of his family members.47 Gaius’ brother Drusus was allowed to starve to death in the dungeons of the Palatine, and his mother Agrippina also died under uncertain circumstances on the island where she had been exiled.48 Gaius, however, had almost no reaction to the news. According to Suetonius, “He not only failed to show any interest in the murder of his relatives, but affected an amazing indifference to his own ill treatment…”49 Tacitus’ report is largely the same, and to the ancient authors this is a mark of Gaius’ brutality and monstrous nature. But that is not the only interpretation

“In contrast to his mother, his brothers…. And in spite the emperor’s unpredictability… Caligula managed to maintain his position. The price he paid for this was to control his own feelings and to play a part in front of Tiberius.”50

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46 Suetonius, Cal. 10
47 Winterling, p. 47
48 Ibid, p. 40
49 Suetonius, Cal. 10
50 Winterling, p. 41
Gaius had seen what happened to those who displeased the emperor. He knew that if he was to survive, he had to seem dispassionate about volatile issues (especially if he was under intense scrutiny for possible hostility towards the emperor), and not speak out against Tiberius’ wishes. The possibility that Gaius’ behavior was a mark of his brutal nature might be valid, but if the ancient authors are to be believed on that account, then it must be assumed that Gaius had no real connection with his family. If he truly did not care about their deaths, that would mean he had never felt any sort of attachment to them. This seems highly improbable, as Gaius not only grew up with his brothers and parents close by, but when he eventually succeeded Tiberius, he praised his family and made sure their burials were properly attended to.  

Certainly, if the clear affection he would later show to his sisters is any indication, Gaius must have loved his family very deeply.  

Gaius’ was obviously aware of his precarious position on Capri, and his lack of a response at the time of his mother and brother’s deaths can be viewed as a product of his cunning and intelligent mind. The fact that he managed to affect such a façade of indifference at the deaths of his family members is incredible. He was sufficiently aware of his position that he purposely feigned indifference, a clear sign of his shrewd and cunning nature. According to Philo, however, Gaius’ survival was much more due to the efforts of Macro (the Praetorian Prefect after Sejanus), who attempted to ingratiate Gaius with Tiberius at every available opportunity. But Philo is generally sharply critical of Gaius and is happy to deprive him of any kind of credit for his own actions. In addition, while the other sources all make mention of

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51 Suetonius, *Cal.* 15  
52 Ibid, *Cal.* 15  
Macro’s involvement in Gaius’ rise to power, none of them explain exactly what that role was.\textsuperscript{54} Therefore, the extent of Macros’ influence in guiding Gaius is difficult to determine. Given, however, that Gaius continued to prove his intelligence after Macro’s death, he was evidently capable of surviving and thriving on his own.

Philo may take every opportunity to criticize Gaius, but at one point he also provides evidence of Gaius’ intuition and capacity to read the people around him. Philo admits that “…he [Gaius] was very acute at comprehending a man’s inmost designs and feelings from his outward appearance and expression of countenance…”\textsuperscript{55} In addition to Gaius’ shrewd and cunning nature, his capacity to read others seems to be a large part of the reason that he was able to survive on Capri, despite the fact that many people there considered him a threat and wanted him removed. Gaius was able to pass himself off as wholly dedicated to Tiberius’ commands, and thus was able to get close to Tiberius (perhaps with some help from Macro). Once Gaius had proven himself to Tiberius, he quickly accelerated up the social ladder. Cassius Dio says that “He [Tiberius] therefore cleaved to Gaius as his successor in the monarchy…”\textsuperscript{56} although it should also be noted that Tiberius was running out of options. Regardless, Gaius survived the intrigues of Capri and managed to secure a solid position for himself, despite his many enemies among Tiberius’ advisors.

Another way in which Gaius was able to endear himself to Tiberius was in his intellectual pursuits. Tiberius was well known to have a vested interest in scholarship (apparently, he quite enjoyed intellectual discussions with Greek philosophers, astrologers, poets, and the like),\textsuperscript{57} and while on Capri Gaius partook in the same kind of academic study and evidently had “…a

\textsuperscript{54} Winterling, pg. 48
\textsuperscript{55} Philo, \textit{Leg.} 35.263
\textsuperscript{56} Cassius Dio, 58.23.2
\textsuperscript{57} Winterling, p. 42-43
profound knowledge of the works with which educated men of the day were expected to be familiar.” The sources, however, do not seem to indicate that Gaius displayed an aptitude for learning later in his life. The lack of evidence regarding such an aptitude for learning possibly indicates that Gaius was participating in academic discussions and scholarly pursuits because he knew Tiberius was interested in such things. He may have hoped that by showing interest himself, he could further cement his relationship with the aging princeps.

Academic pursuits were not the only thing that the sources claim Tiberius was interested in. One of the most serious accusations levied at Tiberius is his alleged interest in a variety of depravities, and the sources are quick to highlight Gaius’ interests in those same activities. Suetonius indicates that Gaius was unable to hide his monstrous nature. Apparently, “He [Gaius] loved watching torture and executions, and… abandoned himself nightly to the pleasures of feasting and scandalous living.” This could well be true, for Gaius had grown up amidst such trying circumstances that it should come as no surprise that his mind was unbalanced enough to enjoy such extravagance. But the possibility exists that in pretending to enjoy these depraved activities, he was trying to play a part for Tiberius, just as he was with his academic pursuits. Either way, however, Gaius certainly did all he could to attach himself to the emperor and garner his favor.

Tiberius was getting on in age, however, and in 37 C.E. he fell ill. Finally, after some time of fluctuating between recovery and illness, he died in the same year. Numerous stories

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58 Winterling, p. 43
59 Winterling, p. 44
60 Suetonius, Cal. 11
61 It should also be noted that the stories of debauchery are extreme, especially in the case of Tiberius, and could easily be fabrications of those who hated Tiberius and/or Gaius. But because we don’t have a lot of information about Gaius’ time on Capri, to omit these as entirely fictitious is far more dangerous as a historical practice than to try to understand them in specific contexts. It is also worth noting that Philo indicates that Gaius actually lived a moderate life on Capri, and didn’t engage in such extravagances until he returned to Rome. (Philo, Leg. 2.14)
62 Barrett, p. 41
surround his death and several indicate Gaius’ involvement in hurrying Tiberius to his grave. Cassius Dio says that Gaius (with some unspecified form of help from Macro) smothered the ailing emperor when he began to show signs of recovery.\textsuperscript{63} Suetonius states that Gaius tried to poison Tiberius, and when he still would not die, he smothered him with a pillow.\textsuperscript{64} No matter how he actually died, however, Tiberius was gone, and the question of succession quickly became a problem. Only two realistic options for the next emperor remained: Tiberius’ young grandson Tiberius Gemellus, and the slightly older and moderately more experienced Gaius. Apparently, even to the end of his life, Tiberius was unable to make a solid decision, and each source provides different variations of how he attempted to decide. Ultimately, Tiberius Gemellus was far too young to assume the Principate, and so Gaius (with a good deal of help from Macro) was able to take power fairly quickly, and with an outpouring of popular support from the people. Thus, Gaius became emperor of Rome, a title that he would not hold for nearly as long as his predecessors.

Gaius was born and raised in several different environments, and before he was even seven years old he had seen a wide portion of the empire with his father. His early years were filled with instability, travel, and a hefty dose of eastern culture. He was able to see the ways that both Roman and Hellenistic cultures treated those with power, and how dangerous having power could be. He spent his adolescent years in Rome, where he learned much about the machinations and political struggles of the imperial family, and where he was surrounded by constant danger as his family was targeted and removed, one by one. He was brought to Capri, where he lived in a constant state of danger and survived only by his ingenuity, intellect, and adherence to

\textsuperscript{63} Cassius Dio, 58.28.3
\textsuperscript{64} Suetonius, \textit{Cal.} 12
Tiberius’ will. The things that Gaius experienced at different points during his childhood would come to define his short adult life, generating much of the controversy that marked his reign.

As he grew up Gaius experienced the draw of Hellenistic culture, he saw the power that was available to the *princeps*, and he watched his entire family get murdered by the political intrigues of the imperial household. The events of Gaius’ Principate heavily reflect all of these influences and aspects of his early life. They stem from his Hellenistic inclinations, the traumatic experiences of his youth (and their effects on his mind), and the cunning intelligence that allowed him to survive on Capri. Gaius’ reign was marked with many oddities, strange and controversial events, and harsh criticisms from the sources (many of which will be discussed in the upcoming chapters, in particular in chapter four), and perhaps the key to explaining them lies in his turbulent upbringing.
Chapter 2
A Promising Start: Gaius as Princeps

At this point in time, the death of a princeps was still a new phenomenon in Roman culture. Augustus had been the first emperor, but he had never established a law of succession. Instead, he had merely adopted Tiberius and given him a variety of powers. Therefore, Tiberius “…became in fact almost a co-regent…” and thus when Augustus died, Tiberius was already essentially the new emperor. The Senate did meet, however, and formally vote that Tiberius should be allowed to keep his existing powers, and that he should be given additional ones. Upon accepting these powers, Tiberius officially became the new princeps.

When Tiberius died, however, the line of succession was not nearly as precisely laid out. Unlike Augustus, he had not elevated either of the two prospective candidates to a position similar to his, and therefore there was less clarity in regards to who was supposed to succeed him. This was probably a time of some contention for Gaius, who most likely realized he was the only logical choice to inherit power, but given Tiberius’ lack of a selection this point in Gaius’ life must have been plagued with uncertainty. Macro, however, was confident in what was going to happen when Tiberius died. He put in a large amount of effort to maneuver Gaius into position, and his success allowed Gaius to succeed smoothly to the throne. Gaius was hailed as imperator by the local troops at Misenum (where Tiberius had died), and then accepted by the consuls and Senate.

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66 Ibid, pp. 226-227
67 Winterling, pp. 50-51
In the process of accepting Gaius, the Senate had overlooked Tiberius’ last will, which declared that Gaius and Gemellus would be joint heirs to Tiberius’ estate, although not necessarily to the title of princeps. This curious arrangement evidently rose from the fact that legally, Tiberius only had the power to appoint an heir to his estate (and not to the Principate), because Augustus had never put a law of succession into place.68 The Senate, however (perhaps with some influence from Macro) voided the will, although their reasons for doing so are unclear. Because Tiberius had failed to take the same steps with Gaius as Augustus had done with him, Gaius had to rely on popular support and the support of the military to succeed Tiberius.69 That support was garnered in large part by Macro, who ensured that the Praetorian Guard stood behind the young Gaius. The Senate also seems to have strongly supported him, as did the people of Rome. Thus, Gaius rose to power quickly and with no opposition despite his lack of experience in Roman politics and his youth (he was only twenty-four at the time).

