CALIGULA AS AUCTIONEER

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ABSTRACT

In the winter of AD 39/40 the emperor Caligula was based at Lyons for a considerable time. It was in the aftermath of a most dangerous crisis in his brief reign. The favourite for the succession, M. Aemilius Lepidus, had earlier been executed on the accusation of having conspired against Caligula. The latter's sisters, Agrippina and Livilla, were accused of having entertained improper relations with Lepidus and were subsequently banished. The governor of Upper Germany, Cn. Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus, had been executed 'ob detecta nefaria consilia in Germaniis'. At Lyons Caligula organised two auctions, one of the possessions of his sisters, the other of imperial paraphernalia. This particular episode of the emperor's stay in Gaul is presented by our sources as a continuation of his tyrannical performance in Rome. Several aspects of the auctions, however, do not tally with that picture and have to be explained in a different way. As will be shown in detail, there is some justification for arguing that at the second auction Caligula was playing the benevolent prince rather than the cruel tyrant.

In the winter of AD 39/40 Caligula was based at Lyons for a considerable time, preparing for campaigns in Germany and Britain. This stage of Caligula's reign presents a cluster of negative images with that of rapacity dominating the scene. Dio's account offers the sharpest possible contrast between costs and results. The change of scenery, from Rome to Gaul, is not induced by military necessity but by greed. Caligula has spent all the money in Rome and Italy and, with expenses pressing him hard, he used the excuse of hostile Germans stirring up trouble to exploit Gaul with its abundant wealth (59. 21. 1). Caligula is said to have inflicted no harm on the enemy, retreating from the Rhine and turning back from the ocean's edge. Instead, he terrorized and despoiled the subject peoples, the allies and the citizens (59. 21. 3). The image of greed is exemplified in Caligula's behaviour at auctions that he organized in Lyons. The emperor sold items for much more than their real value, and, encouraged by this success, he decided to transport the superfluous palace furniture to Gaul to have it sold.

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Unfair treatment of Caligula has been noted by several scholars. They have pointed out that Caligula’s second auction falls within a category of imperial auctions that is usually reported in positive terms. An auction of imperial goods was a perfectly acceptable way of raising cash for an emergency or to balance the books. Emperors, other than Caligula, are even lauded for organizing them. While acknowledging misrepresentation, scholars have failed to scrutinize the deeper meaning of the auctions. This deeper meaning is to be found in the different moods evident at the two auctions. I believe that these moods are not the result of misrepresentation, but represent contrasting ideological meanings, deliberately inserted by the emperor himself.

Both Suetonius and Dio report two auctions. In itself this is not sufficient evidence for accepting their veracity, since it was a common device of ancient historians to duplicate a negative item. However, the two auctions are contextually separated as to the items sold and the behaviour of the emperor. At the first auction Caligula sold off the possessions of his sisters, whom he had accused of conspiring with Aemilius Lepidus. The items included jewelry, furniture, slaves, and freedmen. Altogether, they represented the personal luxuries that the sisters had brought along with them on their trip. Subsequently an auction of imperial paraphernalia was advertised. According to both Suetonius (Calig. 39. 1) and Dio (59. 21. 5), Caligula was already in Gaul at the time and he had sent for the belongings from Rome.

Our sources show some disparities when they relate the owners of the possessions sold at the first auction. Dio (59. 21. 4–5) believes that they were possessions belonging to people accused of conspiracy and rebellion, whereas Suetonius (39. 1) indicates that they were Livilla’s and Agrippina’s. However, both of them seem to have had instigators of a conspiracy against Caligula in mind. As far as the second auction is concerned, Dio (59. 21. 6) refers to the heirlooms of the monarchy, goods formerly in the possession of his father, mother, grandfather, great-grandfather and of Antony (his maternal great-grandfather). There can be no misunderstanding here. Dio speaks of τὰ τῆς μοναρχίας κεφήλαια; the word κεφήλαια, although infrequent in prose of any period, is used in one other instance by Dio and there it refers to personal belongings of the emperor Claudius given away by Messalina to her lover C. Silius (60. 31. 3).

