Echos du Monde Classique / Classical Views (EMC/CV) is published by the University of Calgary Press for the Classical Association of Canada. Members of the Association receive both EMC/CV and Phoenix. Members of the Classical Association of the Canadian West also receive EMC/CV without further charge. The journal appears three times per year and is available to those who are not members of these associations at $20.00 Cdn./U.S. (individual) and $35.00 Cdn./U.S. (institutional). Residents of Canada must add 7% GST. ISSN: 0012-9356.


Send subscriptions (payable to "Classical Views") to:

University of Calgary Press
2500 University Drive N.W.
Calgary, Alberta, CANADA, T2N 1N4

Back Numbers / Anciens numéros:
29-39 (n.s. 4-15): $18

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CALIGULA’S BROTHEL ON THE PALATINE

THOMAS A.J. McGINN

1. The Evidence

The sources allege many incredible things of Caligula. One of the more unbelievable allegations is that he set up a brothel on the Palatine. The discussion which follows suggests that there is a kernel of truth to this strange tale. Caligula’s motives as brothel-keeper were at minimum a mix of the financial, political, and what may be called “personal,” namely the uninhibited pursuit of amusement.

Our main source for this incident, Suetonius’ account, is richly detailed:

Suet. Cal. 41.1: Ac ne quod non manubiarum genus experiretur, lupanar in Palatio constituit, districtisque et instructis pro loci dignitate compluribus cellis, in quibus matronae ingenuique starent, misit circum fora et basilicas nomenclatores ad invitantos ad libidinem iuvenes senesque: praebita advenientibus pecunia faenebris appositiique qui nomina palam subnotarent, quasi adiuvantium Caesaris reditus.

("And to leave no sort of booty untied, he [sc. Caligula] set up a brothel in the imperial palace and, after setting aside and furnishing—in a manner appropriate to the high-class setting—a number of single rooms, in which women of respectable standing and freeborn young men were to offer their services, he sent touts around the fora and basilicas to summon young and old for the satisfaction of their lust. Upon arriving, the clients found loan-money available and clerks standing by who openly registered their names, on the ground that they were making a contribution to the emperor’s revenues.")

Dio³ elaborates the particular about the matronae ingenuique, describing them as “the wives of the leading citizens and the children of upper-class men” and adding a spicy detail: some were willing, some not. One may compare the report of the Epitome de Caesaribus:⁴ “In the

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¹ On difficulties with the ms reading districtisque, see G. Guastella, Gaio Suetonio Tranquillo: La vita di Caligola (Rome 1992) 239.

² Nomenclatores were slaves and freedmen who announced the names of persons greeting their master or patron: see OLD s.v. nomenclator 2. It was evidently deemed highly inappropriate for Caligula to employ them as shills for his brothel.

³ Dio (in Xiph., Exc. Val.) 59.28.9.

⁴ Ep. Caes. 3.7: In palatio matronas nobiles publicae libidini subiecit.
imperial palace he [sc. Caligula] compelled respectable women of high birth to submit to the lust of the general public."}

2. Emperors and Brothels
The story, at first glance, seems fantastic. One does well to cast a cold eye on accounts, ancient or modern, which have members of the élite, above all emperors, operating brothels directly. The story of Commodus’ indiscretions given by the Historia Augusta is almost certainly concocted, at least in part, from the tradition on Caligula’s brothel. More embroidery on the theme of imperial experiments in this line of business can be found in the Vita Elagabali and the Vita Carini. The same author would have us believe that Verus set up a popina in his house, to which he would retire after Marcus’ dinner parties (out of a distaste for his colleague’s Stoical cuisine?). Further details on Elagabalus’ initiatives in the field of commercial sex are given by Dio. The author of the HA may in fact have derived his information from the historian. If so, this does not guarantee its reliability, in my view. Dio has Messalina whores in the Palace along with other women of rank.