The Senate recognized Gaius as the new princeps, even though he was not actually present in Rome at the time. Instead, he was accompanying the body of Tiberius on the journey from Misenum to Rome. Along the way “…a dense crowd greeted him [Gaius] ecstatically with altars, sacrifices, and torches, and such endearments as ‘star’, ‘chick’, ‘baby’ and ‘pet’.”70 According to Suetonius, because of the people’s fond memories of Germanicus, Gaius enjoyed massive popular support both in the provinces and at Rome itself from the outset of his reign. Suetonius also explains that when Gaius arrived in Rome, “…the Senate… immediately and unanimously conferred absolute power upon him.”71 This power evidently included all the

68 Barrett, pp. 38-39
69 Ibid, pp. 51-52
70 Suetonius, Cal. 13
71 Ibid, Cal. 14
powers that Augustus had gradually accumulated throughout his reign.\textsuperscript{72} Thus, in a very short time Gaius had gone from a young man who had barely spent any time in the city of Rome to a ruler with complete power who headed the entire empire.

The start of Gaius’ reign was full of promise, and betrayed nothing of the darkness that lay ahead. He began his rule by delivering a speech to the Senate in which he both indicated his desire to cooperate with the senators and declared that he was their son and ward.\textsuperscript{73} He also took steps to erase the intense distrust and disdain that had built up between the emperor and the elite under Tiberius. He honored the monetary bequests in Tiberius’ will (despite it having been annulled), which included payments to the Praetorians, soldiers, and the people of the city.\textsuperscript{74} He also decided to honor the bequests from Livia’s will that had been ignored by Tiberius.\textsuperscript{75} He even threw in his own personal contribution to the Praetorians and the heads of every family in Rome.\textsuperscript{76}

This outpouring of money was a key factor in cementing Gaius’ reign. The Praetorians, soldiers, and people all looked more favorably on the young emperor who showered them with monetary gifts upon his succession. But the money was not the only thing Gaius did to ensure that the people (particularly the senators) were happy with him; he officially ended the treason trials of Tiberius (which the senators had detested).\textsuperscript{77} Additionally, to show that he harbored no ill will towards those who had condemned his family to death during the trials, he publicly

\textsuperscript{72} Barrett, p. 56
\textsuperscript{73} Cassius Dio, 59.6.1.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 59.2.1-3
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 59.2.4
\textsuperscript{76} Winterling, pp. 55-56 (Cassius Dio, 59.2.2)
\textsuperscript{77} Cassius Dio, 59.4.3
burned all the records of their cases.\textsuperscript{78} He even pardoned anyone who was still imprisoned or exiled because of an order from Tiberius.\textsuperscript{79}

Gaius’ actions at the start of his reign indicate that he not only had a strong sense of his capacity and duties as emperor, but that he also understood that his position relied on the support of those below him. He was possibly applying the lessons he had learned from observing his father to his administrative techniques, and thus the beginning of his rule was a time of great rejoicing for the people of Rome. Even the Senate seemed happy, as Gaius’ actions gave strong indication that his rule would be different from the terror of Tiberius’ reign. One key moment marks a striking difference between Gaius and his predecessor: Gaius received a tip about a plot against him but he dismissed it, saying that he could not possibly have any enemies as he had given no one any reason to hate him.\textsuperscript{80} Gaius thus began his rule with great popularity and acclaim, and his open attitude of cooperation with the Senate demonstrated a willingness to break from the troubled past and push forward into a new era for Rome.

During this time Gaius began to demonstrate the capacity of his cleverness and ingenuity, particularly in administrative affairs. None of the ancient sources are keen to recognize his capacity as an administrator, as his positive actions are largely overshadowed by his generally negative portrayal. This negative portrayal, however, does not mean that Gaius’ actions at the start of his reign were not well-informed or that his decisions were not made with the best interests of the empire in mind. One of his more intelligent moves was to adopt Gemellus and to grant him the title “Prince of the Youth”.\textsuperscript{81} This not only served to propel Gemellus into an obvious position to succeed Gaius, but it helped to ensure that a faction that supported Gemellus

\textsuperscript{78} Suetonius, \textit{Cal.} 15  
\textsuperscript{79} Winterling, p. 54 (Suetonius, \textit{Cal.} 15)  
\textsuperscript{80} Suetonius, \textit{Cal.} 15  
\textsuperscript{81} Winterling, p.57 (Suetonius, \textit{Cal.} 15)
over Gaius would not rise. This move was extremely prudent, and demonstrated remarkable foresight on Gaius’ part.

Gaius also did many things that “…can be clearly seen as an attempt to copy the Augustan Principate…”82 He delivered a speech to the Senate on his policies,83 dedicated a newly-completed temple to the deified Augustus,84 decreed that the imperial financial accounts would be published (an Augustan-era tradition, suspended by Tiberius),85 and was careful not to accept an overly large number of honors.86 Many of these sophisticated decisions, however, seem contrary to Gaius’ level of experience. Philo explains the phenomenon by crediting Macro with making most of the key decisions, as well as with crafting Gaius’ positive public perception.87 The other sources, however, do not provide much information that would indicate that Macro was responsible for Gaius’ success. Still, despite this, Philo should not be entirely discounted. Macro was quite likely involved in moderating Gaius’ public appearance, but the extent of Macro’s control is difficult to determine. One of the best indicators of Gaius’ independence from Macro is that when Macro was eventually eliminated Gaius still succeeded in maintaining a stable rule for some time afterwards.

Gaius was able to maintain a high standard of behavior and administrative capacity for much of the first year of his reign. Unfortunately, however, sometime around the eighth month of his rule Gaius fell drastically ill. The illness that afflicted him was severe, but the ancient sources are unclear on the exact nature of the sickness. Philo is the only one who indicates any kind of cause: he claims that Gaius essentially partied himself to illness. He explains that Gaius was

82 Winterling, p. 58
83 Ibid, 59.6.7
84 Ibid, 59.7.1
85 Ibid, 59.5.4
86 Barrett, pp. 68-69
87 Philo, Leg. 7-8.
accustomed to a more moderate and temperate lifestyle on Capri, and his body was unable to adjust to the luxury he now found himself living in, which caused him to become seriously ill.\(^{88}\) Philo’s explanation, however, is contrary to Suetonius’ statement that while on Capri, Gaius “…abandoned himself nightly to the pleasures of feasting and scandalous living.”\(^{89}\) Unfortunately, Suetonius does not comment on the nature or cause of Gaius’ illness, although he does give an indication of the people’s reaction: “When he [Gaius] fell ill, anxious crowds besieged the Palatine all night.”\(^{90}\) Philo is in agreement in regards to the effect of Gaius’ sickness on the populace, although he expands that effect to include the entire empire, and indicates that people everywhere were completely depressed and melancholy for fear of Gaius’ death and the end of his prosperous reign.\(^{91}\)

Gaius, however, did not die from his sickness but in fact made a full recovery. At this point, Philo claims he began to display “…the savageness which he had previously overshadowed by pretense and hypocrisy.”\(^{92}\) Philo’s reason for accusing Gaius of savagery is that, once he had recovered, Gaius quickly forced the young Gemellus to commit suicide.\(^{93}\) The ancient sources present a variety of stories regarding Gaius’ decision to eliminate Gemellus, but Winterling provides a highly probable interpretation. He claims that when Gaius became sick, Macro and Silanus (a prominent senator and Gaius’ former father in law) began to work to prepare a replacement in case Gaius died. The only possible choice was Gemellus, so the boy was apparently the center of their efforts. But when Gaius recovered and realized that they had been working on replacing him in the event of his death, he moved to eliminate Gemellus, who

\(^{88}\) Philo, Leg. 2.14
\(^{89}\) Suetonius, Cal. 11
\(^{90}\) Ibid, Cal. 14
\(^{91}\) Philo, Leg. 3.15-20
\(^{92}\) Ibid, Leg. 4.22
\(^{93}\) Apparently, Gemellus’ death was a forced suicide, in the sense that Gaius sent soldiers who found Gemellus and ordered him to kill himself. (Barrett, p. 75. Philo, Leg. 5.30-31)
“...as long as he lived would remain a magnet for conspirators hostile to the emperor...”

Thus Gemellus was removed, and he would be followed before long by both Macro and Silanus.

Even as Gaius recovered from his illness, he still had an empire to run, and despite the blotch on his record of Gemellus’ death he still managed to administer the empire efficiently. He made several motions to remain at peace with the Senate and to distance himself from the policies of Tiberius, including lifting a ban on certain writings that had been put in place by his predecessor. He also took steps to renovate the judicial system by curbing his own authority in hearing cases. Additionally, he created a fifth panel of judges to cut down on the time it took for cases to be heard. Gaius then turned his attention to the equestrian order, which had been neglected in recent years. He reinvigorated the order with new numbers, expelled unfit members, and allowed many new members the honor of wearing the senatorial insignia (as opposed to the equestrian one). His well-received actions did not stop there; he ended the general sales tax for all of Italy, and even returned the election process for new magistrates to the popular assemblies (Tiberius had given it to the Senate).

According to Cassius Dio, “These measures gave satisfaction to everybody...” Clearly, Gaius was still capable of running the empire, despite the harrowing ordeal of his close brush with death during his illness.

Sometime either at the end of 37 C.E. or at the beginning of 38, Gaius took another startling action: Silanus committed suicide as a preemptive move to his forthcoming deposition.

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94 Winterling, p. 63
95 Ibid, pp. 63-65
96 Ibid, p. 67 (Suetonius, Cal. 16)
97 Suetonius, Cal. 16
98 Winterling, p. 68 (Suetonius, Cal. 16)
99 Cassius Dio, 59.9.6
100 Ibid, 59.9.6
101 Due to general confusion in Cassius Dio’s account, there is significant debate on exactly when these events occurred. Some sources place them earlier in Gaius’ reign, while others indicate they happened after the death of Macro. For the purposes of this paper, the precise order is less relevant.
by Gaius.\textsuperscript{102} This suicide was yet another black mark on Gaius’ otherwise excellent rule thus far. Gaius, however, did not stop there; in a move that clearly demonstrates that Gaius did not need Macro to tell him what to do, Gaius had Macro and his family eliminated.\textsuperscript{103} In order to smoothly remove Macro from power, he first assigned Macro to a new position: the Prefecture of Egypt. This may have been a diversion tactic to distract Macro while Gaius prepared to eliminate and replace him. Before Macro could leave to fulfil this new office, he was suddenly eliminated and replaced not by one, but by \textit{two} Praetorian Prefects.\textsuperscript{104} This arrangement had not been in practice since the time of Augustus, and this moment marks the first time that we can be sure that Macro was not manipulating or influencing Gaius’ decisions.

The replacement of the Praetorian Prefect with two successors is a prime example of Gaius’ administrative capacity and shrewd intellect; he not only smoothly and efficiently rid himself of Macro, but he then replaced him with two men to dilute the power of the office by splitting it in half. A powerful new prefect like Sejanus or Macro could no longer become a threat so easily, as now two prefects were struggling to hold onto a position of power.\textsuperscript{105} Exactly how many of Gaius’ actions Macro inspired up until his demise is difficult to say, but the circumstances surrounding the prefect’s death seem to have been entirely of Gaius’ doing.\textsuperscript{106} Gaius had experienced Sejanus’ rise and fall from power and he knew that to dispose of a Praetorian Prefect was no simple task; thus he constructed the elaborate two-part plan to distract Macro with a new office and then replace him with two new prefects.