The second part of my argument concerns the behaviour of Caligula. At the first auction Caligula solicited the bidding himself and raised the prices to exorbitant heights. Dio states that people were compelled to buy the articles at any price and for much more than their value (59. 21. 5). Behaviour at the second auction, however, is completely out of character with the image of a tyrant. In Suetonius’ account, the emperor is said to have been railing at the bidders for their avarice and because they were
not ashamed to be far richer than he. He is also assumed to have feigned regret for allowing common men to acquire the property belonging to the imperial household (Suet. Calig. 39. 2). Dio indicates that Caligula was auctioning the imperial articles together with the reputation of the persons who once possessed them by making comments on each one: ‘This belonged to my father’, ‘this to my mother’, ‘this to my grandfather’, ‘this to my great-grandfather’, ‘this Egyptian piece was Antony’s, the price of victory for Augustus’. There certainly was a lack of enthusiasm, since, Dio adds (59. 21. 6), Caligula at the same time explained the necessity of selling them, so that no one dared to appear rich (καὶ τοῦτο τὴν ἡ ἀνάγκην ἐμα τῆς πράσεως αὐτῶν ἐννέκυκλο, ὥστε μηδένα ὑπομένειν εὐπορεῖν δοκεῖν).

The enforced buying at the first auction is replaced by ‘free’ bidding. With the introduction of each item came the explanation for the necessity of the sale (ἀνάγκην τῆς πράσεως).

Apart from a physical setting where money was raised, an auction was a ritual of performance that received a variety of symbolic meanings, suggested either by the actor, the victim or the spectators. Under the emperor Claudius, Umbonius Silio, governor of Baetica, was expelled from the senate because he had sent too little grain to the army in Mauretania. The senator, feeling unjustly accused, subsequently brought all his furniture to the auction place. However, he only sold his senatorial dress, indicating that he could still enjoy life as a private citizen (Dio 60. 24. 5–6). This is the somewhat flat interpretation given by Dio. There might be another, more emphatic, meaning that he failed to highlight. Umbonius Silio, through the auctioning of his senatorial garb, demonstratively underlined his withdrawal from the senate, a silent protest against his unjustified expulsion.

In another case, when Augustus attempted to auction his own possessions and those of his companions in 30 BC, ‘nothing was purchased and nothing taken in exchange either — for who, pray, would ever have dared follow either course? — yet he secured by this means a plausible excuse for delay in carrying out his promise; and later he discharged the debt out of the spoils of Egypt (...)’ (Dio 51. 4. 8). This story obviously requires a different reading from the previous one. It seems as if the audience of potential buyers had read the intentions of Augustus all too well. Buying at an auction could land one in trouble if the political climate suddenly changed. Furthermore, no political leader would have liked to be reminded of the fact that he had had to organize a public auction to discharge his debts; spoils were a more acceptable way of achieving this. Evidently, Augustus had expected the crowd’s response and had manipulated the auction to silence any form of criticism of his financial politics.

Imperial auctions conducted by the emperor himself might be utilized to transmit public condemnation or disparagement of an imperial predecessor.
for his rapacity and luxury. In his speech upon receiving the consulship in AD 100, Pliny the Younger reminded his audience of the blessings of the present emperor, Trajan. Senatorial possessions were now secure, estates and houses that used to belong to the emperor [Domitian], presumably after confiscation, had now been distributed to his trusted and loyal friends (Pan. 50. 1–5). Trajan had also published a long list of possessions for sale. In blatant contrast with the reign of Domitian, when senators lived under the constant threat of being dispossessed of their houses and estates, '[Trajan] believes us worthy of imperial possessions and we have no fears about seeming so' (Pan. 50. 7). Here the motive behind the auction is also to raise money (probably, although Pliny does not say so explicitly, to fund a campaign against the Dacians; cf. Dio 68. 6), but the act has been eulogized by a friendly source into a benefaction. The money motive is suppressed to give precedence to a more opportune political message: the creation of a spirit of goodwill and understanding between emperor and subjects through a redistribution of favours. Significantly enough, the emperor’s presence at, possibly even presiding over, the auction is not an object of criticism. Pliny reports that Trajan himself introduced ('ipse inducit') the articles (Pan. 50. 6), whereas in terms of another imperial auction Dio praised Nerva for not haggling over the price of the articles (68. 2. 2).

