

Mad, Deranged, Insane: A Case Study of Madness as a Diagnosis in Antiquity

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Inception

This research essay was originally written in Fall 2016 for the Health in Antiquity class with Dr. Michael Mackinnon. Since then I have been expanding on further knowledge of the topic of madness in Antiquity.

Abstract

In our recent past, we have understood madness as locking someone up in an asylum and not letting them take part in our culture. In antiquity, it was quite different because those who were understood to be were banished to the streets where they were left to the will of the gods. Scholarship debates the nature of madness in antiquity, and, specifically, how physicians diagnosed what was known as the “sacred disease”—epilepsy. One of the most fascinating accounts that has been left for us to study is the case of Emperor Gaius Caligula, was claimed to be a man. Using the writings of Hippocrates and other ancient sources we can look deeper into the Emperor’s short life and consider that it was not madness that changed Caligula’s mindset; rather, it was the “sacred disease” as it was understood at the time by Roman society.

I. Introduction: Behind the word, “mad”

The Hippocratic Corpus¹ offers a detailed understanding of the sick, insane and injured in antiquity. As ancient populations were rising and medicinal understanding was expanding, mental illness became a well-known disorder to the Romans and Greeks.² It was not uncommon for someone who was considered to be “mad”; someone who was lacking mental stability to process all common sense, to seek treatment or shelter from the outside world.³ Only some people were treated, while there were others who were unable to afford the necessary treatments or to undertake the travel to receive them.⁴ But there was difficulty in defining what madness was in the ancient world. For us, in the present, it can be classified as one’s derangement from an original personality, but even then, this is not entirely adequate.⁵ In antiquity, madness was not only a type of mental disorder, but was also seen as an illness that affected a person’s humours with an imbalance that caused a person’s body, mind and spirit to change mentally, spiritually, physically, culturally

¹ A body of discussions, prognoses, diagnoses, and case histories created by Hippocrates of Kos. (400 BC). Loeb Classical Library, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://classics.mit.edu/Browse/browse-Hippocrates.html>.

² “Understanding of illness.” Hom, *Il.*, 1.1-16; Hippocrates, “Father of Medicine”, 155; Hippocrates, *Corpus*, 208. Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, 78.

³ Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, 57-8, 74-5. The four models of mental illness.

⁴ Most were treated at home by friends, family and possibly a doctor. Milns, *Attitudes towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 460; Vlahogiannis, *Curing Disability*, 184-5. Those who could afford to travel went to Cult Centers to be treated with prayer, sacrifice, medical attention and vivid sleep. Hip., *An. Med.*1, 1-20; Stafford, “*Without you no one is happy*”: the cult of health in ancient Greece, 125.

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary*, “Madness”: “The state of having a serious mental illness, extremely foolish behaviour, wild and chaotic activity”. Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, 55, 78. AMA, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, section 3.

and socially.⁶ In the case of a specific emperor from Rome in the first century AD, Gaius “Caligula” Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (who from now on will be referred to as Caligula⁷), we see that many ancient authors such as Suetonius, Philo, Cassius Dio, and Josephus discuss not only the life of the Emperor, but they also focus upon his mind and mental state. Modern scholars have different opinions concerning the diagnosis of Caligula. This article will argue that Caligula, who was regarded as a mad man,⁸ suffered from a form of epilepsy.⁹ With the use of ancient and modern evidence—the ancient sources that refer to mental illness, prognosis, diagnosis, and treatment in the ancient world—this paper will argue that Caligula was one of the many that had what was considered to be “epileptic psychosis” in ancient Rome.

II. The Mentally Ill in Antiquity

Before examining this possible diagnosis for Caligula, we must consider how mental illness was understood in antiquity. Modern scholars have determined that in antiquity both physical and mental illnesses were the results of a variety of causes and situations that ranged from congenital, accidental, and occupational hazards, through to misadventures on the battle-field, disease, and old age.¹⁰ The organs and genes in a person’s body were seen to be problematic because they could transmit and affect someone’s

⁶ King, *Health in Antiquity*, 136.