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{102} Winterling, pp. 64-65 (Cassius Dio, 59.8.4)
\bibitem{103} Macro and his wife, according to Philo, were compelled to kill themselves. (Philo, \textit{Leg.} 8.61)
\bibitem{104} Barrett, pp. 79-80
\bibitem{105} Winterling, p. 64
\bibitem{106} Once again the confusion in Dio’s account makes a timeline of events difficult. Unfortunately, that means that it is hard to say for sure if the death of Macro occurred before or after some of these other moves by Gaius, therefore making it impractical to speculate how much Macro may have been involved in these actions. We cannot say for sure if he had a hand in them, or if it was all Gaius’ doing.
\end{thebibliography}
The forced suicide of Gemellus, followed shortly by that of Silanus and Macro, are significant events and yet are still quite puzzling. The removal of Gemellus is understandable, as he was a potential rival with a solid claim to the throne, and during Gaius’ illness he had possibly been the center of Macro and Silanus’ plans to replace Gaius should he die. But the elimination of Macro and Silanus is a bit more problematic. Silanus had been one of the leading senators and a man of great power and influence, and Macro had been in large part responsible for Gaius’ ascent to the throne. Our modern perceptions of what is and is not reasonable for a leader to do are quite different from the Romans, of course, but Philo presents evidence that people at the time were also shocked and confused by the deaths.

Philo explains that the deaths of three prominent members of the imperial household came as a surprise to many people. Apparently, “…men, disbelieving that one [Gaius] who but a little while before was so merciful and humane could have become altered so entirely… began to seek for excuses for him…” The excuse they apparently found for the death of Gemellus was that Gaius was preemptsing an attack on his position and that he had acted to secure the best interests of the state. For Macro, they claimed that the prefect was too full of pride and did not know his place as Gaius’ subject. As for Silanus, they said that the senator should not have tried to exert fatherly authority over his former son-in-law, and that his attempts to do so led to his downfall.

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107 Barrett offers a claim that should be addressed: he believes that, because Rome had continued to operate without Gaius during his illness, when Gaius awoke he realized that the truth of the matter was that he was not indispensable: Rome could run just as well without him. Therefore, Barrett concludes, Gaius must have acted on this realization coupled (possibly) with the revelation of some kind of conspiracy, and eliminated Gemellus (and perhaps even Silanus and Macro as well). But Barrett fails to account for the fact that Gaius already knew he wasn’t indispensable. He had been living a life of fear and danger for years; he had been fully aware of his own indispensability ever since the death his father demonstrated that popularity wasn’t sufficient protection for one’s life. (Barrett, p. 75)

108 Philo, Leg. 10.67

109 Ibid, Leg. 10.67-72
These explanations that Philo claims were flying around Rome are important primarily because they highlight the reaction of the Roman people to the forced suicides of Gemellus, Macro, and Silanus. Based on what Philo says, Gaius’ actions seem to be morally questionable, or else the people would not have needed to generate excuses for them. The people were also having trouble reconciling Gaius’ actions against Gemellus, Macro, and Silanus with his rule until that point. Not too much earlier in his reign, Gaius had declared that he would not pay heed to informers who brought conspiracy theories to his attention. He had adopted and promised to care for Gemellus, and he had shown deference to the Senate, placing himself in their care as their ward. As soon as he received even the slightest hint of what he considered a conspiracy against him, however (even if the plot were less of a conspiracy and more of an emergency plan), he reacted by putting Macro, Silanus, and Gemellus to death.

This sudden aggression that apparently appeared after Gaius’ illness is difficult to explain, and the most recent scholarly trend has been to postulate complex conspiracies or intricate political maneuverings. Even contemporary Romans tried to find excuses for Gaius’ actions. But there could well be a simpler explanation: namely, that the years of continual stress and strain that Gaius had undergone, from the death of his father, to the elimination of his family, to his struggle to retain Tiberius’ favor on Capri, had taken a stronger mental toll on him than had been immediately apparent until that point. Balsdon states that Gaius’ illness “…would probably be described [today] as a nervous break-down…” and Barrett says that Gaius’ first six months of rule

“…exacted their toll on the young emperor. The strain of being at the center of power and attention, and the adulation of the people, would have made enormous demands on his nerves and stamina…”

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110 Balsdon, p. 36
111 Barrett, p. 71
It seems unlikely that the strain was caused by Gaius’ newfound life of luxury, as Philo asserts, but perhaps the idea of Gaius becoming unstable should be seriously considered. Up until now, his life had hardly been one of much stability, and perhaps at this point that instability finally manifested itself. It would not be prudent to assume that the forced suicides of Gemellus, Silanus, and Macro had no basis or rationality behind them, but it seems entirely possible that Gaius’ reasoning could have been affected by some kind of mental unbalance or excessive stress and strain. Such an imbalance could have caused him to overreact drastically to Macro and Silanus’ plan in case of his death, and could explain why he suddenly had all three of them eliminated.

The deaths of Macro, Silanus, and Gemellus were not the only events in late 37 and early 38 C.E. that indicate the potential of mental issues for Gaius. Sometime after the death of Macro Gaius was rocked by yet another blow: his beloved sister Drusilla died. By the time Gaius had ascended to the throne, he and his three sisters were the last living members of his immediate family. The sources attest that Gaius had a very close relationship with his sisters, which makes sense, given how brutally the rest of his family had been destroyed. Cassius Dio clearly lays out the privileges that Gaius conferred on his remaining siblings when he became emperor.

“To his sisters he assigned these privileges of the Vestal Virgins, also that of witnessing the games in the Circus with him from the imperial seats, and the right to have uttered in their behalf, also, not only the prayers annually offered by the magistrates and priests for his welfare and that of the State, but also the oaths of allegiance that were sworn to his rule.”\footnote{Cassius Dio, 59.3.4}

Apparently, Gaius had a particular fondness for Drusilla, so much so that when Gaius had been ill and he thought that he might not recover, he had declared Drusilla to be the heir to his
property and the empire as a whole. According to several sources, Gaius’ attachment to his sisters went beyond familial love; the sources make multiple accusations that Gaius was in the “...habit to commit incest with each of his three sisters in turn...” although, in Gaius’ defense, “The charge of incest has been traditionally leveled against despots, from antiquity to Napoleon.” Whether Gaius was complicit in illicit sexual activity with his sisters is a matter of debate, but not wholly relevant to demonstrating the reverence he had for them. What is clear in both Suetonius and Cassius Dio is that Gaius elevated his sisters to a high status as the last surviving members of his family, and when Drusilla died his grief was obvious. The question, however, is whether or not that grief was a product of Gaius’ mental instability or if it fell within traditional Roman customs.

Suetonius depicts Gaius’ reaction to Drusilla’s death as one of extreme grief and mourning. Gaius instituted a period of public mourning, and then left Rome in a rush, traveled to Sicily, and then returned (during which time he failed to shave or cut his hair). Seneca (Gaius’ contemporary) also takes time to discuss Gaius’ reaction, although he is much more cynical and critical of Gaius’ outpouring of grief:

“...[Gaius] shrank from seeing and speaking to his countrymen, was not present at his sister’s funeral, did not pay her the conventional tribute of respect, but tried to forget the sorrows caused by this most distressing death by playing dice at his Alban villa...”

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113 Suetonius, Cal. 24
114 Ibid, Cal. 24
115 Barrett, p. 85
116 With regards to the accusations of Gaius’ incest, the matter seems to be of significance to his reign, especially in the sense that it is one of the most well-known stories about him. The charge of incest, however, is a literary topos that is typically applied to any emperor that the sources wish to denounce as evil. Therefore, not only is it of little interest in this paper, but it also is one of the few instances where we do have just cause truly to doubt the veracity of the reports in the primary sources. Barrett discusses the problem and provides evidence against the accusations on page 85 of his work.
117 Suetonius, Cal. 24
118 Ibid, Cal. 24
119 Seneca, Dialogues, 12.17
Seneca continues with his tirade regarding Gaius’ display of grief, claiming that he wandered up and down the coast of Italy and Sicily, let his beard and hair grow long, and punished those who did not show sorrow at her passing.\textsuperscript{120}

After her death, Gaius accorded Drusilla several honors, including all the honors that had been bestowed upon his great-grandmother Livia. He had Drusilla deified, and she became the goddess Panthea, with her own statue in the Temple of Venus in the Forum, and her own cult of priests to attend her.\textsuperscript{121} Gaius’ reaction and her deification may seem excessive and unusual, but Barrett makes the argument that none of Gaius’ behavior was atypical for a Roman, including all of the posthumous honors that were granted to Drusilla.\textsuperscript{122} Winterling also indicates that because Drusilla was Gaius’ designated heir, her deification was not unusual, as the deification of a male ruler had precedents. He also points out that “Her deification was the first time a woman from the imperial family was added to the Roman Pantheon, but not the last.”\textsuperscript{123}

Jean-Michel Hulls, however, contests the idea of what was considered a ‘normal’ display of grief for a Roman aristocrat. He analyzes a specific poem by Statius (who writes shortly after Gaius’ time), regarding the grief of a man over the death of his father. Hulls asserts that “…the traditional approach to public displays of grief by important Roman men, [was] where the aristocratic Roman male would not show any overt emotion in public.”\textsuperscript{124} In fact, Hulls goes so far as to say that it was “…a golden rule that the aristocratic Roman male did not show grief in

\textsuperscript{120} Seneca, \textit{Dialogues}, 12.17
\textsuperscript{121} Cassius Dio, 59.11.2-4
\textsuperscript{122} Barrett, p. 86
\textsuperscript{123} Winterling, p. 83. Later, both Livia and Poppaea Sabina were added to the Roman pantheon, by Claudius and Nero respectively.
\textsuperscript{124} Hulls, Jean-Michel. \textit{Poetic Monuments: Grief and Consolation in Statius Silvae 3.3}. In Hope V. & Huskinson J. (Eds.), \textit{Memory and Mourning: Studies on Roman Death} (pp. 150-175). Oxford; Oakville: Oxbow Books (2011) http://www.jstor.org.resources.library.brandeis.edu/stable/j.ctt1cd0pnw.13, p. 152

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public.” If Hulls is correct in his assessment, then Gaius most certainly violated traditional Roman mourning customs in his display of grief over the death of Drusilla.