In view of this constellation of positive associations, one might justifiably wonder whether Caligula did not have a similar response in mind but lacked a Pliny to get his intentions across. First we have to ascertain to what extent the issues of money and conspiracy had an effect on the way in which Caligula conducted the auctions. The emperor’s financial situation is obscured by anecdotes of doubtful historicity that serve to typify the emperor’s greed. Dio reports that at one time the emperor was playing dice and running out of money. Thereupon he called for the census lists of the Gauls and ordered the wealthiest of them to be put to death and their property confiscated. Returning to the dice table he is supposed to have remarked: ‘Here you are playing for a few denarii, while I have taken in a good hundred and fifty millions’ (59. 22. 3–4). A similar story — but not set in Gaul — can be found in Suetonius (41. 2), where Caligula had two Roman knights executed and their property confiscated, returning to his fellow-players boasting that he had never played in better luck.

The anecdotes misdirect the reader as to the real circumstances of Caligula’s finances. There are indications that the monetary situation late in 39 was not as prosperous as in the first year of his reign. Tangible signs of a financial débacle, however, only appear in AD 40, after his return to Rome, when Caligula was forced to introduce new taxes (Dio 59. 28. 8–11). Other signs may suggest that Caligula’s reign may not have been as wasteful as our sources have claimed. Caligula’s successor Claudius was
able to give the Praetorians a substantial donative at his accession (Tac. Ann. 12. 69. 2: 15,000 HS per soldier) and implemented other measures that suggest no lack of money. Among other things he is said to have returned sums that had been confiscated under Tiberius and Caligula (Dio 60. 6. 3). Unfortunately, we are unsure of how and at what precise time Claudius realized both objectives. Of greater relevance to our theme is Caligula’s immediate need of cash. The emperor raised new auxiliary units to deal with the emergency in Germany and raised two new legions and further auxiliary troops in order to invade Britain. The Roman tax system was notoriously inflexible in dealing with military emergencies. It is a sound conjecture that Caligula used the opportunity of his sisters’ banishment and the possible existence of a network of conspiracy to raise cash for his military plans.

Prior to the auctions, M. Aemilius Lepidus, formerly married to the emperor’s sister Drusilla, had been executed on the accusation of having conspired against Caligula. The latter’s sisters, Agrippina and Livilla, were accused of having entertained improper relations with Lepidus and were subsequently banished. The governor of Upper Germany, Cn. Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus, had been executed ‘ob detecta nefaria consilia in Germanicum’. The details of the conspiracy and the plans of the key players are lost to us, just as we are unsure of how Caligula found out about the plot. A connection between Lepidus’ execution and that of Gaetulicus is hard to prove. The latter may be justifiably accused of incompetence and laxness, but he cannot be identified beyond all doubt as the author (or co-author) of a conspiracy against Caligula. Another governor, Lucilius Junior, the prefect of the Alpes Poeninae and Graiae, may have played a key role in the conspirators’ plans. The evidence for his involvement, however, is circumstantial, and he may not even have been prefect of the said region.