The case of Caligula’s brothel is particularly suspect, given the hostility of the tradition to this emperor. Managing a brothel brands Caligula as a lenx: indeed, the details reported in the sources portray him as a conscientious and enthusiastic pimp. Such behavior marks him in a manner reminiscent of the stigma imposed by descriptions of

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5 H. Willrich, “Caligula,” Klio 3 (1903) 85-118, 288-317, 397-470 (at 425), perhaps Caligula’s most ardent defender, attacks it as an invention of the emperor’s “witzige Feinde.” D. Hurley, An Historical and Historiographical Commentary on Suetonius’ Life of C. Caligula (Atlanta 1993) 155, appears to regard it as an invention of the biographer himself.

6 R.A. Bauman, Women and Politics in Ancient Rome (London 1992) 55 asserts (cf. 56, 59) on the basis of Dio (in Exc. Val.) 26.87 that the Vestals accused of sexual incontinence in 114 B.C. were actually running a brothel.

7 HA Comm. 2.7-9.

8 Cf. HA Comm. 3.7, with Verus 4.6, which all but proclaims its spuriousness.

9 HA Elag. 24.2, 26.3-5, 30.1.

10 HA Carin. 16.7.

11 HA Verus 4.5.


élite women acting as prostitutes. This holds true precisely in the sense recognized by the *lex Julia* on adultery, which cast the complaisant husband as a *lupo* in counterpoint to the adulteress/prostitute-type.\(^{15}\) To the extent that the behavior which the sources attributed to Caligula conforms to a type, their information appears unreliable, pure defamation of character set forth in a manner consistent with the unfavorable presentation of this emperor in the tradition.

Such considerations would seem fully to justify skepticism over Caligula's brothel. And yet there is reason to believe that the sources relate a measure of truth. Valerius Maximus\(^ {16}\) tells of a dinner-party hosted by a certain Gemellus, a *tribunicius viator*, in 52 B.C. for the consul Metellus Scipio and the tribunes of that year. By way of setting up a brothel in his house (*lupanari ... domi suae Instituto*), Gemellus prostituted two matrons of standing and a well-born youth to his guests. The amount of detail he provides is striking: Valerius names not only the host and chief guest of honor but all three "prostitutes."\(^ {17}\) The main focus of criticism is, as we might expect, the host, for whom it seems unlikely, given the man's obscurity, that this affair was invented. Because the report predates Caligula's reign, it cannot rely on any tradition based on him.\(^ {18}\) The story suggests that such behavior as the sources attribute to Caligula was not utterly without parallel. While the truth of one report hardly guarantees the reliability of the other, it is significant that not every such story can be dismissed as pure fiction.

As for Caligula's brothel, while most of the details the sources offer seem roughly consistent with behavior attributed elsewhere to pimps\(^ {19}\) and so able to be dismissed as mere invective, one item stands out. The clerks who "openly" wrote down the names of customers, "on the ground that they were making a contribution to the emperor's revenues," find no parallel in any description of a Roman pimp or brothel.\(^ {20}\) There seems something peculiarly "Caligulan" in this


\(^{16}\) Val. Max. 9.1.8.

\(^{17}\) For a defense of the names transmitted in the text, see Bauman (above, n. 6) 299 n. 8.

\(^{18}\) The *Facta et Dicta Memorabilia* is generally thought to have been completed in A.D. 31 or soon thereafter: see, for example, W.M. Bloomer, *Valerius Maximus and the Rhetoric of the New Nobility* (Chapel Hill 1992) 1 n. 1.

\(^{19}\) In other words, the details can appear as a transfer to the imperial setting of behaviors typically associated with pimps. For the use of toasts to drum up business for a brothel, see H. Hertel, "Die Soziologie der antiken Prostitution im Lichte des heidnischen und christlichen Schriftums," *JbAC* 3 (1960) 70-111 (at 88).