Hulls’ interpretation of ‘normal’ and ‘excessive’ grief is reinforced by the primary sources. Seneca ridicules Gaius’ behavior, explicitly stating that “On losing his sister Drusilla, Gaius Caesar, a man who could neither mourn nor rejoice as becomes a prince…” Seneca then goes on to list the various ways in which Gaius mourned (apparently incorrectly), and then states “Far be it from every Roman to follow such an example…” Additionally, the sources provide several instances of the reactions of Gaius’ predecessors upon losing someone close to them. Augustus lost several people to whom he was very close, and he responded in a much more restrained manner. According to Dio, when his beloved nephew and prospective heir Marcellus died, “Augustus delivered a eulogy in the traditional manner, gave him a public burial, and placed his body in the tomb which he was building.” Nowhere does Dio mention excessive grief from Augustus over Marcellus’ death, despite how close Augustus was with the boy. Dio also tells us about Augustus’ reaction to the death of his close friend Agrippa, which was just as restrained as his reaction to Marcellus’ death. Even the death of Augustus’ own sister Octavia did not provoke a stronger response, as Augustus “…arranged for her body to lie in state… [and] himself pronounced the funeral oration.” Clearly, Gaius’ reaction to Drusilla’s death did not follow Augustus’ precedents for handling a death in the family.

Other Roman authors have similar views on the proper way to respond to the death of a close family member. Marcus Tullius Cicero, who wrote before Gaius’ time, lost his daughter,

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125 Hulls, p. 153
126 Seneca, Dialogues, 12.17
127 Ibid, Dialogues, 12.17
128 Cassius Dio, 53.30.5
129 Ibid, 53.31.2-3
130 Ibid, 54.28.3
131 Ibid, 54.35.4-5
Tullia, and his friend Servius Sulpicius wrote a lengthy letter regarding Cicero’s level of grief. In the letter, Sulpicius asks Cicero “Why is it that a private grief should agitate you so deeply?”\(^{132}\) he also states that it is time for Cicero to “…convince us that you are able to bear bad fortune equally well [with good fortune], and that it does not appear to you to be a heavier burden than you ought to think it.”\(^{133}\) Clearly, Sulpicius found Cicero’s level of grief to be disproportionate to the death that occurred, although his take on the matter seems to stem from a strongly philosophical standpoint and therefore may be a bit extreme.

Pliny the Younger, who wrote after Gaius’ time, discusses the death of his friend Fundanus’ daughter, although in a more compassionate way than Sulpicius. He tells the recipient of the letter (Marcellinus) that “You will excuse, you will even approve, his [Fundanus’] grief, when you consider what he has lost”. Pliny seems keen to defend Fundanus’ level of grief as appropriate, even though Fundanus was apparently a man of philosophical inclinations and evidently should not have been so exorbitant in his display of sorrow. Pliny seems to find that his level of grief was justified, even if others might not see it as being so. The fact that he felt the need to defend Fundanus’ grief, however, is indicative of a potential cultural stigma surrounding sorrow and grief (especially if the one grieving was a philosopher). Gaius, of course, was not a philosopher and therefore cannot be held to the same standards of grieving as they appear to have been. But Gaius was still in a very prominent role and there appears to have been a certain stigma attached to ‘excessive’ grief in the Roman world in general, especially if the person grieving was an aristocratic male. Therefore, it does make sense that Senenca would criticize Gaius for his reaction, and both Pliny and Cicero seem to contain evidence that grief such as

Gaius displayed could be considered excessive and was not an accepted way of handling the death of a close family member.\textsuperscript{134}

The question that arises from this analysis of Drusilla’s death relates directly to the other events of early 38. Did Gaius have some kind of serious mental issue that affected his decision-making process in dealing with Gemellus, Silanus, and Macro, and that influenced his excessive grief for Drusilla? The best way to analyze this possibility is to first look at the factors that contributed to a potential mental instability. Once that has been done, the next step is to look at the symptoms and actions that resulted from such an instability. In regards to the contributing factors, the first evidence is the turbulence of Gaius’ youth, the instability of his upbringing, and the danger he faced from the time he was a child until he became emperor. The early instability in his life must have contributed some kind of impact onto his personality. Additionally, even when he finally did become emperor, it would be a mistake to assume that he found relief from the stress and dangers of his earlier years.

While Gaius was no longer in the same kind of danger that he had experienced on Capri, the existence of plots and conspiracies from the very outset of his reign, as well as the tense and strenuous political atmosphere in Rome, could well have contributed to his mental issues. There is also the chance that the weight of all these factors eventually contributed to his illness, and the possibility that the illness itself had caused an increase in Gaius’ instability should not be overlooked. If that is the case, then his actions upon his recovery could have stemmed from a

\textsuperscript{134} When discussing Roman mourning practices, it is important to remember that what exactly the Romans considered to be acceptable levels of grief and mourning is not explicitly clear, and seems to vary on a case-by-case basis. Although it can fairly be said that there appears to have been some level of stigmatization of 'excessive' grief (what exactly 'excessive' looked like is hard to say), that appears to apply primarily to philosophers. It is also important to remember that, in regards to the death of Drusilla, Gaius was much younger when she died than Augustus was when he lost Marcellus, Agrippa, or Octavia. Gaius’ inability to follow Augustus’ precedents does not inherently indicate that his style of grief or mourning was ‘wrong’, but there is certainly evidence to suggest that at least some people (such as Seneca) considered it to be excessive (especially for the head of state).
buildup of paranoia resulting from extreme mental instability created before, and exacerbated during his illness. That paranoia and instability could possibly explain the deaths of Gemellus, Silanus, and Macro. Their removal could easily have been the first sign of Gaius’ overloaded mind.

Just as with Gaius’ illness, the death of Drusilla and Gaius’ response demonstrates both a contributing factor to and a product of his mental instability. The impact that Drusilla’s death had on him is evident from the posthumous honors he heaped upon her, and the instability that her loss caused is clear in his dismissal of traditional Roman mourning customs. The level of instability that he reached during this period gave way to certain displays of grief, such as wandering up and down the coastline, letting his beard and hair grow out, and distracting himself with dice games at his villa. While it is not easy to prove that his actions were necessarily excessive, they certainly were out of line for a traditional Roman aristocrat.

This notion of Gaius’ disturbed mind, however, seems to rely solely on a tenuous analysis of events and an attempt to interpret occurrences using only semi-solid evidence. This paper must still ask a question that would seem to be key to unraveling the relevance of these events and their potential impacts on Gaius: is there evidence of Gaius’ disturbed mental state in the primary sources? The answer is a resounding yes; in fact, Gaius’ mental instability is one of the few things that every major source that we have for him agrees upon to some extent.

Suetonius states outright that “I am convinced that this mental illness accounted for his two contradictory vices - overconfidence and extreme timorousness.” and even goes as far as to

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135 When discussing Gaius’s mental state, it is important to remember that there are a whole variety of anecdotes and stories from the sources (Suetonius in particular) that attempt to depict Gaius as an insane monster. Many of these stories can be explained or otherwise discredited, so this paper utilizes other examples where the authors specifically point out Gaius’ mental issues.

136 Suetonius, Cal. 51
explain that “He [Gaius] was well aware that he had mental trouble, and sometimes proposed taking a leave of absence from Rome to clear his brain…” 137 Cassius Dio claims, in a passage that heavily implies strong instability in his character, that “…Gaius invariably went by contraries in every matter…” 138 Seneca states that “…his mind was so ill-balanced…” 139 in reference to Gaius’ actions after Drusilla’s death, and Philo claims that “…the madness and frenzy to which he gave way were so preposterous, and so utterly insane, that he even went beyond the demigods…” 140 Tacitus states that Gaius’ failed invasion of Britain was a result of “his own volatile instability…” 141 and finally Josephus consistently refers to Gaius’ madness, indicating that it “extend[ed] itself through all the earth and sea…” 142

The continual references to Gaius’ apparent mental instability is so prevalent in the ancient literature that there must be some grain of truth, despite the clear negative biases that these authors had for Gaius. 143 Unfortunately, none of the sources give a precise indication of a timeframe for any kind of mental breakdown Gaius may have had, but it seems clear that both his illness and the death of Drusilla played key roles. Whether those events were the causes of the instability, the symptoms, or a mix of both is difficult to say for sure. What can be said, however, is that the changes in Gaius’ behavior began after he became sick and continued up through the death of Drusilla and beyond. The changes in his behavior clearly indicate some kind

137 Suetonius, Cal. 50
138 Cassius Dio, 59.4.1.
139 Seneca, Dialogues, 12.17
140 Philo, Leg. 13.93
141 Balsdon, p. 89. The phrase used here is “ingenio mobili”, which Balsdon translates as “volatile instability”.
142 Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, First Rate Publishers, 19.1
143 Despite the overwhelming evidence from the ancient sources, the possibility still exists that accusations of Gaius’ insanity follow some kind of rhetorical tradition or literary topos. But even if we assume that the later sources (Suetonius, Cassius Dio, and Tacitus) are writing based on a previously existing literary tradition, that doesn’t account for the contemporaneous sources. Both Philo and Seneca met Gaius personally, and they both call him insane. If there is a tradition it starts with them, and since they both agree on the matter, the tradition must be based in reality to some extent.
of alteration to his mental state, as his actions are difficult to rationalize, and when placed in the context of his life as a whole they continue the story of instability that had plagued Gaius from his earliest days.
Chapter 3
Decline and Fall: Gaius’ Last Two Years as Princeps

The death of Drusilla was certainly a destabilizing factor for Gaius, and it marked the end of the high point of his reign, but her loss could not have been the tipping point that sent Gaius spiraling out of control. Even after Drusilla was gone, Gaius continued to demonstrate his administrative capacity in his effective management of the empire. A few weeks after her death, Gaius traveled to Sicily where he began construction on a new port terminal and granaries that would be of immense benefit to the grain supply of southern Italy.\footnote{Winterling, pp. 85-86 (Josephus, Antiquities, 19.2.5)} Then, once Gaius had returned to Rome, he personally assisted in putting out a fire in the city,\footnote{Cassius Dio, 59.9.4} and he began construction on two new aqueducts to bring water into the city.\footnote{Winterling, p. 86 (Suetonius, Cal. 21)} Despite the trauma that Drusilla’s death had caused him, Gaius was still quite clearly focusing his efforts on effective administration of the empire, and he seems to have been doing an excellent job.

Sometime around the start of 39 C.E., however, everything began to change. Josephus marks the transition well by stating that

“Now Caius [Gaius] managed public affairs with great magnanimity during the first and second year of his reign, and behaved himself with such moderation, that he gained the good-will of the Romans themselves, and of his other subjects. But, in process of time, he went beyond the bounds of human nature in his conceit of himself...”\footnote{Josephus, Antiquities, 18.7.2}

Josephus does not give a specific cause or explanation as to what happened, but both Barrett and Winterling are under the impression that a senatorial conspiracy was uncovered,\footnote{Barrett, pp. 92-93, Winterling, pp. 92-93} leading to a
massive rift between Gaius and the Senate and a series of convictions and deaths that Cassius Dio describes as “…nothing but slaughter…”\textsuperscript{149} The exact chronology is severely confused, but at some point, Gaius delivered a shocking and powerful speech to the Senate in which he apparently eulogized Tiberius, and then blamed the Senate for the deaths of so many of their own members during Tiberius’ treason trials. Gaius allegedly went through each case and tried to demonstrate why the senators themselves had been responsible for the deaths in the trials, and why none of the fault rested with Tiberius.\textsuperscript{150} He derived this evidence from documents he had supposedly burned at the beginning of his reign (but which he had clearly retained), then after he was done verbally assaulting the Senate, he reinstated the charge of treason and left the Senate house in a rush.\textsuperscript{151}

This speech was a clear signal to the Senate: the time of goodwill and mutual respect between themselves and their emperor had come to an end. Unfortunately, the reason why Gaius gave the speech in the first place is not clear (it could possibly have been the result of the newly uncovered conspiracy), but considering some of his other rash actions (such as the removal of Macro and Silanus), the speech provides further evidence that Gaius was becoming increasingly unbalanced. No matter whether Gaius had uncovered a conspiracy, or if the trauma of his recent losses and the pressures of rule were increasing the strain on his mind, his actions from this point on cannot easily be explained. Not only did he become increasingly autocratic, but during this period many events occurred which the sources would later claim as proof of Gaius’ insanity (the most significant of which will be covered as we move through Gaius’ last two years).