Conspiracy or not, the crux of the matter is that the emperor himself acted as if he had escaped from a major danger. He had sent a report to Rome ὡς καὶ μεγάλην εἰς ἐπιφολὴν διαπερηγώς (Dio 59. 23. 1). During his stay Caligula remained sensitive to the threat of conspiracy. An embassy sent by the senate to congratulate him on his escape from the plot on his life met with strong hostility. The choice of his uncle Claudius to lead the representatives particularly upset him. He turned some of the envoys back as spies and issued a statement that none of his relatives was to be honoured. If Caligula was really under the impression that he was the target of a coup, was he wrong in thinking that the first move of the conspirators would have been to get military support from the German armies and to secure the Alpine passes? Was he wrong in thinking that the conspirators would have made an attempt to secure support in Gaul? This story has all the bearings of the scenario for a dangerous conspiracy.
It was a common fact of imperial history that the fates of Germany and Gaul were connected. Once an emergency had arisen in Germany (either through disloyal generals or through invading barbarians), the province of Gaul was the first of Rome’s possessions to be in jeopardy. While discussing events in 47 Tacitus reports that D. Valerius Asiaticus was rumoured to project a visit to the German armies: ‘For his [Asiaticus’] birth at Vienna in Gaul, and his powerful connections in that country, make it easy for him to rouse his own people’s tribes’ (Ann. 11. 1. 2).

Both Caligula’s need of money and the threat of conspiracy turned the emperor’s visit to Gaul into a tense and confusing affair. As Dio wryly comments, ‘things were taken care of in a sloppy way’ (59. 22. 4: ἐποτε άχρητῶς πάντα ἐγγέννηκα). An illustration of this attitude can be found in the anecdote about a Gallic nobleman, Julius Sacerdos, who was executed because of a similarity of names (Dio Cass. 59. 22. 4). This may signify Caligula’s uncertainty of the extent of the support Lepidus and Gaetulicus had mustered in Gaul rather than as a blind attack on a wealthy provincial. J.C. Faur sees in the unfortunate Sacerdos one of the agents contacted by Gaetulicus to prepare the Gauls for a change of emperor.

Dio, furthermore, admits that large gifts were brought to Caligula voluntarily, although he adds venomously that this was made to appear so (59. 21. 5). Suetonius relates that a rich provincial had paid two hundred thousand sesterces to Caligula’s summoners (‘vocatoribus’) to be smuggled in among the guests at one of his dinner-parties. Caligula was allegedly not displeased that the honour to dine with him was rated so highly. The man appeared at the emperor’s auction the next day and was forced to buy some trifle for the same amount of money, eventually receiving a personal invitation to dine with Caesar (Calig. 39. 2). The story has obviously been manipulated by historians to accentuate the bad taste and greed of Caligula, but we can still recognize the need to show loyalty to the emperor and the latter’s apparent satisfaction in receiving it.

Both Auguet and Barrett have argued that Caligula’s extraordinary sense of humour provided historians with excellent opportunities for distorting the real intentions of the emperor. Auguet is most probably right in arguing that Caligula’s famous remark to the consuls reclining next to him at a banquet, that a nod of his was enough to have both their throats cut on the spot (Suet. Calig. 32. 3), was directed at the consuls of 39 whom he suspected of plotting against him. He deposed them on a ridiculous pretext, broke their fasces, after which one of them committed suicide, a possible sign of guilt or some other misdemeanour. Auguet furthermore argues that the praetor Aponius Saturninus, who nodded off during an auction of gladiators and ended up by paying nine million sesterces for thirteen gladiators (Suet. Calig. 38. 4), was actually punished for some misconduct by being thus forced into bankruptcy.
Humour is deliberately used here to install fear into the emperor's enemies. Its main result was iniquitous for the people concerned: the ferreting out of a guilty party resulted in a suicide; a forced bankruptcy. Note that it is implied that, prior to the deployment of jest, Caligula was already certain of the opponents' guilt. However, in the case of the anonymous banqueter, humour in the end created a release of tension, with both parties realizing their objectives: Caligula received a considerable sum of money, whereas the banqueter acquired his prized dinner invitation, signifying a reconciliation with the emperor. This moves us closer to the spirit of the second auction. The praise awarded to Trajan by Pliny might serve to explain Caligula's intentions. Domitian is described by Pliny as the emperor who felt the need to own whatever he saw (Pan. 50. 2), or as the emperor who possessed far more than he needed, but always wanted more (Pan. 50. 5). The selling of imperial articles at Trajan's auction is valued by Pliny as an act of benevolence: 'Trajan believes us worthy of imperial possessions' (50. 7). As a matter of fact, Trajan's auction is described as a positive indication of the emperor's behaviour, in direct contrast with the negative image of confiscation.

