

CALIGULA AND RELIGION



Fig. 1. Portrait Bust of Caligula (Louis le Grand, 2007)

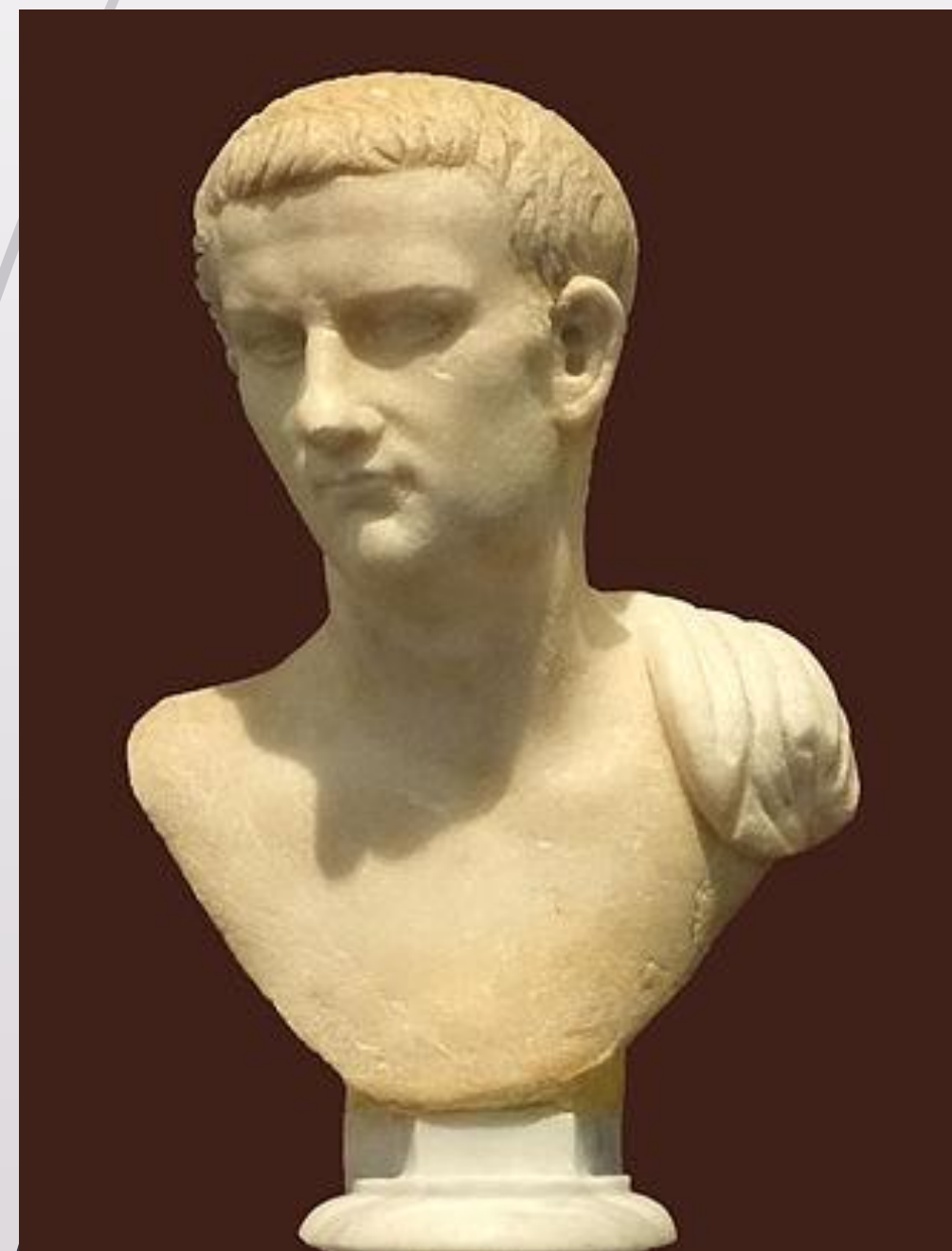


Fig. 2. Portrait Bust of Caligula (Tomk2ski, 2015)