⁷ Caligula comes from the Latin term “caliga”; caligae were the shoes worn by the Roman soldiers. In the diminutive, as Caligula is, this would mean “little boot”.

⁸ Ancient authors and modern scholars both agree that he was mentally ill, however hard to determine the exact disease due to the lack of evidence in archaeological and skeletal record. King, *Health in Antiquity*, 12-16.

⁹ Suet., *Calig.*, 50. 2; Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula’s Mental Illness*, 183.

¹⁰ Vlahogiannis, “Curing Disability”, 181.

humours.¹¹ It is also important to consider the term, “disease,” and its place in ancient society. According to Vlahogiannis, disease is a disturbance or a typical functional deficiency, while illness is a social dysfunction.¹² Having a mental or physical disease impairs many bodily functions, most importantly the brain, which is the organ that supplies us with motor function, cognitive thoughts, and the senses. But Vlahogiannis states that when someone was mentally ill, one of the humours assumes control over the others.¹³

The conclusions that we draw about how mental illness was perceived derive from literary, epigraphic, iconographic, archaeological and skeletal evidence.¹⁴ Evidence from various ancient literary sources can provide us with a useful perspective in observing how civilizations understood mental illnesses. One very important genre of literature that has the most vivid descriptions of madness is Athenian tragedy. Milns says that when we look at this as evidence, we need to remember that playwrights and authors of antiquity were most likely from the upper class and their attitudes may not be typical of the actual majority.¹⁵ However, this does not suggest that just the higher classes had what antiquity deemed mental illness; it was all classes—higher, lower, and slaves—that were affected by various diseases.¹⁶ Some examples of tragedies that do have characters who have suffered from some form of mental illness (as understood in antiquity) are Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*, Euripides’ *Orestes* and the *Bacchae*, and Sophocles’ *Ajax*. Of these three poets, Euripides seems to have more knowledgeable understanding of psychological illnesses and the

¹¹ Cel., Med., 14-15.

¹² King, *Health in Antiquity*, 180.

¹³ Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, 62.

¹⁴ King, *Health in Antiquity*, 182.

¹⁵ Milns, *Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 454.

¹⁶ Vlahogiannis, “Curing Disability”, 181; Milns, *Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 458; Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*

processes of their progression. The Greek historian Herodotus may not be a tragic playwright, but he describes madness clearly:

No sooner was he (Cleomenes, Spartan King) back, however, than he fell seriously ill: what have previously been mild derangement was now full-blown madness. Whenever he encountered one of the Spartiates, he would hit the man across the face with his staff. This behaviour, and his descent into lunacy, prompted his relatives to lock him up in the stocks. Thus tethered, and seeing that the guard was on his own, standing apart from the others, Cleomenes badgered him for a knife...With the iron weapon now in his hands, Cleomenes began to hack at himself, beginning at the shins. Strip after strip of his own flesh he sliced off...¹⁷

The Greeks, in particular, believed that disease and illness came from the gods: Zeus and Athena brought blindness, infertility and mental disorder; Apollo brought plagues and disaster.¹⁸ The common theme from the gods bringing about disease was that it was meant to be punishment for wicked impulses and actions done by mortals.¹⁹ If a god were the cause, it was said the person affected should go to the temple of the specific god and make a sacrifice to them for their crimes/sins to be forgiven.²⁰ From the Hippocratic period (c. 460 BC- 375 BC) and onward, ancient authors came to the conclusion that the brain was where disturbances that caused mental illness occurred, and that all diseases were essentially organic.²¹ These changes in attitudes towards the nature of disease also brought on different methods of healing.

¹⁷ Hdt., *The Histories*, 6.75.

¹⁸ Hom., *Il.*, 1. 1-16

¹⁹ King, *Health in Antiquity*, 182-3.