Caligula's behaviour at the second auction catches his audience by surprise. This time there was no compulsion, but an explanation given personally why the articles had to be sold. If we look at the chance (?) list of items for sale recorded in Dio, it reads like an exact replica of Caligula's imperial ancestry, mention being made of Germanicus, Agrippina (the Elder), Tiberius, Augustus, and Antony. Was Caligula attempting to win goodwill from his provincial subjects by allowing them a share in the imperial family's possessions? The feigned regret that Caligula is supposed to have expressed, that common people were able to acquire the possessions belonging to the imperial household (Suet. Galig. 39. 2), may have been another of the emperor's serious remarks spoken in jest. Stripped of its humorous aspects we find the remark repeated in Pliny to indicate the benevolent spirit established by Trajan at his auction.

Altogether, Gaul was a province of eminent importance to Caligula, especially in view of his future manoeuvres in Germany and Britain. Sound military tactics suggested that the situation in Gaul must first be stabilized before he could embark on any further expedition. The young emperor, moreover, had special ties with Gaul. He was undoubtedly very popular in Vienna, two statues having already been erected there before he succeeded to the throne (CIL 12, 1848/9). Furthermore, one of Caligula's personal friends (amicus Caesars) was D. Valerius Asiaticus (consul in 35), born in Vienna and probably admitted to the senatorial order under Tiberius. At some stage before 48 Vienna seems to have acquired the status of a colonia, and it is most likely Caligula who was instrumental in the promotion at the behest of his friend. Caligula also personally encouraged the process
of including provincials in the upper orders. At the beginning of his reign, Caligula is said to have recruited people from all over the Empire to enter the depleted equestrian and senatorial orders. Several of these must have come from Gaul. The threat of conspiracy and the need for money disturbed the happy balance between the emperor and his Gallic subjects. It was the strong political motivation behind the second auction to restore that balance. In order to achieve this aim, Caligula used the auction as a ritual of reconciliation.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was given at the 21st meeting of the Classical Association of South Africa in Bloemfontein in January 1995. I would like to express my gratitude to the scholars who made helpful suggestions during the discussion. I would also like to acknowledge my indebtedness to the referees for this journal (Barbara Levick, David Wardle and Barry Baldwin). Needless to say, the responsibility for expressing my views in this form and for any remaining mistakes is mine alone.

2. The itinerary of Caligula’s trip is far from clear. Various options are available, but they all raise further problems. Recently Anthony A. Barrett, *Caligula. The Corruption of Power*, New York 1989, 103-5, developed a new itinerary. In his reconstruction of Caligula’s journey the emperor is not just travelling to Mainz, the headquarters of Gaetulicus, but straight to Lyons. Gaetulicus was probably executed in Lyons when he was summoned there by Caligula, or, more likely, the emperor had him killed by sending agents to the camp, as suggested by Barrett (105). It remains unclear where Aemilius Lepidus was executed and where exactly the emperor’s sisters were accused of adultery and conspiracy. Barrett’s suggestion that this all happened at Mevania is a possibility. The evidence for his prolonged stay comes mainly from Dio Cassius and Suetonius. A fragmentary inscription from Lyons (AE 1989, 638) records the fact that Caligula, Claudius and an unknown female member of the imperial family (Caesonia?) have dedicated a building, which, unfortunately, cannot be identified. Cf. J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *The Emperor Gaius*, Oxford 1934, 69-70 with note 1 for other municipal inscriptions possibly reflecting the trip to the North.