\(^{20}\) It seems obvious that most brothels demanded cash up front. The jurists
wrinkle, almost as if he intended a sardonic comment on the Augustan register of actual prostitutes.\textsuperscript{21}

For these reasons, it is possible to accept the story of the Palatine brothel in principle, though I think it likely that Suetonius and the other sources are generalizing from a single incident; in other words, it is not necessary to assume that this institution was a permanent fixture for any part of Caligula's reign.\textsuperscript{22} It may be helpful to note that the protagonist of the incident in 52 B.C., described above, is supposed to have established a brothel in his house for the purposes of an evening's entertainment. One is reminded of Nero's famous parties; Nero in fact provides another sort of parallel to this behavior, as we shall see below.

Why would Caligula install a brothel in the imperial palace? The question of motive is an interesting one, more complex perhaps than it might at first appear. The motive of profit is especially prominent in Suetonius' account, and we need not doubt that this was primary. Caligula was the emperor who initiated a tax on prostitutes, chiefly in order to raise as much money as possible.\textsuperscript{23} At the same time, there seems to be more to Caligula's purpose than the mere making of money. This is suggested by the location and staff of the brothel: if Caligula was only interested in profit, he might simply have placed it in the Forum or Subura and equipped it with ordinary prostitutes. The programmatic content of the project is perhaps best illustrated by the detail about the open registration of patrons' names, quasi adiuvantium Caesaris reditus. We may compare the rate stipulated for the tax, whose remarkable emphasis on the sexual act (unus concubitus) may reflect more than just a desire for maximizing revenue or min-
istrative convenience, but a certain legitimization of prostitution.²⁴ As for Caligula’s other political objectives, allowing popular access to the Palatine and sexually humiliating upper-class women, it is necessary to reserve these for more extensive treatment below.

Another motive for establishing a brothel on the Palatine, more shocking than the financial and the political, is that it may have been fun, at any rate for those who participated of their own will. It will be obvious that, aside from the physical pleasures typically associated with the operation of a brothel, there is at work here a strong streak of transgressive behavior, of role-playing in a key not normally permissible for the upper-class Roman, for whom even to set foot in a brothel might be inappropriate behavior.²⁵ The concern, as with *popinae*, was with the mixing of members of different ranks in the Roman social hierarchy, which was precisely the point of Caligula’s operation.

Such transgressive role-playing is consistent with other behaviors alleged of certain emperors, particularly of Caligula and Nero. A good example is Nero’s activity as a mugger in the streets of Rome.²⁶ An interesting aspect of this pastime was the establishment of a fencing operation in the imperial palace:

Suet. *Nero* 26.1: *quintana domi constituta, ubi partae et ad licitationem dividendae praedae pretium absumeretur.*

(“A market was set up in his [i.e. Nero’s] house, where the booty he had acquired was split up, auctioned off, and the proceeds squandered.”)

To my mind, this provides a more secure parallel for the imperial brothel than does Gemellus’ experiment in domestic prostitution cited above. Caligula’s operation was different, in that it was evidently more public, more open than Nero’s shadowy transactions on the Palatine. But a similar motive is discernible of self-enjoyment in the defiance of accepted rules of behavior (and at the expense of others), combined with a certain theatrical exuberance, a spirit of play-acting.

At this point a serious contradiction in my argument must be addressed. With all three of these motives, financial, political, and personal, combining to encourage the operation of a brothel on the Palatine, how is it that this experiment was only of short duration? It might be argued that the political and personal motives were satisfied relatively quickly, but the contradiction with the financial purpose behind the brothel is a serious one and not so easy to resolve. Why

²⁴ For this argument, see McGinn (above, n.15) Ch. 7.
²⁵ See McGinn (above, n.15) Ch. 9 on *Viv.-Cels.-Ulp. dig.* 4.8.21.11.
close a profitable business after only a short run?