Declaring himself a Deity

- Caligula, to the further controversy added to his image, impersonated both gods and demigods openly in the company of others (Sidwell, 2010, p.193; Philo. Leg. 78).
- As the time of his reign increased, he increasingly demanded deification- openly and publicly (Eck, 2006; Philo. Leg. 76).
- "And yet what business had you, Gaius, to take the 81 insignia commonly used to adorn the images of the said deities?" (Philo. Leg. 81).
- He also appeared to try to identify himself as a god by replacing the heads of statues representing the gods as his own (Sidwell, 2010, p.194; Suet. Calig. 22).
- Though some were open about the controversial nature of Caligula's actions, his belief in his divinity was encouraged by many Romans of whom were seeking to flatter him (Sidwell, 2010, p.194).
- These thoughts may have stemmed from when, after his sister Drusilla died, he elevated her to a goddess status, thereby giving him the power to create gods (Sidwell, 2010, p.194). This may have contributed to Caligula's divinity aspirations, and therefore be a large contributor in why he started to demand deification in a public sense.

Context

- Gaius Iulius Caesar Germanicus had the nickname 'Caligula' given to him by soldiers when he was on the Rhine (Rajak, 2012).
- "His surname Caligula he derived from a joke of the troops, because he was brought up in their midst in the dress of a common soldier" (Suet. Calig. 9).
- After his rise to kingship, Caligula bestowed the Palestine Kingship upon his friend Agrippa- this did nothing to prevent upsets between the Jewish population and Caligula, meaning that the differences in the religious beliefs was a major diplomatic blind spot for the emperor (Rajak, 2012).
- This could be explained with his track record for political decisions, of which the majority were erratic decisions which were not properly thought through, and as such not thought about further than what the emperor himself wanted (Eck, 2006).
- In fact, many of such decisions were quickly repealed and in all, Caligula did not make many political acts which held a good amount of significance- his leadership was to do what he wanted, which occurred more and more often as he realised that no one was willing to stop his actions (Eck, 2006).
- "he was not satisfied merely not to listen but replied: 'Remember that I have the right to do anything to anybody.'" (Suet. Calig. 29).

Relationship with the Jewish Population

- The relationships within the various communities is demonstrated by Philo with his description of the Alexandria legation of the Jews and Greeks (Eck, 2006; Adams, 2007, p.16). He describes such within his Legatio ad Gaium- On the Embassy to Gaius (Eck, 2006). As expected, the relationship between the two communities deteriorated greatly within the latter parts of his reign (Bilde, 2008, p.67).
- This is because the Roman policy, which was traditional, was changed by Caligula when he ordered that Jerusalem's temple should be converted into an imperial cult shrine (Bilde, 2008, p.67).
- Caligula was not very considerate towards other religions or communities due to his increasing self-recognition that he was able to procure as much power as he would like. (Eck, 2006).
- His increased want for public deification culminated with his desire to build a colossal statue of himself as Jupiter in the temple of Jerusalem- this endeavour was only prevented upon Caligula's death (Eck, 2006; Taylor, 2000, p.1). An order to build such a statue was ordered by Caligula in 39/40 AD (Taylor, 2000, p.1).
- The reason for the statue is unknown, though it could have been a response to the Alexandrian Jewish delegation or the destruction of the pagan altar at Jamnia (Rajak, 2012; Taylor, 2000, p.2).
- The statue was very controversial as the monotheistic Jewish religion the temple centred upon would be threatened by such an installation (Taylor, 2000, p.1).
- In fact, the statue's existence would have been so controversial that progress was stalled by the governor of Syria who was sympathetic to the Jewish population and a letter to Caligula from Agrippa is rumoured to have slowed the plan (Rajak, 2012).