4. Gaul had a reputation as a wealthy province: Strabo 4. 2. 3; Velleius 2. 39. 1; Josephus BJ 2. 364; Mart. 9. 35. 5f.; Tac. Ann. 11. 23. 4. Cf. furthermore J.F. Drinkwater, ‘Gallic Personal Wealth’, *Chiron* 9 (1979), 237-42. Dio (59. 21. 2) mentions Spain in the same context, although Caligula never had any plans to go to Spain.

5. Suetonius (39. 1) uses ‘invitatus luero’ to explain the organizing of the second auction and Dio also seems to imply that the success of the first auction influenced the emperor’s decision to have the palace furniture transported to Gaul.

6. Barrett (above note 2), 227 with note 55 refers to Trajan’s auctions recorded by Pliny. Balsdon (above note 2), 87 with note 1 implies unfair treatment of Caligula’s
second auction when compared with later imperial auctions. T. Reekmans, 'La politique économique et financière des autorités dans les Douze Césars de Suetone' in *Historiographia antiqua ... in honorem W. Peremans*, Louvain 1977, 292, argues as follows: 'L'inclusion de divers détails aggravants ne change rien au fait que les vents aux enchères n'auraient en elles-mêmes rien de reprehensible'. D. Wardle, *Suetonius*’ Life of Caligula. *A Commentary*, Brussels 1994, 288, offers the interesting remark that the absence of auctions in the *Lives* may suggest their rarity or that they were notoriously unjust. He fails, however, to take into consideration other purposes for which an auction might be used. Donna W. Hurley, *An Historical and Historiographical Commentary on Suetonius*’ Life of Caligula, Atlanta 1993, 150–1, chooses not to discuss the wider implications of misrepresentation. A. Ferrill, *Caligula. Emperor of Rome*, London 1981, 124, is uncritical in handling the sources and glosses over the problem raised by Balsdon and Wallace-Hadrill.

7. *Plin. Pan.* 50; Dio 68. 2. 2 (Nerva); 74. 5. 4–5 (Pertinax); *HA* Marc. Ant. 17. 4–5; 21. 9; *HA* Pert. 7. 8–8. 7. For the Later Roman Empire: Zosimus 4. 32; Friscus fr. 9. 3. On Marcus Aurelius’ auction in 169 see A.R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius: a biography*, London 1987, 160. The emperor was faced with a reduction in taxes because of the plague and mounting costs for the upcoming wars (the raising of new legions). Wardle (above note 6), 288 rightly remarks that these cases do not concern emperors who had squandered their predecessor’s surplus, allegedly 2,700 million HS, in less than two years. However, in Marcus Aurelius’ case the auctions might be partly connected with the extravagances of Verus, who died in 169. On the 2,700 million squandered by Caligula, see R.P. Duncan-Jones, *Money and Government in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge 1994, 17, who justifiably signals the unreliable character of ancient references to amounts. Amounts of 30 and 300 seem to have had a standard character: 'The likelihood is that amounts within this family of stereotypes were often purely conventional, and not specific historical data in their own right'.

8. Barrett (above note 2) seems to be inconsistent in his evaluation of Caligula’s auctions. At 132 he specifically refers to auctions in the plural. At 107 and 226/7, however, he insufficiently distinguishes between two different events, assigning the sale of the sisters’ possessions and the imperial heirlooms to one and the same auction. Our sources state that the items for the second auction had to be transported from Rome. They were, therefore, not the same as the possessions of Caligula’s sisters and other conspirators sold at the first auction. Presumably, the latter were the goods the sisters had taken with them for the journey. It is rather difficult to imagine the sisters’ possessions (notably slaves and freedmen) as heirlooms of the monarchy (τα της μοναρχίας κειμένα).

9. This suggestion is made by Hurley (above note 6), 150. The same suggestion is made in Barrett (above note 2), 107, but on the same page he later argues otherwise: ‘Thus he in fact imported items to Gaul from Rome after his arrival, and these could have included the jewels, furniture and slaves of his disgraced sisters’. Hurley assumes that the movable property of the sisters was confiscated ‘on the spot’, but she does not enlighten us as to the geographical location. The confiscation might have taken place either at Mevania or at Lyons. For Caligula’s baggage train see Dio 59. 21. 2.