\textsuperscript{149} Cassius Dio, 59.13.3.
\textsuperscript{150} Prior to this address to the Senate, Gaius had evidently joined with the senators in their dislike of Tiberius. While he may not have allowed for public displays of dishonor to Tiberius’ memory, he certainly didn't go out of his way to honor his predecessor in any way. This sudden show of devotion to Tiberius was therefore entirely unexpected. (Balsdon, pp. 48-49)
\textsuperscript{151} Cassius Dio, 59.16.1-8
Sometime after Gaius’ dramatic speech to the Senate (Cassius Dio seems to indicate that it was almost directly after), the young emperor prepared and executed one of his most famous and most discussed displays of power, which involve an engineering feat the likes of which had never been seen before.\footnote{Cassius Dio, 59.17.1} Despite being well-documented, this feat of engineering (generally referred to as the ‘Bridge at Baiae’) is very difficult to understand and contextualize. According to Suetonius, Gaius gathered all the available merchant ships and anchored them together in two lines (which, according to Dio and Seneca, caused a famine in Italy due to a lack of boats),\footnote{Cassius Dio, 59.17.2. Seneca, Dialogues, 10.18} then covered them in planks and dirt, creating a bridge that stretched from Baiae to Puteoli (spanning part of the northern end of the Bay of Naples, a distance that Suetonius reports as over three miles). Gaius then got on his horse, and rode back and forth across this bridge for two days, wearing ornate clothing and accompanied by Praetorians.\footnote{Suetonius, Cal. 19} Cassius Dio adds several additional details, including that Gaius had rest stops constructed along the way, complete with running water, and that as he rode, he wore a breastplate that he claimed belonged to Alexander the Great.\footnote{Cassius Dio, 59.17.3} Dio also says that Gaius brought armed soldiers who followed him across the bridge, charging with him into Puteoli as though rushing into battle.\footnote{Ibid, 59.17.3} On the next day, he returned with the soldiers and what he claimed were ‘spoils’ as though from a victory. He then gave a speech and celebrated the event with festivities and merriment in which many people participated.\footnote{Ibid, 59.17.4-8}

The Bridge at Baiae was not only a massive undertaking and engineering marvel, but also one of the single most unusual events of Gaius’ short reign. Both Suetonius and Cassius Dio offer several explanations as to why Gaius undertook such a strange project in the first place.
Suetonius says that “Gaius is of course generally supposed to have built the bridge as an improvement on Xerxes’ famous feat of bridging the much narrower Hellespont.”\textsuperscript{158} He also says that some believed that Gaius was attempting to intimidate the Germans and Britons, in preparation for a desired campaign against them. Finally, he offers another conclusion that his own grandfather had told him when he was a boy. Apparently, his grandfather had heard that the sole reason for the bridge was that Gaius wished to prove wrong a statement made to Tiberius by an astrologer that Gaius “…has no more chance of becoming emperor than of riding a horse dry-shod across the gulf of Baiae.”\textsuperscript{159} Cassius Dio also has several notions to explain this strange undertaking. He first states simply that Gaius was granted an ovation by the Senate, but “…he did not consider it any great achievement to drive a chariot on dry land; on the other hand, he was eager to drive his chariot through the sea…”\textsuperscript{160} Dio also states that in regards to Darius and Xerxes, Gaius “…made all manner of fun of them, claiming that he had bridged a far greater expanse of sea than they had done.”\textsuperscript{161}

Neither Suetonius nor Cassius Dio are able to provide a clear reason for why Gaius constructed this bridge (although they both seem to agree to an extent that he was interested in outdoing Xerxes),\textsuperscript{162} and even if any of their theories are accepted, they do not fully explain Gaius’ rationalization for the bridge’s construction. Perhaps neither of them were able to provide an explanation because they did not have a reasonable answer themselves. This may be because Gaius never told anyone his reason for constructing the bridge, but perhaps the simplest

\textsuperscript{158} Suetonius, \textit{Cal.} 19
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid, \textit{Cal.} 19
\textsuperscript{160} Cassius Dio, 59.17.1
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid, 59.17.11
\textsuperscript{162} This idea that the bridge was Gaius’ attempt to overshadow the feats of the eastern monarchs Darius and Xerxes could potentially be indicative of Gaius’ fascination with eastern culture. Perhaps Gaius looked to Darius and Xerxes as ‘role models’ of sorts whom he wished to outdo. Even if this is true, however, it does not make his decision to construct the bridge any more rational.
explanation is that Gaius did not have a rational reason. The bridge was built seemingly on a whim, in a very short span of time, as evidenced by Dio who claims that some ships “…were built on the spot, since the number that could be assembled there in a brief space of time was insufficient, even though all the vessels possible were got together…”\textsuperscript{163} Additionally, the outbreak of a famine in Italy (as attested by Dio and Seneca) clearly demonstrates that Gaius did not consider the consequences when planning the bridge’s construction. Clearly, the bridge represents a lapse in Gaius’ clear and rational thinking capacity.

The death of Drusilla, followed closely by a potential conspiracy and the breakdown of Gaius’ relationship with the Senate, mark the point at which Gaius’ mental stability truly began to waver. The bridge, built right on the heels of Gaius’ speech to the Senate, can easily be seen as a product of that instability; Gaius was losing his capacity for rationality and that caused him to begin to make unusual decisions. In his mind, perhaps, the construction of the bridge was a rational decision that made good sense, but to outside viewers it was both irrational and excessive, and its construction could easily be a marker of the decline in Gaius’ mental stability.

Gaius’ rationality may have been slipping, but he still seems to have been capable of managing the empire effectively because sometime in late 39 C.E., after the Bridge at Baiae, he made significant reforms in the province of Africa. Under Augustus, Africa had been granted a special status as a ‘senatorial province’ under the command of a proconsul designate. In addition to its special status, the province was also protected by a legion that was, contrary to normal practice, under the command of the proconsul (typically, legions were under the command of an imperial legate, not a proconsul). By Gaius’ time, Africa was the only province in the empire governed in such a way.\textsuperscript{164} But after the area experienced several uprisings and regional

\textsuperscript{163} Cassius Dio, 59.17.2
\textsuperscript{164} Barrett, p. 115
conflicts, it became clear that the command structure was clearly no longer functioning efficiently.\textsuperscript{165} Thus, Gaius took command of the legion away from the proconsul designate and placed it under an imperial legate.\textsuperscript{166} This reorganization of the command structure in Africa was not only practical, but was also a calculated and effective maneuver that resulted in greater stability and administrative efficiency in the region. Despite the recent instances of apparent mental instability, Gaius was evidently still concerned with effective rule of the empire and still capable of making intelligent decisions regarding the provinces.

At some point in late 39 C.E., probably after the reorganization of Africa, a series of key events occurred that resulted in the permanent breakdown of relations between Gaius and the Senate. Unfortunately, the available chronology and explanations are thoroughly confused, but thankfully the significance lies not in the precise order of these events but in their impact on the relationship between Gaius and the Senate. The first key event was the formation of yet another major conspiracy. The ironic reality of these repeated conspiracies is that each time Gaius acted against the Senate to protect himself from perceived or real threats, his actions further alienated the Senate and created an atmosphere conducive to breeding new conspiracies. This newest conspiracy was the most dangerous to date and reached deep into the imperial household.

Evidently, the plot involved several prominent senators, (including both the consuls), as well as

\textsuperscript{165} The timeline and chronological sequencing of this entire chain of events is difficult to ascertain due, once again, to confusion in Cassius Dio’s account (as well as a break in the text). The key to the events is the execution of Ptolemy (the ruler of Mauretania) by Gaius. His death led to Gaius’ splitting Mauritania (at that point a client kingdom) into two separate provinces (thus annexing them into the empire). But the sources don’t even agree that Gaius was the one who did this; Dio claims it was Claudius. The sources also can’t agree on when and why Gaius gave the legion to a legate (although Tacitus and Dio both agree that Gaius was the one who did this). Regardless, the chronology is beyond the scope of this paper, but Barrett dedicates an entire chapter to it that summarizes and analyzes the sequence of events very nicely. (Barret, pp. 115-123)

\textsuperscript{166} Barrett, p.119 (Cassius Dio, 59.20.7)
Lepidus (Drusilla’s husband, Gaius’ close friend and advisor), Gaetulicus (the military commander in Upper Germany), and even Gaius’ own two sisters.  

The plot appears to have begun in conjunction with Gaius’ planned campaign to the north, which he undertook sometime in late 39 C.E. From as early as the episode of the Bridge at Baiae, we are told that Gaius had in his mind the idea that he would make a military incursion into Germania. Suetonius claims that “He wasted no time in summoning legions and auxiliaries from all directions, levied troops with the utmost strictness, and collected military supplies on an unprecedented scale.” As Gaius was planning this campaign, the new conspiracy was apparently beginning to form. Unfortunately, we do not have any details regarding exactly what transpired, nor the order in which events occurred, but we do know that somehow Gaius learned about the plot and took swift action against it. First, he removed the two consuls from office, then he hastily embarked on a journey to the north (accompanied by Lepidus and his sisters), presumably to deal with Gaetulicus in person, as well as to begin his Germanic campaign.

Because Lepidus and his sisters were traveling with him, it seems that Gaius had yet to uncover the full extent of the conspiracy, although he may have learned of Gaetulicus’ involvement, which prompted his hasty departure.

When Gaius arrived in Germania, he executed Gaetulicus and then replaced him with a man named Galba (a future emperor) who was a capable and highly effective general. This replacement was clearly not without forethought, as Gaetulicus had not been an effective commander, and the entire region had been suffering military setbacks for some time. Despite

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167 Winterling, p. 107
168 Suetonius, Cal. 43
169 Cassius Dio, 59.20.2-3
171 Cassius Dio, 59.22.5
172 Winterling, p. 110
173 Barrett, p. 103
the strain of the conspiracy, Gaius was still functioning well enough to place a competent military commander in charge of Germania, which is another indication that he was continuing to make good decisions with regard to running the empire. Sometime shortly thereafter, however, the rest of the conspiracy apparently came to light. Exactly how this happened is unclear, but Lepidus was executed, and Gaius’ sisters were banished. Gaius then sent a letter to the Senate informing them that he had narrowly escaped an assassination plot, and he forbade them to vote any of his relatives any honors in the future.