²⁰ King, *Health in Antiquity*, 183; Milns, *Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 455; Hip., *Morb. Sacr.* 4; Hom, *Il.*, 1.

²¹ Milns, *Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 457; Hip., *Dis.*, 1.8.

III. The “Four Humours” as the Cause

Before examining the possible treatments of the mentally ill, however, we need to return to the humours and their purpose in the ancient world. In antiquity, it was believed that there were four humours that affected a person’s bodily health depending on which of the humours dominates the others, as each humour affects a particular body part differently. There were four humours: black bile, which was melancholic; yellow bile, which was choleric; blood, which was sanguine and finally, water, which was phlegmatic.²² Evans believes that these proportions led to a mixture that determined someone’s intelligence, temperament and predisposition. An excess (*dyscrasia*) of one of these determined the hotness or coolness, dryness or wetness of a person’s body.²³ Ancient medical doctors would use the humours to diagnosis the ill, including the mad: for instance, patients who were mad from an excess of phlegm were quiet and, would neither shout or make disturbances; those who were maddened by excess of bile were noisy evil-doers, as well as restless and were always doing something inopportune.²⁴ Furthermore, if the patient’s brain were badly affected, then they would have terrors and attacks, which today we call those seizures.²⁵ One person, in particular, can be an example of “those maddened through bile”²⁶

Emperor Caligula. Winterling observes in his biography of Caligula that all ancient authors and philosophers, at some point, claim that Caligula was insane, mad, filled with imperial madness or a violent

²²Evans, *Searching for Schizophrenia in Ancient Greek and Roman Literature*; Uribe, “Contagion: Historical Views of Diseases and Epidemics”, 207.

²³ Milns, *Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 458; Evans, *Searching for Schizophrenia in Ancient Greek and Roman Literature*.

²⁴ Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 18.

²⁵ Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 18.

²⁶ Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 18.

man.²⁷ The philosopher Seneca mentions Caligula's madness and calls him a beast.²⁸ It is to say at the very least, that ancient sources had no right or wrong facts on the life of Caligula.

IV. Hippocrates' On Sacred Disease

Before examining Caligula's tyranny and the possible diagnosis of epilepsy that relate to his personality change and mental state, the following will consider Hippocrates' famous work *On Sacred Disease* and its prognosis, diagnosis, and their relation to Caligula's madness, which so happens to correlate with the Emperor.²⁹ The Sacred Disease—epilepsy—is neither more divine nor sacred than other diseases, and Hippocrates claims that it has a natural cause.³⁰ Our modern definition of epilepsy is very similar to that of Hippocrates': "a disorder characterized by recurrent episodes of brain dysfunction due to a sudden, disorderly and excessive neuronal discharge."³¹ Epilepsy affected the young, which usually ended in death. However, among the old; its affects were less risky. Paralysis was more common when an attack affected the elderly.³² If someone in the ancient world did have the sacred disease there were many signs of an occurring attack, or what we call a seizure.

If the phlegm be cut off from these passages (airways), but makes its decent into the veins...the patient becomes speechless and chokes, froth flows from the mouth; he

²⁷ Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography*, 1-2; Suet., *Calig.*, 14. 2, 50. 2; Philo, *Leg.*, 14-21; Cass., *Book 59*.

²⁸ Sen., *Gai. Cal.*, 4; Barrett, *Caligula: Corruption of Power*, 214.

²⁹ Benedittson, *Caligula's Madness: Madness or Interictal Temporal Lobe Epilepsy*, 373-375; Suet., *Calig.*, 30. 2.

³⁰ Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 1.1.

³¹ *Medical Dictionary*, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://medical-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com>.

³² Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 11-12.

gnashes his teeth and twists his hands, the eyes roll and intelligence fails....”³³

Hippocrates also records that children, since they do not understand the disease, “fall everywhere” and they “run to their mothers.”³⁴ During his research of the brain, Hippocrates found the relationship of the four humours with epilepsy and he believed that they affected the moistness in the brain, which, in turn, caused madness.³⁵ Galen agrees with this idea of the humours affecting the brain because he argues that mental illness arose when the psychic *pneuma* was deteriorated by a humour.³⁶ Plato held a similar opinion to those of Hippocrates and Galen. He believed in this ideology and even divided the psyche into three groups: rational and ruling, the passionate and the emotional, and appetitive and desiring.³⁷ The rational and ruling is dependent on the brain, and how it rationally weighs options, analyzes situations, and trues of outcomes; while the passionate and emotional focuses more towards the element of the soul and emotional senses involved. Finally, the appetitive and desiring, just as it sounds, is dependent on pleasures, comforts and bodily ease.³⁸ We can see that this theory is quite similar to that concerning the humours. Plato believed that when someone was mentally ill, one of the humours assumed control over the others. Firmicus Maternus believes that the prognosis of excessive moisture led to madness.³⁹ Toner has noticed that ancient practitioners had an interest in focusing their medical studies on the emperors themselves because they believed that the pressure of governing a

³³ Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 10.

³⁴ Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 14.

³⁵ Hip., *Morb. Sacr.*, 27-28.

³⁶ Milns, *Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 458-9; Gal., *Nat. Fac.*, 2.5.

³⁷ Milns, *Attitudes Towards Mental Illness in Antiquity*, 461; Pl., *Rep.*, 13.

³⁸ Kerns, “Plato’s Three Parts of the Soul”; Plat., *Rep.* IV, 437-450.

³⁹ Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, 76.

large empire caused stress and madness.⁴⁰ From this information on the humours, we can argue that both Caligula's mental illness and epilepsy were understood to be due to an excess in moisture in his brain, and that all three groups of the *pneuma* that Plato had developed, above, were all affected by Caligula's mental and physical state.

V. Case Study: Roman Emperor Caligula

Caligula was born 31 August AD 12 in Antium, Italy, to Germanicus and Agrippina.⁴¹ Suetonius tells us that during Caligula's time as a child he was living with Augustus, his grandfather, but before the latter's death, Caligula was sent to his parents with one of his slaves, a doctor.⁴² According to this source (a letter purportedly from the Emperor Augustus), it appears that in the early years of his life, he did suffer from delicate health. It is said that he was prone to epileptic fits, but as he grew older these fits appear to have lessened in frequency.⁴³ After this apparent letter from Augustus,⁴⁴ we are left with very little to no information concerning the events of Caligula's youth, until Tacitus tells us that he was with his parents in the Rhine.⁴⁵ With the lack of evidence during the majority of Caligula's childhood, it could be argued that his illness was present at this time, however, we have no proof to assert this argument, therefore, we have to be careful giving an accurate timeline. Ferrill says that there is evidence that Caligula received special treatment as a child⁴⁶ such as when he was with his parents in the camps his mother would

⁴⁰ Toner, *Popular Culture in Ancient Rome*, 84.

⁴¹ Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 34.

⁴² Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 34; Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula's Mental Illness*, 187; Suet., *Calig.*, 8.

⁴³ Barrett, *Caligula: Corruption of Power*, 213; Suet., *Calig.*, 8.4, 50.2, 54.1.

⁴⁴ Suet., *Calig.*, 8; Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 34.

⁴⁵ Tac., *Ann.*, 1.69.