The answer to this dilemma may be sought in the nature of the services on offer. It is a truism that prostitutes who appear to be “respectable” can command relatively higher prices than their colleagues. A woman of actual “respectable” status, as the denizens of Caligula’s brothel are said to be, might expect to receive even more, though it is difficult to say how much more—this obviously depends on how much the prospective client is willing to pay. Suetonius not only implies that the imperial brothel was profitable, but mentions that loans were available to customers, an unusual feature for a brothel, as remarked, but entirely consistent with the principle that prices were exorbitant at this place. We will never know how high these prices were, of course, but if loans were a necessary option for some clients, this suggests that multiple visits might have been beyond their reach.

A more subtle reason perhaps diminished even more effectively the continuing demand for such a high-priced brothel. The popular imagination, in the form of film and tabloid fantasy, is replete with the image of the wealthy businessman who solicits a night of pleasure from a woman who is not ordinarily a prostitute. The going price for these fictional encounters is a high one, typically given as $1,000,000. It is surely risky to speculate about marginal utility in this business, but I invite the reader to consider whether the price of a second or third encounter, even in the realm of fantasy, could begin to approach this number. The answer, I believe, suggests how quickly the novelty of Caligula’s brothel might have worn off, especially as the loan payments came due.

With respect to Caligula’s political motivations, two distinct points remain which may assist our understanding of his installation of a brothel on the Palatine. One is the political context of popular access to imperial property, above all the Palatine. The other concerns the sexual humiliation of upper-class women.

3. Popular Access to Imperial Property

The theme of popular access finds its roots in two traditions. The first is the aristocratic custom of doing public business in one’s house, receiving clients there, and so on: the idea was so firmly established that it entered into the design of upper-class houses. Related to this is the

\[27\] See, for example, H. Reynolds, *The Economics of Prostitution* (Springfield IL 1986) 15.

principle that the people should enjoy easy access to the *tribuni plebis*, which meant, above all, that their houses should always be open to the people: this tradition too evidently might influence the design of a house. The political leaders seeking the favor of the populace thus ensured that their dwellings were accessible to the general public.

The emperors took up this principle of public access. These men had as great or greater need than the aristocrats of the Republic to conduct business in their dwellings and were eager to take up the symbolic trappings of the tribunate. For the emperors, access to the imperial residence was an element in *levitas popularis*, a style of official comportment characterized by personal accessibility to the people and an open willingness to share in their amusements, and intimately connected with the exercise of *tribunicia potestas*, a prerogative essential to the public image of the principate as a "popular" institution.

Each emperor had his own style of rule. Some, like Tiberius, kept themselves apart from and inaccessible to the people, either secluding themselves while in Rome or keeping away from the city entirely. Others, like Vespasian and Nerva, avoided the Palatine and its symbolic associations with tyranny and/or opened up imperial properties to the people. The Palatine remained a central focus of attention, as the imperial residence *par excellence*; emperors like Domitian sought to make the "palace" more private and forbidding, while Hadrian reversed this to an extent. The ever-flexible Augustus appears to have

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30 The evidence for Gaius Gracchus, Julius Caesar, and others is discussed by Yavetz (above, n. 29) 98-100.

31 On the role of *levitas popularis* in shaping the popular image of the princeps and its connection with *tribunicia potestas*, see above all Yavetz, *Plebs* (above, n. 29) Ch. 5; also R. Gilbert, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Princeps und stadtrömischer Plebs im frühen Principat* (Bochum 1976) 139-151, 233-243.

32 On Tiberius' inaccessibility and lack of *levitas popularis*, see Yavetz (above, n. 29) 103-113; see also B. Levick, *Tiberius the Politician* (London 1976) Ch. 6.

33 For Vespasian, see Mart. Spect. 2; Dio (in Xiph.) 66.10.4-5; for Nerva, Euseb.-Hieron. *Chron.* p. 193 ff.

34 For a discussion of the contrast *Palatium-urbs*, see M. Royo, "Le palais
come down on both sides of the fence, converting the luxurious villa of Vedius Pollio on the Esquiline into the Porticus Liviae, and occupying a good part of the Palatine with a complex that was at once palace, senate house and temple.  