The conspiracy stirred events up at Rome, and a wave of trials and executions for treason followed, just as had occurred in the days of Tiberius. With each new conspiracy Gaius grew (understandably) more paranoid, and this made things worse for the senators at Rome. But for now, at least, Gaius was not in Rome, and thus the affairs of the Senate remained tense but manageable. As the senators struggled with the new wave of treason trials back home, Gaius had his hands full in Germania. He had quickly come to realize that the legions in Germania were in terrible condition (thanks to Gaetulicus’ poor management) and were not at all prepared for the military action that Gaius desired to undertake. Therefore, in addition to appointing Galba to the command, Gaius also discharged many ineffective centurions. Galba then set about reforming the legions to be fit for combat.

The legions, under Galba’s strict oversight, were eventually made ready for combat, and Gaius was determined to lead them into battle. Exactly what occurred when he did so, however, is difficult to ascertain. Apparently, there was at least one (if not several) small conflicts (possibly staged to allow Gaius to participate without any real danger), and Gaius proclaimed a

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174 Cassius Dio, 59.22.6-8
175 Winterling, p. 110 (Cassius Dio, 59.22.7-9 & 59.23.1)
176 Suetonius, Cal. 44
177 Winterling, p. 113
great victory for Rome. The details of the expedition are jumbled and beyond the scope of this paper. Of greater significance, however, is what happened after the Germanic campaign: Gaius’ infamous ‘invasion’ of Britain. This entire episode has presented modern scholars with numerous difficulties in interpretation and explanation. As Barrett puts it, “It is difficult to sort out fact from fantasy in the descriptions of this undertaking.” In addition, a gap in Dio’s account leaves the sequence of events even more uncertain. What we can say for sure is that Gaius gathered his troops on the edge of the English Channel, orchestrated some form of bizarre exercises, and then promptly ended the campaign without so much as setting foot on the island itself. Suetonius provides us with a vivid description of the proceedings:

“...he [Gaius] drew up his army in battle array on the shore... and moved the siege engines into position... No one had the least notion what was in his mind, when suddenly he gave the order ‘Gather seashells!’ He referred to the shells as ‘plunder from the sea, due to the Capitol and to the Palatine’, and made the troops fill their helmets and the folds of their clothes with them...”

After this bizarre undertaking was concluded, Gaius apparently commemorated the ‘victory’ by erecting a lighthouse (which Suetonius claims was like the one at Pharos), and then distributing a small amount of money among the soldiers. Cassius Dio adds the detail that during the event, Gaius “…embarked on a trireme, and then, after putting out a little from land, sailed back again.” This curious series of events has been the center of much scholarly interpretation and debate. Most theories tend towards complex, intricate analysis of the events in an effort to explain them. Balsdon offers two potential explanations: that the soldiers refused to cross the water out of fear, and that the order to collect shells was a punishment, or that the term...
‘shells’ is a confusion on Suetonius’ part with a rare technical word meaning siege equipment.\textsuperscript{184} Barrett poses a different idea: that the whole affair was a demonstration in response to the surrender of Adminius (the son of a British ruler), which Gaius chose to present as a victory over the whole island.\textsuperscript{185}

Even with the variety of potential explanations for the event, there is the possibility that one of the simplest has been discounted or overlooked: that Gaius’s rational decision-making capacity and his mental state as a whole were still severely declining. The events leading up to the ‘invasion’ clearly demonstrate a reoccurring instability in Gaius’ character, and the strange occurrences at the Channel only serve to highlight further his continual downward spiral. Gaius’ strained relationship with the Senate, the repeated conspiracies, and the recent betrayal of his closest friend and remaining family must have had a huge impact on his mind, and whatever rationality he had retained must have been almost gone. The Channel was another episode (much like the Bridge at Baiae) in which no rational explanation can easily be reached. Gaius was losing the ability to make rational decisions, and even if these events made sense to him, to the people around him they were irrational and illogical.

The evidence that Gaius was struggling to maintain his mental composure continued to compile after the events at the Channel, and with his slipping mental balance, Gaius began to tilt wildly towards autocracy. Suetonius provides a clear image of Gaius’ mindset when he left the Channel and headed back towards Rome. “So, when the distinguished senatorial delegates met him [Gaius] with an official plea for his immediate return, he shouted, ‘I am coming, never fear, and this’- tapping the hilt of his sword- ‘is coming too!’”\textsuperscript{186} In addition to the implied threat of

\textsuperscript{184} Balsdon, p. 92
\textsuperscript{185} Barrett, pp. 136-137 (Suetonius, Cal. 44)
\textsuperscript{186} Suetonius, Cal. 49
returning with his sword by his side, Gaius also claimed that he was returning only to those who really wished to see him (specifically the people and the *equites*), and that he would no longer consider himself a fellow citizen or *princeps* of the Senate.\(^{187}\) This moment represents the complete and final breakdown of relations between Gaius and the Senate. Presumably, the most recent conspiracy had been the final straw for Gaius, and he no longer possessed the required rationality, mental acuity, and desire to put up with the machinations of the Senate. Instead, he had clearly decided that he was going to end any kind of communication he had originally maintained with them. From this moment onward, Gaius’ rule would be characterized by an autocratic level of control over the city and the senators.

As he returned to Italy from Germania, Gaius stopped somewhere outside Rome, and there he had a direct encounter with Philo\(^{188}\) and the delegation from Alexandria.\(^{189}\) Gaius was pleasant enough to the delegates, but had no time to meet with them at that moment. As Barrett points out, however, there must have been a backlog of administrative work that Gaius needed to attend to after his lengthy campaigns away from Rome.\(^{190}\) Clearly, Gaius was still attempting to run the empire, despite his continual issues with the Senate. Unfortunately for Philo and the delegation, however, when they eventually met with Gaius they found that his ideas about how to manage the empire had resulted in an order that had the entire Jewish delegation “…struck dumb with astonishment and terror…” and “ready to fall to the ground with fear and sorrow…”\(^{191}\) Gaius had apparently ordered that a statue of himself be placed in the Temple at

\(^{187}\) Suetonius, *Cal.*, 49

\(^{188}\) Philo of Alexandria, whose work this paper has already referenced several times, was a Jewish man whose writings contain valuable information on Gaius. Philo is the only author whose work we have that actually met Gaius, and although he disliked the emperor, his work provides valuable insights into Gaius’ character. Philo met with Gaius as a member of a delegation of Jews and non-Jews from Alexandria, who were hoping that the emperor might settle some of the issues between the two populations that plagued the city.

\(^{189}\) Barrett, p. 154

\(^{190}\) Barrett, p. 154

\(^{191}\) Philo, *Leg.*, 29.189
Jerusalem. This idea was never implemented, however, as Gaius was convinced to give it up before it could be undertaken.\(^{192}\) A short time later, Gaius reentered Rome for the first time since before his campaigns and celebrated an ovation (a lesser form of triumph) for his ‘victories’ in the north.

Once Gaius was back in Rome, his autocratic behavior manifested itself quite strongly. According to Suetonius, upon his arrival he apparently planned on “…murdering the most distinguished of the senators and equites and then moving the seat of government first to Antium and afterwards to Alexandria.”\(^{193}\) Gaius never undertook these ventures, but this report (found in several sources) may be indicative of the fears that the Senate and aristocracy held as the young princeps returned to the city.\(^{194}\) An atmosphere of fear seems to have prevailed in Rome at the time, and the sources claim that widespread executions of senators and equites took place on Gaius’ orders, although they do not list many specific names.\(^{195}\)

Regardless of the lack of specifics, accusations of treason were clearly becoming more and more prominent as the senators struggled to keep themselves in Gaius’ good graces. Cassius Dio relates a story that exemplifies the mood of the aristocracy at the time; apparently when one of Gaius’ freedmen assistants, Protogenes, entered the Senate house one day the senators all greeted him as usual. Unfortunately for a senator named Scribonius Proculus, however, when he came to greet Protogenes, the latter “…darted a sinister glance at… [him] and said ‘Do you, too, greet me, when you hate the emperor so?’” The other senators responded to this accusation with swift and decisive action: they “…surrounded their fellow senator [Proculus] and tore him to

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\(^{192}\) Barrett, pp. 190-191
\(^{193}\) Suetonius, Cal. 49
\(^{194}\) Winterling, p. 133-134
\(^{195}\) Ibid, p. 134
Clearly, the Senate was in a state of disarray similar to its condition at the end of Tiberius’ reign, and were willing to betray and kill each other to protect themselves and curry the favor of the emperor.

The heightened levels of fear and uncertainty in Rome soon bred yet another conspiracy against Gaius, although this one was short-lived and failed, but the mounting tension that ran rampant across the city was bound to lead to further confrontations. One of the most significant dilemmas that troubled the relationship between Gaius and the Senate was the issue of Gaius’ godhood. Upon his return to the city, Gaius had begun to usurp traditional Roman religious norms. As Gaius’ struggles with the Senate continued, he began to associate himself with the divine very strongly. According to Suetonius “…he insisted on being treated as a god…” and his actions began to mirror that mentality. He allegedly cut a pathway that led to the imperial palace through the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum, so that they might be his gatekeepers. The senators did not help matters either, as they apparently began to refer to him as a demigod or a god, and a senatorial decree ordered that a temple be built for the emperor. A college of priests was founded for him, and the richest citizens did everything they could to secure positions in the priesthood.

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196 Cassius Dio, 29.1-2.
197 Winterling, p. 136 (Cassius Dio, 59.25.5b)
198 Suetonius, Cal. 22
199 Cassius Dio, 59.28.5
200 Not all scholars agree on the specifics of Gaius’ apparent deification. Winterling discusses the veracity of such claims and eventually decides on his own interpretation of Gaius’ deification. Barrett is skeptical of the entire concept throughout the chapter of his book dedicated to Gaius’ divine honors. As he points out, almost no archaeological evidence exists that supports the existence of a cult to Gaius. Barrett offers several alternate theories, which are beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that even if no such cult existed, the idea that Gaius demanded a higher level of veneration than either Augustus or Tiberius had been accorded in life is still indicative of his position relative to the Senate at this point in his reign. (Winterling, p. 148, Cassius Dio, 59.26.3-5)
201 Winterling, p. 148 (Suetonius, Cal. 22)
Gaius also instituted a new kind of ritual called *proskynesis*, which was clearly an adaptation of an eastern practice and held religious undertones. The practice involved prostrating oneself before a figure of authority and kissing their feet, and in some eastern cultures it was merely a social formality. In Greece, however, this practice was more closely associated with worship. In Rome, the practice was almost never used (except in the most extreme cases). During Gaius’ reign, however, the practice became commonplace, although how much it related to Gaius’ claims of divinity is difficult to say. Regardless, *proskynesis* was far from normal in Roman society, and when Claudius became emperor after Gaius’ death, he banned the practice.²⁰²

The primary sources that discuss this period of Gaius’ rule clearly indicate that he was struggling both in his relationship with the Senate and in his mental balance and rationality. As more potential conspiracies came to light, Gaius understandably became more imbalanced. If he was indeed suffering from mental instability prior to this point, then the massive strain on his relationship with the Senate must have pushed him even further. The desire to be venerated as an eastern monarch (and possibly as a god) through *proskynesis*, despite it being strongly against Roman customs, is clearly a mark of a breakdown in Gaius’ mental state. Just as with the Bridge at Baiae and the ‘invasion’ of Britain, Gaius’ capacity to make rational decisions and to follow social customs was evidently in sharp decline. This continual breakdown of Gaius’ capacity for rational thought would have caused him to ignore what he had once known was correct and instead make irrational decisions that only made sense in his mind.