⁴⁶ Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 33-4, 48.

dress him up in boots and military attire⁴⁷ and he would prance around like he was one of them. This particular example, plus other attentions towards Caligula, started a quarrel between Agrippina and Tiberius.⁴⁸ After the death of Germanicus in AD 19, Caligula was placed under the care of Tiberius, who was emperor at the time.⁴⁹ Suetonius asserts that the death of Caligula's father was one of the major turning points in the boy's life, which could have been a possible acceleration in his illness.⁵⁰ Yet, there are other times that may have been just as significant: for example, when his mother and siblings were exiled onto an island and later died there, except for his favourite sister, Drusilla. The fact that Caligula continued his youth and early manhood in a life of turmoil, and had to please Tiberius just to live another day,⁵¹ which brainwashed Caligula into not being emotionally attached to family. Another factor could be the death of his first wife, Junia Claudilla, who died during childbirth.⁵² Even though these are sufficient examples of some of the possible effects on the boy's mind, the most prudent that has been discussed and debated upon by ancient and modern sources is the year AD 37; starting with the death of his adoptive father, Tiberius in the Bay of Naples.⁵³ During his first few months as the new Roman emperor, he was apparently a kind and generous ruler.⁵⁴ After just a few months into his rule, however, Caligula fell seriously ill,⁵⁵ which could have been one of the overall stressors to ignite his

⁴⁷ Suet., Calig., 9.

⁴⁸ Ferrill, Caligula Emperor of Rome, 47-8.

⁴⁹ Suet., Calig., 6, 14-14; Suet., Tib., 75.

⁵⁰ Suet., Calig., 1-8; Ferrill, Caligula Emperor of Rome, 33, 150.

⁵¹ Ferrill, Caligula Emperor of Rome, 53-81; Suet., Calig., 2.

⁵² Suet., Calig., 12.

⁵³ Ferrill, Caligula Emperor of Rome, 90-2; Cambridge Ancient History 10, 221; Suet., Tib., 75; Suet., Calig., 11.

⁵⁴ Cambridge Ancient History 10, 222; Philo, Leg., 14-23; Ferrill, Caligula Emperor of Rome, 97-9; Sandison, The Madness of Emperor Caligula, 203.

⁵⁵ Cambridge Ancient History 10, 224.

“madness.”⁵⁶ Here again, it can be argued against this being the actual trigger point since the evidence, again, loses sight of the Emperor, until his return months after.⁵⁷ Suetonius’ opinion is clear about how Caligula transformed from the sweet boy to the madman: “So much for Gaius the Emperor; the rest of this history must needs deal with Gaius the Monster.”⁵⁸

VI. *Caligula: Mad, Deranged, Insane*

It was after Caligula’s illness in AD 37 when he started to show signs of tyranny and violence, and it appears that the prevalent general opinion at the time (at least, initially) was that this was the aftermath of his illness.⁵⁹ According to Suetonius, Caligula could not control his cruelty and viciousness any longer and he would show enjoyment when watching torture, executions and would act out with singing and dancing of excitement.⁶⁰ Along with his likeness for violence and turmoil, like that of the man—Tiberius—who had raised him, he did not pay any attention to the proper dress codes of an emperor; instead, he would dress up like various gods.⁶¹ It is unclear as to the reason for these childlike games; however, it can be argued that these related to the stresses of ruling, or of past events when Caligula was a child.⁶² Another sign that he had a mental illness was his treatment of his horse, Incitatus: Dio reports that Caligula would dress his horse up in the finest attire, bring it to dinner, serve him the finest of foods, played chess with him, and even wanted his horse

⁵⁶ Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 100.

⁵⁷ Suet., *Calig.*, 6.

⁵⁸ Suet., *Calig.*, 22: “hactenus quasi dē principe, reliqua ut dē monstro narranda sunt.”; Heichelheim, *A History of the Roman People*, 309.

⁵⁹ Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 100-5.

⁶⁰ Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*, 203; Suet., *Calig.*, 27, 29; 32; Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 114-5.

⁶¹ Suet., *Calig.*, 52; Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*, 203; Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula’s Mental Illness*, 193.