No general study on this subject appears to exist, though works devoted to particular emperors often touch upon it.  

35 There was a Republican tradition of transforming private property into public going back at least as far as the triumphant generals of the mid-second century B.C.  

Augustus was active in this field, as noted. M. Agrippa delivered an eloquent speech, cited with approval by Pliny the Elder, arguing that all works of painting and sculpture be made accessible to the public. Trajan received fulsome praise for making over imperial property to private persons.  

39 Access to “public” property outside of Rome was also of importance—several imperial villas served as tourist centers.  

The issue of access to property used or claimed by the emperors continued to involve more than just real estate, to judge from the story of Tiberius’ attempt to remove the statue of the Apoxyomenos by Lysippus, made available to the public by Agrippa himself, from its place in front of the Baths of Agrippa to his own residence.  


37 The earliest example known to the elder Pliny (Nat. 35.24-26) is L. Mummius, the sacker of Corinth in 146 B.C. Mummius, impressed by the high price fetched by a painting at an auction of his spoils, rescinded the sale against the vigorous protests of the buyer, Attalus II of Pergamum, and installed the work in the temple of Ceres at Rome. Pliny (26) gives special prominence to Julius Caesar in his dictatorship as a patron of “public art.”  

38 Plin. Nat. 35.26. I am grateful for the kindness of Dr. Nicholas Horsfall in furnishing this reference.


40 Millar (above, n. 28) 16.
popular outcry was raised, which resulted in the return of the statue.\textsuperscript{41} Pliny records with approval that Vespasian placed many art objects in the \textit{Templum Pacis} for the enjoyment of the public, works that Nero had taken from Greece and placed in his \textit{Domus Aurea} for his personal enjoyment.\textsuperscript{42}

Caligula’s institution of a brothel on the Palatine is the most extreme instance known to us of an emperor asserting this principle of public access. It is practically in a class by itself, and should be distinguished from the programs of other emperors above all on the basis of motive. This is obvious perhaps for those of profit and amusement, but holds true even of Caligula’s politically inspired reasons, which included aspects not shared by most or all of the emperors who promoted access to imperial property.

It would be useful to place this move in the overall context of Caligula’s efforts as a builder.\textsuperscript{43} His record is remarkable, given the brevity of his reign, and displays a taste not only for the utilitarian, but for the monumental and grandiose. Of particular interest are his interventions on the Palatine itself.\textsuperscript{44} There is a chance these were very extensive and included the construction of the \textit{Domus Tiberiana}, but a conservative reading of the evidence yields only the acquisition and renovation of privately-held aristocratic houses on the hill and the building of a monumental entrance-site to the Palatine “complex” in the Forum behind the temple of Castor and Pollux.\textsuperscript{45}

Unfortunately, none of these ventures is of necessity connected with the enterprise of the brothel. Whether Caligula intended, or actually accomplished, a restriction or opening up of imperial property on the Palatine or elsewhere is impossible to establish from this evidence, in my view. Even if it were possible to discern a pattern in either direction, it would be unwise to assume complete consistency on the part of this emperor. Those with a taste for speculation might be tempted to paint a picture in which Caligula places his brothel in one of the newly refurbished aristocratic houses now part of the imperial complex, and sends his touts through the grand new entrance in the Forum to drum up business. Such a context for the brothel is neither outlandish nor impossible, but the facts do not take us nearly this far.

