Imperial Portrait of the Emperor Caligula, God and Ruler

Unknown Roman

Roman, Julio-Claudian Period, 37-41 AD
Gilt Bronze: 15 x 8 7/8 x 10 1/8 in. (38.1 x 22.5 x 25.7 cm)

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The Roman literature tells us that the Emperor Caligula proclaimed himself a god and erected a golden statue of himself in a temple in the Capitolium in Rome. His personal correspondence says that this emperor also intended to place his golden image in the great temple of Jerusalem. Ancient inscriptions provide evidence that cults worshipped Caligula as a god in eastern parts of the Roman Empire.

This magnificent gilt bronze head was probably the focal point of a temple. It combines the classic good looks of portraits of this Caesar's dynasty with his own well-known features. In this way, Caligula distinguished himself as a descendent of gods and rulers as well as a god/ruler in his own right. Coins minted during his brief and turbulent reign do so as well. The bronze sestertius clearly shows this likeness.

Online Resources:
Hirsch Library Online Catalog
The Metropolitan Museum of Art Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Articles:

Print Resources:
From Caligula to Constantine
Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response
Roman Sculpture
Roman Portraits in Context
From Republic to Empire
Bibliography

General Surveys of Roman Art


Roman Art, History and Culture


Roman Portraiture


Roman Bronzes


This reference guide is just the tip of the iceberg on helpful resources in the library's holdings. Many of the suggested resources above have their own bibliographies. Each of these may lead you to another resource that would also be helpful in your research here in the museum or in another library. To find additional resources, use keywords such as "Roman portraiture" and "Emperor Caligula" in the online catalog and in periodical indexes. Once you find a few relevant titles, pay attention to the subject headings to identify similar materials. Examples of useful subject headings are:

Portraits, Roman
Bronzes, Roman
Coins, Roman
Art, Roman

For guidelines about writing it may be helpful to look at Sylvan Barnet's A Short Guide to Writing about Art, which includes tips for looking, reading, and writing about art. Ask for it at the reference desk. At every stage of your work, please allow the library staff to help you. Contact us at 713-639-7325 or hirsch@mfah.org