Unfortunately for Gaius, the repeated conspiracies born from his issues with the aristocracy continued until one of them finally succeeded. Gaius’ assassination is well

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²⁰² Barrett, pp. 150-151 (Cassius Dio, 60.5.4)
documented in the sources, and they provide a variety of different accounts. The precise details are not relevant to the scope of this paper, but a general summary of events will suffice. The plan was set in motion by a group of conspirators, including several tribunes of the Praetorian Guard. The most well-known conspirator was a tribune named Cassius Chaerea, but several others were also involved, including a few key aristocrats and senators.\textsuperscript{203} Cassius Dio states that “There were a good many, of course, in the conspiracy and privy to what was being done… Practically all his [Gaius’] courtiers were won over, both on their own account and for the common good.”\textsuperscript{204}

Dio seems to believe that many people were privy to the plot, but Winterling sees this as being unlikely, and presents a convincing argument on the matter. He explains that it is highly improbable that many people participated in the conspiracy, as the more people who were aware of the plot, the greater the chance Gaius might have discovered it. Winterling attributes Dio’s statement to the probability that, after the assassination, “…men could gain credit as principled members of the aristocracy by claiming to have taken part in or known about the plot.”\textsuperscript{205} Clearly, however, the conspiracy would not have succeeded if so many people had known about it. The previous ones had all failed because Gaius had discovered them, so it seems unlikely that, had this one actually been so widespread, he would not have uncovered it.

Once the conspiracy had been set in motion, the conspirators seem to have had difficulty in determining when to make their move, but they eventually settled on the celebration of the Palatine games, which began in mid-January, 41 C.E.\textsuperscript{206} Gaius remained in the theater that had been constructed for the games for most of the day, but around midday, Gaius and his entourage

\textsuperscript{203} Barrett, pp. 161-163  
\textsuperscript{204} Cassius Dio, 59.29.1a  
\textsuperscript{205} Winterling, p. 173  
\textsuperscript{206} Barrett, p. 162
left the theater for the baths. For some reason, Gaius split off from the rest of the group and took a small side passageway to the baths. There, he encountered a group of performers from Asia who were preparing for their routine. As he watched them perform, he was set upon by Chaerae and the other conspirators. Several versions of the assault exist, but it will suffice to say that Gaius met his end in the hallway, and as Cassius Dio remarked (in one of his more humorous moments) “Thus Gaius, after doing in three years, nine months, and twenty-eight days all that has been related, learned by actual experience that he was not a god.” Both Gaius’ wife Caesonia and his young daughter were killed as well, and Suetonius explains that after his death “His body was moved secretly to the Lamian Gardens, half-cremated on a hastily built pyre, and then buried beneath a shallow covering of sods.” Apparently, when his sisters returned from exile some time later, they dug up the remains, fully cremated them, and then gave them a proper burial.

Gaius was dead, the first emperor to fall victim to a conspiracy that had been born out of the hatred and distrust that he had fostered between himself and the aristocracy. But while the Senate and aristocracy rejoiced, the people of Rome seem to have been quite upset by Gaius’ death. They streamed into the Forum and demanded that the murderers be found. Gaius’ popularity with the people had clearly not been compromised as it had with the aristocracy. But, as was the case with his father, popularity with the people had not been enough to save Gaius. Just as Germanicus had died despite the affection of the masses, so had Gaius.

207 Josephus, Antiquities, 19.1.14
208 Cassius Dio, 59.30.1
209 Suetonius, Cal. 59
210 Ibid, Cal. 59
211 Ibid, Cal. 59
212 Winterling, p. 183
From the death of Drusilla through the end of his reign, Gaius demonstrated a contradictory tendency: he managed the affairs of the empire with efficacy and efficiency, and yet he also demolished his relationship with the Senate and became increasingly irrational and unstable. The death of Drusilla was clearly a causal factor, and his response was indicative of his declining mental state. The advent of a conspiracy led to Gaius terminating cordial relations with the Senate, and the continual paranoia and fear for his life must have caused Gaius’ mental state to break down even further. This is evidenced in the Bridge at Baiae, which could well have been the first concrete instance in which Gaius’ disturbed mind produced and executed an idea that he found to be rational, but that was viewed as abnormal and irrational by others around him.

In the midst of all of his irrational and strange behavior, however, Gaius still maintained a strong control over the administration of the empire, as he demonstrated in his reorganization of the province of Africa. Clearly, even though Gaius’ mind was continually slipping into irrational thought and general instability, he was still able to act as a clever and capable administrator for the empire. He further demonstrated his cleverness in dealing with the conspiracy involving Gaetulicus and Lepidus. His quick and efficient removal of Gaetulicus, as well as his apt choice for a replacement, further showcased his shrewd intellect. But that intellect was continually offset by his more irrational actions, such as the events at the Channel. Here, Gaius displayed the same level of irrationality as he had at Baiae, formulating an idea and implementing it, even though it made no sense to those around him.213

213 It is worth discussing the point that neither Gaius nor Tiberius were able to cultivate a successful level of communication with the Senate as Augustus had. Augustus established a committee that consisted of himself and a variety of other senators, and their job was to discuss business for the Senate. Through this group, Augustus was able to maintain a link of communication with the Senate that was less formal than a speech or Senate meeting. Neither Tiberius nor Gaius continued this institution, and therefore it is plausible to assume that part of the issues they both experienced with the senators could have been the result of a serious lack of communication between themselves and the Senate from the outset of their reigns. In the case of the bridge, for example, Gaius seems not to have shared his rational for its construction with anyone, including the members of the Senate. (Scullard, p. 188-189)
Even as Gaius continued to experience issues with his rationality, new events caused his mental state to decay further. The betrayal of those closest to him, followed by the continual machinations of the Senate were clearly some kind of breaking point: Gaius must have felt not only betrayed and distrustful, but increasingly paranoid. If those who were closest to him could conspire against him, how could he trust anyone? Gaius’ response to this paranoia involved a decisive breakdown of his relationship with the Senate, as well as the further degradation of his sanity. Gaius must have felt that, no matter what he did, his life was in a constant state of danger and no matter how well he managed to govern the empire, there would always be those who sought to eliminate him. This realization, coupled with the excessive strain on his mind, must have been a significant factor in the sudden development of Gaius’ autocratic tendencies.

Up until Gaius’ return from Germania, he had given no indication that he was heavily inspired by Hellenistic institutions of rule. But towards the end of his reign, his levels of autocratic behavior spiked precipitously. The strain on his mind, as well as his sudden realization that he had more enemies than friends, must have caused something to change for him. Gaius seems to have taken influence from his youth and the experiences he had before he became princeps and begun to style himself after eastern monarchs. But those experiences had been with him since his childhood, and in his first two and a half years of rule, he had not acted on them. Why Gaius would suddenly make such a drastic change is difficult to understand. The best possible explanation appears to be that Gaius’ decision to begin acting on these influences was a result of his irrational way of thinking. Previously, Gaius had demonstrated awareness for Roman social norms, but now he cast them aside. This decision to begin actively ignoring social customs is a clear effect of Gaius’ irrationality, as in doing so he both disregarded the possible
consequences of his actions and began making decisions that were inconsistent with his rule up until that moment.

The end of Gaius’ relations with the Senate and his sudden desire to ignore Roman social conventions resulted in the institution of eastern practices such as *proskynesis*, as well as Gaius’ insistence on his own divinity. Both are signs of his unbalanced mind, and signals of a disturbance in the traditional relationship between the *princeps* and the aristocracy. These changes seem to have taken place because Gaius no longer had the capacity to distinguish between rational and irrational actions, and therefore undertook actions without regard for the consequences. Perhaps to him, his deification and the practice of *proskynesis* were completely logical and rational responses to the issues he had with the Senate. Unfortunately, as with the Bridge of Baiae and the ‘invasion’ of Britain, these events that seemed rational to Gaius were seen as highly unusual, abnormal, and bizarre by his contemporaries. This view was further aggravated by Gaius’ unwillingness to continue any form of normal communications with the Senate.

Gaius’ transformation from a *princeps* to an autocrat can be accounted for as a side-effect of his mental instability, as well as a product of the continuous formation of conspiracies and the paranoia that these must have caused for him. By the time that Gaius was finally assassinated, one might correctly say that he was indeed ‘mad,’ ‘insane,’ or ‘crazy,’ although these words (so often associated with Gaius) have become taboo in modern scholarship; they represent an outdated way of thinking about Gaius and his reign. The evidence clearly indicates, however, that for many years of his reign (if not for his entire life) Gaius’ mental state was steadily declining, to the point where his ability to make rational decisions became severely
compromised. His declining mental stability led to his autocratic rule, the ‘slaughter’ of the senators, the creation of new conspiracies, and finally to his assassination.
Chapter 4
Oddities, Abnormalities, and Conclusions

The final chapter of this work must deal with several things that have thus far been omitted. The sources contain many stories, events, and anecdotes regarding Gaius’ reign that either do not fit clearly into a timeline of events, or that have not been included in this paper thus far. To leave these stories out of a discussion about Gaius, however, would be a mistake. Therefore, in order to give Gaius’ reign a thorough analysis, the most significant of these stories must be detailed and analyzed for any information they might hold.

Unfortunately, because most of these stories lack a spot in the established chronology, they cannot be given in a linear fashion. Therefore, they will be grouped by topic. The first set of stories are examples of additional instances that seemingly demonstrate Gaius’ mental instability. According to Suetonius, Gaius had several bizarre habits that he often practiced, such as sending “…for men whom he had secretly killed, as though they were still alive, and remark[ing] offhandedly a few days later that they must have committed suicide.”214 He also apparently “…developed a passion for the feel of money and, spilling heaps of gold pieces on an open space, would walk over them barefoot or else lie down and wallow.”215

In addition to his passion for money, Gaius evidently had a passion for different kinds of entertainment, such as horse racing. He was apparently an ardent supporter of the Green faction of chariot racers, and he even had a favorite horse called Incitatus, upon whom he doted.216

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214 Suetonius, Cal. 26
215 Ibid, Cal. 42
216 Ibid, Cal. 55
days leading up to a race, he would picket the neighborhoods around Incitatus’ stable with soldiers to ensure that the streets were absolutely silent for the horse, and Incitatus was even the proud owner of “…a marble stable, an ivory stall, purple blankets and a jeweled collar, as well as a house, furniture and slaves…” Gaius even allegedly planned to award the horse a consulship (although he never actually carried out that plan).

