

Aloys Winterling, *Caligula: a biography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-520-24895-3. Pp. viii + 229.

Caligula: a biography by Aloys Winterling was originally released in German and was largely intended to be a study of the Roman Emperor for a 'general audience'. The present version is the new English translation of the text, which has been slightly revised and expanded from the original. Of course, there have been numerous studies on Gaius Caligula, which is a clear indication of how this historical figure still captures the imagination of a modern audience. With so many studies it is very difficult to try and present an original argument or perspective about such a character. Most previous studies have typically fallen into one of two camps: firstly, the critical; secondly, the defensive. This has changed over time, as it does with most famous/notorious characters, such as Alexander the Great, or with the Emperor Nero. Studies on Caligula are just the same: most are either critical or defensive. It is evident that the study by Winterling largely falls into the latter category. There is nothing wrong with this, but this needs to be noted at the start: this biography is a largely positive representation of Gaius' principate. The work by Winterling is intended for a 'general audience', a focus evident in his narrative style. Much of the text is intended to provide information about the primary characters, the significant events, and the ultimate downfall of this Roman *princeps* (172–86).

The book is divided into seven sections, divided between essentially the ancient sources (and the portrayal of Caligula's insanity), his childhood, the first stages of Caligula's reign, the rise of conflicts, Caligula's monarchy, his assassination, and finally a reappraisal of the sources in relation to the question of madness. Such divisions make perfect sense, particularly in light of how the question of madness is a focal point for Winterling throughout the text. However, there are some concerns, particularly in light of the treatment of the ancient sources. For example, in the 'Introduction' it is stated that the literary sources were 'false' (4), which seems to be a little heavy-handed. Certainly they are questionable in their portrayal of Caligula, and the use of 'false' may have been lost in the English translation, but this is a strong statement that cannot be entirely justified; it is also at odds with the ensuing discussion (6–7) where the ancient representations are shown as being more acceptable. However, this is indicative of the narrow focus of the discussion, with the ancient sources being sporadically used within the narrative, where the discerning reader is often left with the question about how the sources are only used selectively to support Winterling's argument (such as 38–9; 140–1).

Owing to the streamlined focus of the text (i.e., to avoid discussion of the controversies surrounding Caligula within modern scholarship) the reader is often shown a quite resolute portrayal of both Caligula and the general circumstances, such as in relation to his precarious position (39–51), where the breadth of the intrigue behind his succession is given little attention. However, of greatest concern are the occasions where Winterling seems to push the evidence too far, or argues from a lack of evidence, such as in relation to the "odd dearth of information" that is used to point out that there is only one remaining account of Caligula's *salutatio* (76). This is also evident in the discussion of the so-called conspiracies of AD 39 (92), which may

be accurate, but it is impossible to be so definitive. However, while these drawbacks exist, it is important to note the merits of Winterling's analysis as well. The analysis of Caligula's relationship with the aristocracy is meritorious throughout the work; it is complemented by his treatment of the Germanic campaign (113–22), his accentuation of real issues in Caligula's court and the importance of his *consilium* (122–3), and the idea of him being a 'considered' political animal (125). Winterling correctly accentuates Caligula's anti-senatorial stance (142–7), but he also seems to adopt an anti-senatorial stance in the narrative, as compared to the anti-Caligula stance taken by the ancient sources (162–6).

This book is a worthy study, which covers significant aspects of Caligula's reign and provides some new interpretations on this fascinating subject. However, its intended audience remains elusive. While it is stated that it is aimed at being appealing for a 'general audience', some of the terminology and concepts discussed are clearly more indicative of a more scholarly audience. Therefore it is evident that these concepts needed to be explained in further detail if a 'general audience' was going to be both informed and absorbed by the material under question. With that being said, the modern Roman Imperial specialist will find that the work has too much focus upon narrative rather than in-depth analysis, which means that it will unfortunately appear somewhat disappointing. All the same, this is noted in the *Epilogue* by the author, who is seemingly a firm believer in basing the progression of the text upon the narrative of the events (195). Nevertheless, this reviewer feels that more engagement with the controversies surrounding the historiography of Gaius Caligula is ideally required—the endnotes (197–213) do not really fulfil this effectively, but are more indicative of a select bibliography. But it must be stated that regardless of this, the literary context of the surviving ancient texts on Caligula need to be considered in greater depth, whatever the intended audience. The 'interested layman' still needs to be informed about some of the complexities of the issues at hand within such a work.

The ancient literature cannot be dealt with in either a dismissive or speculative fashion, which is the primary danger with any study based upon historiography. The sources are our most cogent forms of evidence, regardless of their obvious failings and biases. This appears to be a hard trap for modern scholars to avoid: to initially point out how wrong the ancient historians were (in order to accentuate the validity/objectivity of a study); and then to illustrate our own perspectives almost entirely upon the basis of the exact same sources. How is this to be avoided? It seems that this can only be achieved through an extensive examination of the authorial context (or as much as possible with currently available evidence): by first understanding the author, then we have a *greater* chance of comprehending the benefits and drawbacks of the historiographical evidence that they provide. All the same, this was not the intention of the present work. Winterling would be well aware of such dilemmas that are faced by modern ancient historians, but it is evident that the focus of the present study was intended to be upon Caligula within a wider aristocratic and socio-political context instead. This is just as valid, but it could have been stated more explicitly as the intention of the study. This is clearly a 'general study' though, but one that can also provoke thought amongst those who have a keen

interest and knowledge about the Emperor Gaius Caligula and his general significance as a representation of the Roman principate.

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