10. *Suetonius*’ account of the transport of the paraphernalia strains belief. Caligula allegedly requisitioned public carriages and animals of the bakeries for this purpose. This action supposedly caused bread to be scarce at Rome and litigants to be unable to reach the courts (39. 1). A similar tale of Caligula’s irresponsible behaviour can be found in accusations levelled by Seneca (*Brev.* 18. 5) and Dio (59. 17) that the
event of the spectacle at Baiae caused a famine. There is no evidence for such calamities and disruptions in 39. No indication can be unearthed that the emperor was instrumental in their making. The stories show Caligula to be neglecting his responsibilities of maintaining the food supply and ensuring the course of justice. Wardle (above note 6), 289 supports Becker's emendation of 'paene', which reduces the fantastic proportions of the story.

11. This was a technique commonly used by 'praecones', see Nicholas K. Rauh, 'Auctioneers and the Roman Economy', Historia 38 (1989) 469, note 77.

12. Some manuscripts have ἀνατρέπω instead of ἀναστρέπω. The latter makes more sense with an emperor in dire financial straits.

13. Cf. Cic. Quinct. 49-50, where an auction of goods of a senatorial debtor is called a fate worse than death. According to Rauh (above note 11), 459 this aspect contributed to the nefarious reputation of 'praecones': they were receiving profits from the misery of others. Cf. Cic. Off. 1. 25, 92; 2. 64, 87 and 3. 63 for the view that wealth should be acquired without causing pain to others (quoted by Rauh 459, note 38).


15. F. Millar, The Emperor in the Roman World, London 1977, 168 argues that these free gifts were actually in the minority. Most senators would have had to buy (their own?) property back from the emperor.

16. It is not sure whether these possessions were 'bona damnatorum'. Millar (above note 15), 168 with note 42 seems to argue in favour of this, but Pliny is so vague that we cannot exclude the possibility that other possessions might have been included as well. Pliny's claim that senators were now allowed to be the owners of princely possessions (Pan. 50. 7) does not seem to refer to 'bona damnatorum'. Note also that Pliny is using the same words ('principalibus rebus') as Suetonius does for Caligula's auction of imperial articles ('principalium rerum').

17. In other cases, the selling of imperial furniture is actually represented as an alternative to the introduction of taxation, which would affect the provincials negatively: 'And lest all this [war] proved burdensome to the provincials, he held an auction of the palace furnishings in the Forum of the Deified Trajan (...)' (HA Marc, Ant. 21. 9).

18. According to Plutarch Sulla himself carried out the sale of confiscated estates from the tribunal during the proscriptions, thereby exciting odium because of the arrogant way in which he conducted affairs (Sull. 33. 1).

19. A cautionary note on the use of anecdotes as historical evidence is sounded by Richard Saller, 'Anecdotes as historical evidence for the Principate', GBR 27 (1980) 69-83. The two stories of Caligula confiscating property while playing dice are discussed at 75. Hurley (above note 5), 156 suggests that one of the wealthy nobles executed was Julius Sacerdos.

20. Wardle (above note 6), 65 assumes two separate incidents: 'Suetonius has two victims, Dio suggests more, and has them chosen from the census-list; in the one Caligula entrusts his turn to another, in the other he runs out of money'.

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25. The expedition was planned long beforehand. Already in 38 the Alexandrian Jews had offered a sacrifice ‘in the hope of a German victory’ (Philo, *Leg.* 356).

26. Barrett (above note 2), 108 argues that, as in so many other cases, the accusation was a cover for more dangerous political activities.


28. The uncovering of the plot had repercussions in Rome as well, where, as Dio reports (59, 23, 8), people were prosecuted because of their friendship with the sisters. Possibly Domitius Afer was made consul in September 39 to deal with matters such as these; cf. Barrett (above note 2), 98. On the replacement of the consuls in September 39 and the identity of the suffect consuls see J.W. Humphrey and P.M. Swan, ‘Cassius Dio on the Suffect Consuls of AD 39’, *Phoenix* 37 (1983) 324–7.