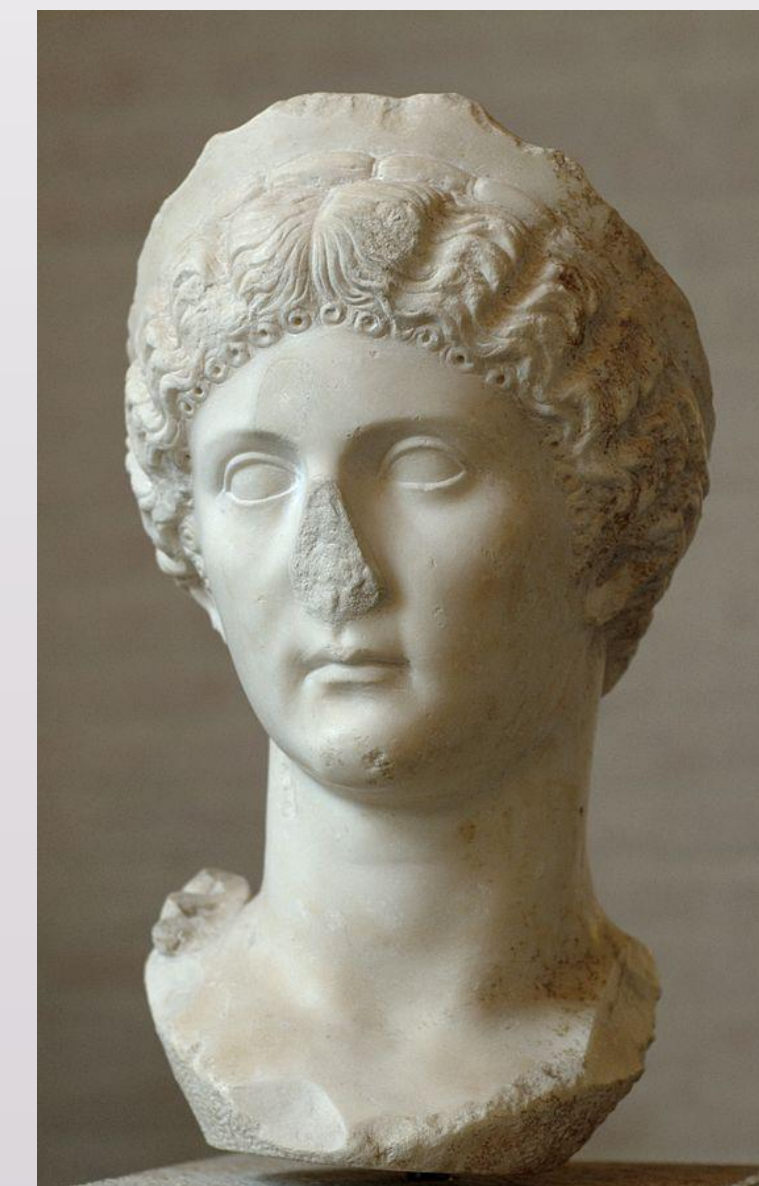


Fig. 3. Caligula's sister, Drusilla (Bibi Saint-Pol, 2007)



Fig. 4. The Jerusalem Holy Temple (Levin, 2017)