\textsuperscript{41} Plin. \textit{Nat.} 34.62.
\textsuperscript{42} Plin. \textit{Nat.} 34.84; see also 35.74, 102, 109.
\textsuperscript{44} Barrett (above, n. 43) 205-210.
\textsuperscript{45} Barrett (above, n. 43) 207.
Paradoxically, help is to be sought in Caligula’s very inconsistency. With regard to imperial property, this emperor emulated the practice of Augustus on two fronts, pushing to the extreme in both cases. On the one hand, abandoning his predecessor’s caution, he extended the program of palace-building to the point where Pliny the Elder can rank his activity next to Nero’s with his Golden House: “on two occasions we have seen the entire city of Rome beset by imperial dwellings, those of Caligula and Nero, that of the latter to be sure, not to miss a trick, golden.” At the same time, in a grossly exaggerated nod to Augustus’ ventures in opening up private property, he made the Palatine accessible to the public as never before or since.

4. Humiliation of Elite Women

The deliberate humiliation of upper-class women attendant upon the operation of the brothel can itself be understood only in a broader context. The purpose behind this is illuminated by the varying official reception accorded public performances of members of the upper orders. Some emperors, like Augustus and Tiberius, attempted to protect the dignity of uterque ordo by preventing senatorials and equestrians from appearing on stage or in the arena. Caligula and Nero, on the other hand, sought to humiliate such persons by compelling, or simply permitting, them to perform in public; the point was to win the favor of the masses, who hated the aristocracy and relished the public disgrace of individual members. In extreme cases an emperor might break the law—and ride roughshod over status-


48 Augustus’ actions are not consistent in this matter: see E. Baltrusch, Regimen Morum: Die Reglementierung des Privatlebens der Senatoren und Ritter in der römischen Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit (Vestigia 41) (Munich 1989) 147-149. One might argue that he played both sides.

49 See the convincing argument of Yavetz (above, n. 29), esp. 113-118, 128-129, 137-139. Discussion also in Baltrusch (above, n. 48) 145-153. I do not mean to suggest that Caligula did not also seek to humiliate members of the lower orders. For this behavior, see the discussion in Z. Yavetz, “Caligula, imperial madness, and modern historiography,” Klio 78 (1996) 105-129, (esp. 116-117, 127). His reign was, to be sure, far from a stunning success.
distinctions—by appearing on stage or in the arena himself. 50

It is striking how this behavior aligns with that displayed by the same emperors regarding the sexual honor of upper-class women. 51 Augustus enacted the lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis, a statute vigorously enforced under his successor Tiberius. 52 Caligula and Nero, in contrast, aimed to humiliate upper-class women sexually. Nero went about this through his notorious parties, which the sources vividly describe for us. 53 At these affairs, women were encouraged to play the part of prostitutes. Caligula achieved the same end through installing the brothel on the Palatine, though this was not his only method. 54

As noted above, Caligula’s use of clerks to record the names of visitors to his brothel may have been intended as a sardonic comment on the Augustan register of prostitutes. One might see a similar purpose behind his staffing of the brothel with elite women: Augustus’ register suffered a notorious breakdown in A.D. 19 when a high-status woman, Vistilia, attempted to enroll as a prostitute to escape prosecution for adultery. 55 Caligula’s humiliation of upper-class “prostitutes” may have been designed in part to recall that incident.

As with the question of public access to imperial property, the varying treatment of high-status women reveals a deeper truth about

50 On the importance of such distinctions in this area, see the comments of T. Wiedemann, Emperors and Gladiators (London 1992) 102 and 131.

51 Barrett (above, n. 43), esp. 229, 232-233, 237 takes a very different line on Caligula’s relationship with the upper orders of society. One notes, for example, no reference to the sexual humiliation of women in his appendix on named victims of Caligula (at 242-243), where Piso’s bride (for whom the sources give two names: see Barrett 77), diverted by Caligula on her wedding day for his own purposes, might have been noticed.