29. C.J. Simpson, ‘The “Conspiracy” of AD 39’ in C. Deroux (ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History*, vol. 2, Brussels 1980, 347–66, rightly points out that the evidence for a fully-fledged conspiracy against Caligula is circumstantial. Some doubt can certainly be cast on a ‘Lepidi et Gaetulici coniuratio’, as reported by Suetonius in his biography of the emperor Claudius (9.1). Simpson argues in favour of two entirely unrelated cases. First, the removal of the lax Lentulus Gaetulicus who had shown incompetence in dealing with the free Germans, whom he had allowed to raid far into Gaul (Suet. *Galba* 6.3: ‘qui iam in Galliam usque proruperant’). And, second, the execution of Lepidus for adultery with the emperor’s sisters. Simpson treats this cause célèbre purely as an adulterous liaison, which could be considered as treason since it involved members of the imperial family. However, what we know of Agrippina the Younger seems to suggest more than an innocent fling: ‘quae puellaribus annis stuprum cum Lepido spe dominationis admiserat’ (Ann. 14.2.2). In the same passage Tacitus points to her consistent use of sex as a means to power: ‘pari cupidinie usque ad libita Pallantis provoluta et exercita ad omne flagitium patrui nuptiis’. Additionally, if Gaius’ infant daughter had already been born by the autumn of 39, there was all the more reason for Lepidus and Agrippina to undertake action.


31. Cf. J.C. Faur, ‘La première conspiration contre Caligula’, *RBPh* 51 (1973) 36–7 and Barrett (above note 2), 112–3. Lucilius was a friend of Gaetulicus and his position in guarding the passes of the Little and Great Bernard would have been of strategic
importance had Gaetulicus been considering any kind of action against Rome.

32. G. Walser, *Via per Alpes Graias. Beiträge zur Geschichte des kleinen St. Bernard-Passes in römischer Zeit*, Stuttgart 1986, 22 sustains Pflaum’s arguments that Lucilius Junior was never prefect of the Alps; he was doing his ‘militia equestris’. At the end of his life (AD 63–4) he managed to reach the procuratorship of Sicily.

33. The threat may be reflected in the fabricated story of Caligula’s preparations to flee the capital after hearing of an uprising in Germany, ‘in case the enemy should be victorious and take possession of the summits of the Alps’ (Suet. Calig. 51. 3; italics, MK). The anecdote, however, deals with the theme of Caligula’s cowardice. Other emperors, notably Nero (Suet. Nero 47. 2), allegedly entertained thoughts of leaving Rome and refounding the capital somewhere else.

34. Dio 59. 23. 1–5; cf. Barrett (above note 2), 133.

35. J.C. Faur (above note 31), 37.

36. A similar anecdote, but given here as a neutral report, concerns the later emperor Vespasian who thanked Caligula in the senate for receiving an invitation to dine with Caesar (Suet. Vesp. 2. 3).


39. It was quite common that the imperial ‘familia gladiatoria’ was put to good commercial use; municipal magistrates hired gladiators from the emperor, cf. CIL 9, 4920 and G. Ville, *La gladiature en Occident*, Paris 1981, 290.

40. Auguet (above note 37), 191.

41. We only hear of the association shortly before Caligula’s assassination. Surprisingly enough, he is not mentioned by the sources as having played a part in the events of 39. Cf. Barrett (above note 2), 81 and 162 with Seneca Const. 18. 2.


43. Dio Cass. 59. 9. 5; Philo Leg. 285; cf. R.J.A. Talbert, *The Senate of Imperial Rome*, Princeton 1984, 14–5 who suggests that it was through the offering of the ‘latus clavus’ that ‘equites’ were allowed to compete for office; cf. Barrett (above note 2), 223.
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