⁶² Philo., *Leg.*, 14-21; Suet., *Calig.*, 14.

to be a consul.⁶³ Dio Cassius⁶⁴ emphasizes Caligula's madness alongside with Suetonius' ideas of epileptic seizures. It has been noted by Suetonius that Caligula was terrified of thunderstorms and would hide under his bed.⁶⁵ It is unclear to ancient and modern sources as to why he had such a fear of lightning, but if we are to look at this medically, loud noises and sharp repetitive blasts of light can cause seizures.⁶⁶ It can perhaps be argued here that Caligula knew he was affected by the storms, which he avoided with sleepless nights; however, there is no textual evidence written by the man himself to prove this theory. There has been some mention of Caligula having insomnia in the ancient records, particularly in Suetonius, and modern scholars today place focus on the sleepless nights from vivid dreams, alcohol abuse, his epilepsy and fear of seizures, which had been present since he was a young boy.⁶⁷ In fact, through their textual research, scholars believe that epilepsy ran in the Julio-Claudian family.⁶⁸

But Caligula's behaviour was not simply harmless or assumingly reasonable: there is evidence that suggests he was cruel and vicious too, perhaps on account of his madness. For example, during a dinner party, one of Caligula's slaves tried to steal a piece of silver from one of the couches and was caught; as punishment, Caligula

⁶³ Cass., *Dio*. 59, 1, 4, 7; Suet., *Calig.*, 55.3; Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography*, 103; Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 160.

⁶⁴ Cass., *Dio*. 59.

⁶⁵ Suet., *Cal*. 50.2.

⁶⁶ Schachter et al., *Triggers of Seizures*.Web.

⁶⁷ Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*, 207-8; Suet., *Calig.*, 51.1, 50.2.; Benedittson, *Caligula's Madness: Madness or Interictal Temporal Lobe Epilepsy*, 370, 53.2, 54.1. Katz, *Caligula's Illness Again*, 451. Moss, *The Mentality and Personality of the Julio-Claudian Emperors*, 165-7.

⁶⁸ Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*; Moss, *The Mentality and Personality of the Julio-Claudian Emperors*; Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula's Mental Illness*, 196.

cut off the slave's hands, tied them around his neck, and stuck a placard on him stating his crime.⁶⁹ Other cruelties he has committed include: beating men with chains; he once cut out a man's tongue because he would not stop screaming to be saved, before throwing him back into the gladiatorial pit, and he would openly say he had the power to decapitate anyone with the nod of his neck.⁷⁰

He added to the enormity of his crimes by the brutality of his language. He sued to say that there was nothing in his own character which he admired and approved more highly than what he called his *ἀφυσαρρεψία*, that is to say, his shameless impudence.⁷¹

Whether this behaviour was symptom of his alleged mental illness or just the acts of a wicked tyrant is difficult to say.⁷² But if it was symptomatic of his affliction, it is likely that the trigger point must have been his illness in AD 37. It could have been the pressure of ruling which could have affected his epilepsy and mental state since he showed the signs of irritableness, suspiciousness, egotistical, paranoia and delusions,⁷³ to the point of it finally getting the better of him.

VII. Caligula's Epilepsy Mistaken as Madness

It can be argued that Caligula had epilepsy, but some modern scholars suggest that there are other reasons for his mental state other than this particular illness. The following will give arguments of some modern scholars and their opinions on Caligula. Since the

⁶⁹ Suet., *Calig.*, 32.2

⁷⁰ Suet., *Calig.*, 27, 51.1, 32.2; Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*, 203-4; Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula's Mental Illness*, 190.

⁷¹ Suet., *Calig.*, 24; *ἀφυσαρρεψία*: shamelessness, impudence.

⁷² Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula's Mental Illness*, 184.