54 See Suet. Cal. 36, Dio (in Xiph., Exc. Val.) 59:28.10 reluctantly admits that the Palatine brothel was popular.

55 See McGinn (above, n. 22), McGinn (above, n. 15) Ch. 5. Caligula’s prostitute-tax rolls (matrices) in a sense replaced Augustus’ register: McGinn (above, n. 15) Ch. 7.
the different modes of governing open to the emperors, who might, for example, use ceremonial to distance themselves from their subjects, especially members of the upper orders, or might present themselves as simple citizens, or might choose an artful combination of both styles. It is obvious how this choice will have influenced élite attitudes toward a particular reign, and so its presentation in history and biography. Caligula's "style" is difficult to isolate from the problem of his madness, as portrayed in the sources.

5. Conclusion: Caligula's Male Fantasy Camp

In the end, the political and fiscal motives for the introduction of the Palatine brothel, like those for the tax on prostitutes, are difficult to separate neatly. The link between these motives can be seen in the effort exerted to guarantee a brisk trade for the new enterprise on the Palatine. Advance-men were sent round to the fora and basilicas to drum up business, loans were made available to those caught without ready cash, and these "contributors" had their names set down in a register openly (we should also say, in this case, honorifically) quasi adiuvantium Caesaris reditus.

The historian attempting to explain an action of the emperor Caligula faces no enviable task. The central difficulty resides not only in the challenge, familiar in the historiography of the Julio-Claudian emperors, presented by uniformly hostile sources, but precisely in the sources' characterization of Caligula's behavior as the acts of a madman. In principle, one must either accept this interpretation, which we suspect to be fundamentally unfair, or try to make sense of what is assumed in the sources to be senseless.

Even so, the explanations of prostitute-tax and Palatine brothel raise different problems of interpretation. That is because the existence of the tax is not open to serious question, especially given the abundance of other evidence for it. The story of the brothel, on the other hand, strains credulity, a problem not helped but exacerbated by the reports of similar imperial initiatives that seem even less reliable. I argue that

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55 See the discussion in Wallace-Hadrill (above, n. 36).
57 See McGinn (above, n. 15) Ch. 7.
58 For a perspective on this measure, see Barrett (above, n. 43) 240. For the operation of the brothel viewed in the context of imperial commercial initiatives, see J. Le Gall, "Les habitants de Rome et la fiscalité sous le haut-empire," in H. van Effenterre, ed., Points de vue sur la fiscalité antique (Paris 1979) 113-126 (at 117).
59 Discussion of this fundamental problem in Guastella (above, n. 1), esp. 22, 38, 48, 51.
profit was Caligula’s chief motive for installing the brothel. Political motivations were also evidently at work, as well as the aggressive pursuit of imperial amusement, not to be underrated. In at least one area, the sexual humiliation of high-status women, the political and the personal motives are not easy to separate. Its importance held not just for the imperial pimp himself but for his clients, in terms of fulfilling a fantasy common to both.  

The underlying problem, of course, in the sources’ presentation of this emperor means that any attempt to explain Caligula’s behavior must remain a hypothesis. But if it is correct to assume that the sources generalize from a single incident, and do not simply invent the story of the brothel, this explanation appears to offer a satisfactory understanding of an otherwise senseless action.  

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60 See L. Roper, “Discipline and respectability: Prostitution and the Reformation in Augsburg,” History Workshop 19 (1985) 3-28 (at 20) on the role of the brothel in late medieval Germany: “it offered the chance for men to dream of enjoying a woman of higher class—or indeed, of humiliating her.”  

61 I would like to thank the editors and readers of this journal, especially Professor James Butrica. The librarians at the American Academy in Rome and the Istituto di Diritto Romano at the Università di Roma offered much-needed help with bibliography, as did Mr. James Toplon and his superb staff of the Interlibrary Loan service at Vanderbilt University. I would also like to thank Professors Bruce Frier, Dennis Kehoe, and Susan Treggiari, who generously gave the benefit of their advice on this and much else. Special thanks are owed to Dr. Nicholas Horsfall, who provided valuable counsel and warm hospitality while I was engaged in the final stages of preparing this article.