Gaius also seems to have been excessively paranoid (a point already discussed to some extent). Suetonius has an entire passage in which he describes Gaius’ “two contradictory vices - overconfidence and extreme timorousness.” The passage is riddled with examples of Gaius’ paranoia, such as an incident that apparently occurred sometime after he returned from Germania.

“…he[Gaius] was alarmed by reported revolts in Germany and decided to escape by sea. He fitted out a large fleet for this purpose, finding comfort only in the thought that, should the enemy be victorious... he would at least be able to hold his overseas provinces.”

In addition to Gaius’ odd fears of invasion, he demonstrated several instances of paranoia in relation to conspiracies (aside from those already discussed). Once, Gaius was having a discussion with a returned exile about what the man had done while in exile, and the response Gaius received was that the man had been praying for Tiberius’ death and Gaius’ succession. Apparently, Gaius’ major insight from this was to conclude “…that the new batch of exiles must be praying for his own death, so he sent agents from island to island and had them all killed.”

This particular story demonstrates, in addition to Gaius’ paranoia, another level of inconsistency

217 Suetonius, Cal. 55
218 Ibid, Cal. 55
219 Ibid, Cal. 55
220 Ibid, Cal. 51
221 Ibid, Cal. 51
222 Ibid, Cal. 28
in his decision-making. He eliminated these exiles on the mere chance that they were praying for his death, and yet he spared (and exiled) his sisters after their direct involvement in a conspiracy against his life. Perhaps he could not bring himself to eliminate the last members of his family, but he did kill off those who were as close as family to him (Macro, Lepidus, and even Silanus), apparently without a second thought (as far as we are aware). Clearly, Gaius’ responses to various dangers were neither logical nor consistent, and that inconsistency can be attributed to Gaius’ imbalanced and irrational mind.

While these stories do further serve to highlight Gaius’ mental instability, they do not outright prove that he had mental issues, but they are examples of the potential effects of Gaius’ lack of rationality. Some of the stories, such as Gaius’ love of money, are not so unusual on their own. But when these stories are considered with the rest of his narrative, they fit into the larger picture of mental instability. The stories that demonstrate Gaius’ excessive, irrational, or illogical fear and paranoia can easily be seen as a direct side-effect of Gaius’ turbulent and danger-filled life from his youth until his death. Gaius cannot be faulted for being paranoid, for he had many reasons to be. He can, however, be faulted for his response to such paranoia, which was often excessive and illogical. Gaius’ inability to think rationally because of his mental issues can account for the bizarre nature of some of these stories.

In contrast to the anecdotes that demonstrate Gaius’ mental instability, other stories exemplify his cleverness and administrative efficiency. For instance, Gaius ordered the construction of many things during his reign, most of which were of immense benefit to the people (and some of which have already been discussed). His building projects included such things as finishing the construction on the Temple of Augustus and Pompey’s Theater, as well as
beginning the construction of a new amphitheater. Gaius also undertook or contemplated several lesser-known monumental tasks in addition to his more famous ones (like the Bridge at Baiae). One such idea that was never realized but that would have been of vast significance was Gaius’ plan to cut a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth. If he had completed this plan, the canal would have had a tremendous positive impact on trade in the Mediterranean. As Balsdon puts it, “Two Romans had the genius to realize this, Julius Caesar and Gaius…”

Gaius’ drive to build or construct things that benefited the Roman people is evidence of his desire to be an effective ruler. Gaius recognized what might be useful to the people of Rome, as well as things that might be valuable to the provinces, and put effort into constructing them. His idea to carve a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth would have been of immense benefit to the area (as it has been in modern times), and he was one of two Romans that we know of who considered the idea (and in fact he considered it quite seriously, as he even sent someone out to survey the site). Evidently Gaius was capable not only of managing the affairs of the empire, but of utilizing his unique intellect to come up with ideas that others had not considered.

Unfortunately, not all of Gaius’ ideas were intended for the benefit of the people. Gaius’ proclivity for Eastern monarchical ideals as well as his autocratic style of rule were new to Rome, but were not received nearly as well as some of his building projects. Seneca provides a strongly worded explanation of Gaius’ autocratic behavior (although Seneca displays strongly negative opinions of Gaius in general). He states that Gaius was produced by nature “…in order to show what unlimited vice would be capable of when combined with unlimited power…”

223 Suetonius, Cal. 21
224 Balsdon, p. 178
225 Ibid, pp. 177-178
226 Suetonius, Cal. 21
227 Seneca, Dialogues, 11.10
The statement may be a bit dramatic, and it does cater more to Seneca’s agenda than to historical truth, but it serves to illustrate the extent to which Gaius’ autocratic behavior went (at least in Seneca’s eyes).

The other sources also see Gaius as inherently monarchical and autocratic. Suetonius describes an episode that occurred one evening at the dinner table, when Gaius was entertaining foreign kings. The kings were bickering about who among them had the most noble lineage, causing Gaius suddenly to cry out “Nay, let there be one master, and one king!” Suetonius then blatantly states that “…he [Gaius] nearly assumed a royal diadem then and there, transforming an ostensible principate into an actual kingdom.”

Suetonius also comments on Gaius’ odd style of dress, claiming that he “…paid no attention to traditional or current fashions… Often he made public appearances in a cloak covered with embroidery and encrusted with precious stones…” This description of Gaius’ clothing choices (as well as a reference later in the passage to the breastplate of Alexander the Great) is far more comparable to the dress of a Hellenistic monarch than a Roman princeps. Cassius Dio provides additional evidence of Gaius’ monarchical inclinations. He claims that when Gaius was returning home from his campaign in Germania, the people of Rome were concerned to learn that “King Agrippa and King Antiochus were with him, like two tyrant-trainers.”

The sources agree that at times, Gaius more like a Hellenistic monarch than a Roman princeps. The evidenced for this comes not only from his actions in the latter part of his rule, but

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228 Suetonius, Cal. 22
229 Ibid, Cal. 22
230 Ibid, Cal. 52
231 Adams, p. 47
232 Cassius Dio, 59.24.1
also from the many stories that highlight Gaius’ monarchial tendencies in several facets of his life. Many things that Gaius did, from major events such as his interactions with foreign kings, to relatively minor occurrences like his style of dress, were indicative of his Hellenistic inspirations. The sources paint Gaius as a ruler who was, at the most extreme, interested in transforming the Principate into a monarchy, and at the least, severely autocratic. This view of Gaius is prevalent across the sources and is constructed not only by the individual stories that the sources present, but by their narrative as a whole.

It seems strange that such qualities as monarchial tendencies, extreme irrationality, mental imbalance, intellectual ingenuity, and an aptitude for administration could all be mixed together in a single individual, but Gaius clearly demonstrated his capacity for all of them in his short reign. But these qualities did not stem just from the events of Gaius’ reign; they were a lifelong development, pieces of Gaius’ personality that were formed from his earliest days in the army camps with his father. From the very beginning of his life, Gaius had been embroiled in conflicts, turbulence, political machinations, and the general dangers that pervaded the life of members of the imperial family. He bore witness to the utter destruction of his family, from his father’s untimely demise to his mother and brother’s exile and eventual executions. The uncertainty of his position, the inevitability of his involvement in politics, and dangers that surrounded him in Rome must have had a serious psychological impact on his young mind.

From his time in Rome during the reign of Sejanus, to his time on Capri with Tiberius, Gaius was forced to conceal his fear and apprehension as he struggled to survive. He demonstrated incredible ingenuity as he avoided the dangers of associating with Tiberius and ultimately ascended to the throne. When Gaius finally came to power he must have felt relieved that he had survived the trials of Capri, and that he had become the one with the power.
Certainly, his early actions as emperor demonstrated that he could apply the same intelligence that he had used to survive on Capri to effective administration of the empire. But he quickly learned the dark truth of being princeps: that he was actually in far more danger than ever before because he now held so much power. The advent of conspiracies from his earliest days in power are a clear indication of the very real dangers that threatened his life.

Despite these threats and a few dark spots early on, however, Gaius persisted in his effective administration of the empire. He dealt fairly and effectively with the Senate, he initiated building projects, he made significant changes to the court system, and he succeeded in reducing the power of the office of the Praetorian Prefect. Gaius continued to prove himself to be an effective ruler for the first several years of his reign, even as events played out that would have severe consequences for his mental state.

The death of Drusilla, followed shortly thereafter by several conspiracies, challenged Gaius’ mental state and his actions began to change to reflect his increasingly unstable mind. He tore down his relationship with the Senate, and in the immediate aftermath his irrationality flared up at the Bridge of Baiae and the ‘invasion’ of Britain. The impact of Gaius’ turbulent and danger-filled life was becoming clear, and even though he was still capable of administrative maneuverings, he was also becoming more capable of carrying out irrational ideas. As conspiracies rose against him and he learned that he could not trust even those who were closest to him, his heightened paranoia led to even deeper levels of mental imbalance.

Gaius must have felt as though he were in danger everywhere he turned, with conspiracies popping up frequently as he continued to alienate himself from the Senate. As his fear increased, so too did his autocratic tendencies. When he returned to Rome from abroad he began to enforce religious-based practices that were highly unusual, and his relationship with the
Senate dissolved completely. His decision to begin conforming to a more autocratic variant of rule could well have stemmed from his apparent inability to make rational decisions, as well as his paranoia that a conspiracy against his life was imminent. Regardless, his days of effective administration of the empire were over, and for the last eight months of his reign Gaius was a paranoid, autocratic, irrational ruler who terrified the Senate into submission. Ultimately, Gaius would pay the price for his method of dealing with the aristocracy.

Gaius was an enigma of a ruler, hated by the sources and often reviled or dismissed as insane by later scholars. Behind the veil of strange anecdotes, bizarre stories, and almost unbelievable scenarios, however, his true face lurks. Gaius was more than just insane: he was an apt administrator, who efficiently ran the empire and made decisions in its best interests. But he was also an autocrat who threw aside caution and societal norms while consistently and openly abusing the aristocracy until those very actions led to his demise. Gaius cannot, however, be entirely faulted for the path his life took because that very path was the catalyst that turned him into such a man. The stresses on his mind, the repeated conspiracies, the continual losses, and the strain of absolute power weighed heavily on him from the very beginning of his life until his death, and caused him to become the person reviled by the sources.

Gaius is not a man to be defended as a ruler whose image has been tainted by the sources, nor is he a man to be reviled as despotic and evil. Rather, he should be viewed in a mixed light, so that all his various traits and tendencies can be understood as part of the whole. His image in contemporary scholarship varies from ‘insane’ to ‘defendable’ (and everywhere in between), but to typecast Gaius as only having one facet to his personality is to do his memory and legacy a severe injustice. Gaius’ personality was comprised of more than just a single trait and he must be understood as a man of many components. He was more than just crazy, monarchical, or
misunderstood, and while he may always be viewed with a certain amount of disdain, that dislike cannot simply be assigned to him without a full understanding of the various nuances of his multi-faceted personality.
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