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The infamous emperor Caligula ruled Rome from A.D. 37 to 41 as a tyrant who ultimately became a monster. An exceptionally smart and cruelly witty man, Caligula made his contemporaries worship him as a god. He drank pearls dissolved in vinegar and ate food covered in gold leaf. He forced men and women of high rank to have sex with him, turned part of his palace into a brothel, and committed incest with his sisters. He wanted to make his horse a consul. Torture and executions were the order of the day. Both modern and ancient interpretations have concluded from this alleged evidence that Caligula was insane. But was he?

This biography tells a different story of the well-known emperor. In a deft account written for a general audience, Aloys Winterling opens a new perspective on the man and his times. Basing Caligula on a thorough new assessment of the ancient sources, he sets the emperor's story into the context of the political system and the changing relations between the senate and the emperor during Caligula's time and finds a new rationality explaining his notorious brutality.