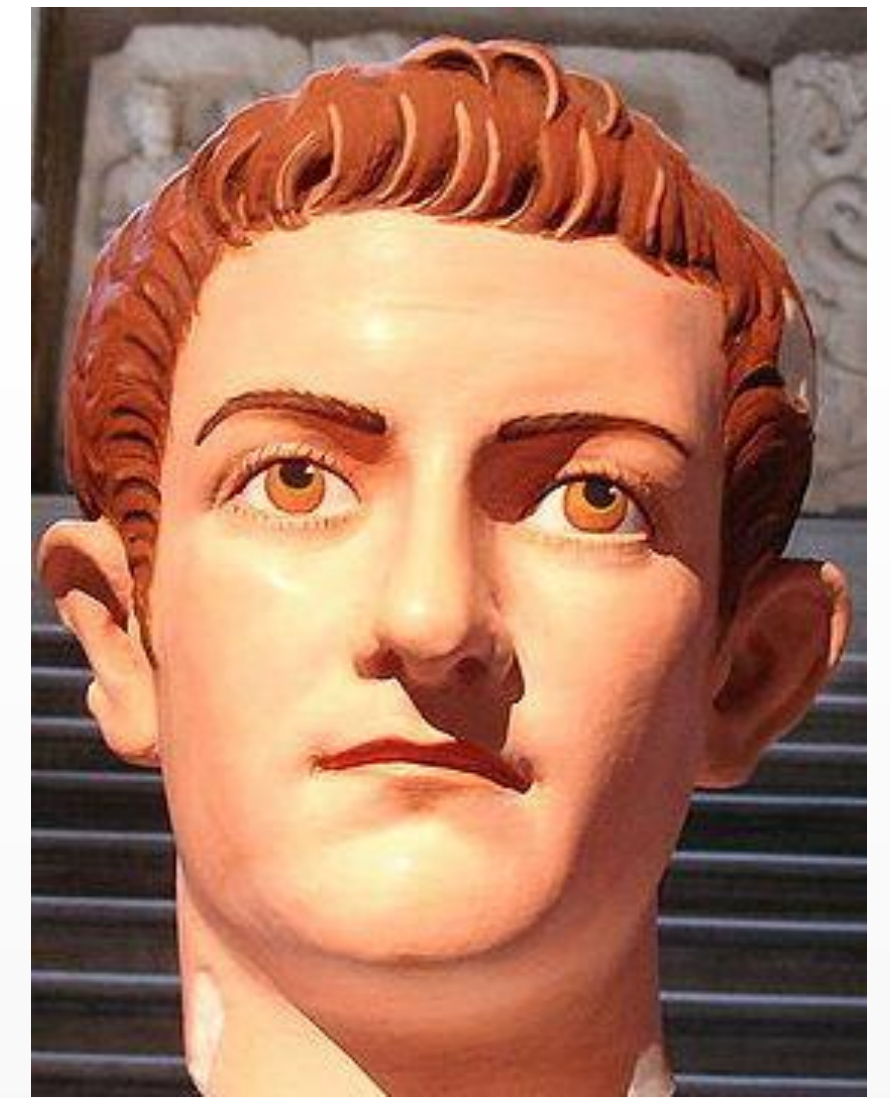


Fig. 5. Recoloured statue of Caligula (G.dallorto, 2006)

Legacy and Scholarship

- Caligula's claims of divinity began the pattern of living emperors declaring their own divine status to exemplify their own positions (Taylor, 2000, p.1).
- The change in Roman policy towards the Jerusalem temple marked the overturning of a system which had been in place since Julius Caesar's time (Taylor, 2000, p.1).
- In fact, Caligula seemed to take pleasure in seeing how much power he was able to hold, with his reign being seen as moving away from the Augustan Principate (Balsdon and Levick, 2012).
- The action of placing the statue would have also been seen as an affront to the 'person of the emperor himself' and therefore also demonstrated that the tolerance would not be reflected back at the Jewish (Taylor, 2000, p.1). It did so, as Taylor states 'on the basis of which Jewish non-conformity with imperial and civic cults was accommodated in the Empire', thereby demonstrating the fact that this sort of action was not a great diplomatic move on the part of Caligula, and was obviously not seen as such by modern scholars (Taylor, 2000, p.1).
- In all, in Alexandria, the conflict between the Greeks and the Jews was still in a heated unresolved stage by the time of Caligula's death, demonstrating a severe lack of secure diplomatic relations between the two communities (Rajak, 2012).
- The ancient sources too, of many describe his actions in a less than pleasant manner, but due to quite a number being after his reign and under that of another emperor, the legitimacy of some of the wilder claims will always be suspect due to the possibility of propaganda (Pollini, 2012, p.4).

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