⁷³ Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*, 207; Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula's Mental Illness*, 196-7, 199.

ancient world did not have the technology and medical advancements that we have in the present, they were unable to give a proper medical diagnosis to Caligula. Philo believes that it was “mental distress and severe depression” and he even had a personal encounter with the Emperor in late autumn of AD 40.⁷⁴ Suetonius and Cassius Dio echo this idea in a similar fashion, but Suetonius gives a more detailed reasoning. He suggests that Caligula was unsound, while recognizing that he was mentally ill.⁷⁵ Seneca paints Caligula in the darkest manner possible by using the words like: *dementia*, *furiosa*, and *inconstantia*.⁷⁶ Some scholars, such as Balsdon, Winterling and Barrett, tend to agree more with Philo and Suetonius believing that Caligula’s illness was the cause of a nervous breakdown,⁷⁷ while others, such as: Sandison, Katz, Marañón and Ferrill suggest that Caligula suffered from epidemic encephalitis, or lobe epilepsy.⁷⁸ But all of these modern scholars have one thing in common: they cannot be definitive in respect to Caligula’s diagnosis, and there are a few reasons why. First, these scholars are from the present and have no evidence other than the literary record; second, the ancient texts about Caligula are mostly written years after his death and are arguably biased towards one particular opinion, probably to portray him in the worst way possible; third, we can only assume that Caligula was epileptic from the textual evidence since epilepsy affects the brain, which is an organ that will decay long before we could medically test it.

⁷⁴ Philo., *Leg.* 14-21, 349-68.

⁷⁵ Suet., *Calig.* 50.2.

⁷⁶ Barrett, *Caligula: Corruption of Power*, 214; Sen., *Gaius Caligula*, 4.8; Sen., *Dial.*, 11.17.5.

⁷⁷ Balsdon, *The Emperor Gaius*; Barrett, *Caligula: Corruption of Power*; Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography*; Sidwell, *Gaius Caligula’s Mental Illness*, 185. ⁷⁸ Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*; Katz, *Caligula’s Illness Again*; Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 158.

⁷⁸ Sandison, *The Madness of Emperor Caligula*; Katz, *Caligula’s Illness Again*; Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 158.

VIII. Conclusion: A Diagnosis for Caligula's Madness

From studying the life and mental prognosis from Caligula's youth all the way until Caligula's assassination on 24 January AD 41,⁷⁹ it seems most likely that he suffered from a form of epilepsy—perhaps “epileptic psychosis”—which was also known as the “Sacred Disease” in Antiquity. He had many of the symptoms and some of them may have caused abnormal behaviour, and may have perhaps created a wicked personality. The sacred disease, epilepsy, has genetically⁸⁰ been passed on through the years into the present, and thankfully with our knowledge today we are able to diagnose and treat it with better understanding. Caligula, on the other hand, was just a pawn in the genetics of his family; which, in the end, made him into the “deranged” figure we have come to know today.

⁷⁹ Ferrill, *Caligula Emperor of Rome*, 163; Dio., 59. 30; Suet., *Cal.*, 58.

⁸⁰ Moss, *The Mentality and Personality of the Julio-Claudian Emperors*, 165.

Abbreviations

AMA	American Medical Association
<i>An. Med.</i>	<i>Ancient Medicine</i>
<i>Ann.</i>	<i>Annals</i>
<i>Calig.</i>	<i>Caligula</i>
Cass. Dio.	Cassius Dio
Cel.	Celsius
<i>Dis.</i>	<i>Diseases</i>
Eds	Edited by
Et al.	All authors included
<i>Gai. Cal.</i>	<i>Gaius Caligula</i>
Gal.	Galen
Hdt.	Herodotus
Hom.	Homer
Hp.	Hippocrates
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Iliad</i>
In.	In
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Leg ad Gaium</i>
M.D.	Medical Dictionary
<i>Med.</i>	<i>Dē re medicina</i>
<i>Morb. Sacr.</i>	<i>On Sacred Disease (De morbo sacro)</i>
<i>Nat. Fac. facultaibus)</i>	<i>On the Natural Faculties (De naturabilibus</i>
n.	endnote/footnote
<i>Ody.</i>	<i>Odyessy</i>
p./pp,	page, pages
Philo.	Philo
Plat.	Plato
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic of Plato</i>
Sen.	Seneca
Suet.	Suetonius
Tac.	Tacitus
<i>Tib.</i>	<i>Tiberius</i>

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