**The Assassination of Gaius, AD 41 - *Josephus***

**Prescribed Source - Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17–27 (E6)**

 There were three different plans for the assassination of the emperor, each of them under the leadership of a good man. One group was led by Aemilius Regulus, a native of Spanish Corduba, who was eager to get rid of Gaius personally, or with the help of his team. A second group, led by the military tribune Cassius Chaerea, was being put together to support them. A significant addition to those plotting against the tyranny was Annius Vinicianus.

The reasons for their hatred varied. For Regulus it was a general sense of outrage and a hatred of the injustices of Gaius' actions. Temperamentally hot-tempered and a man of independent spirit, he was therefore reluctant even to conceal their plans and, as a result, communicated their intentions to many of his friends as well as many others who seemed to him to be men of action. Vinicianus joined the conspiracy because he wanted revenge for the Lepidus affair. Lepidus had been one of his closest friends and one of the best Romans, but Gaius developed one of his regular vendettas, it meant death for all alike. Chaerea felt deeply offended by the insults regularly cast upon him his manhood by the emperor. As he had also been a close personal assistant to Gaius and therefore daily at risk, he regarded it as the duty of a free man to bring about his demise. But the three also agreed that their plans should be discussed by all those who had witnessed the sacrilegious madness of the emperor and were eager to eliminate him, so as to avoid the dire emergency which threatened others. If all went well, it would be a noble achievement to have launched such a great enterprise for the safety of the city and the empire, even if it brought about their own deaths. Chaerea was the one most eager to press ahead with their plans. He was eager to remedy the slur to his reputation, but as tribune he also had unrestricted access to Gaius, and therefore would have the best opportunity to kill him.

This was the time when the chariot races were being held – a spectacle which is immensely popular with the Roman people. They flock enthusiastically to the Circus Maximus and large groups of them petition the emperors for whatever they want. Those emperors who decide that their demands are irresistible are naturally very popular. On this occasion they were making desperate requests to him to reduce taxes and grant some relief from the serious burden they entailed. But he would have none of it, and as the shouts grew louder and louder he sent his officials into different parts of the crowd with orders to arrest those who were shouting, drag them forward and execute them immediately. He issued the order; those so instructed carried it out. The victims of this barbarity were very numerous. As for the people, when they saw what happened they controlled themselves and stopped shouting, since they could see with their own eyes that any such petitions for financial help could only lead to their own deaths. This served only to fire even further Chaerea's determination to launch his attempt and to put an end to Gaius' brutal savagery towards his fellow men. There were many occasions at banquets when he had been on the point of action, but on balance he judged it better to hold back. He no longer had any doubts about the decision to kill the emperor, but was still waiting for the ideal opportunity. He had no desire to take the plunge and then fail; he wanted complete success for his plans.

**Prescribed Source - Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 100–114 (E16)**

 With Gaius constantly putting off his departure, Chaerea indeed was all for going back into the theatre and attacking him where he sat. He realised that this would involve the widespread slaughter of senators and such *equites* as were present, but despite this anxiety he was keen to act, since he believed that the casualties involved counted for little when set against the safety freedom of the whole people. The conspirators had even turned back towards the theatre entrance when the volume of noise increased, alerting them to fact that Gaius had got up to leave. They rushed back to their positions and began to hold back the crowd, pretending that they did not want the emperor to be annoyed, but in fact because they felt it would make things safer for their attack, if they could contrive to keep him in an open space well clear of anyone who might come to his aid. Gaius' uncle, Claudius, Marcus Vinicius, his brother-in-law, and Valerius Asiaticus, led the way out and respect for their high standing meant that no one could have blocked their way, even if they had wanted to. The emperor followed, accompanied by Paulus Arruntius. But once he was inside the confines of the palace, he left the direct route taken by Claudius and his party, which was lined with his own personal slave attendants, and turned down a deserted passageway which was a short cut to the baths, where he intended at the same time to pay a visit to the troop of boys from Asia, who had been sent to sing at the mysteries which he was presiding over and, in some cases, to join in the Pyrrhic dances in the theatres.

There Chaerea met him and requested the password for the day. Gaius gave him one of his usual repertoire of humorous words, and Chaerea reacted immediately and without hesitation. He denounced Gaius violently, drew his sword, and struck him a ferocious blow. But it was not fatal. Some people maintain that Chaerea deliberately planned to avoid slaying the emperor with a single stroke, so as to make his vengeance all the sweeter with a succession of blows. I myself am not convinced by this. On these sorts of occasion fear ensures that there is no time for careful calculation. If Chaerea had any such plan he would, in my opinion, have been guilty of inordinate stupidity in gratifying his lust for revenge rather than ensuring for himself and his fellow conspirators a speedy escape from danger. There were a number of means by which help could have reached Gaius, if he had not been dispatched on the spot, and in that case Chaerea would have had to give up all thought of his own vengeance, and instead reckon on the vengeance of Gaius' for himself and his friends. This was the sort of occasion when, even if the operation went well, it was better to operate silently and avoid the anger of those who might come to the emperor's assistance; and while it was still uncertain whether they would succeed or not, it was madness to lose his life and his opportunity. But still, in this case, judgement is a matter of each to his own choice.

Gaius had been severely dazed by the pain of the blow, which had struck him between the shoulder and the neck before being blocked by his collar bone from penetrating any further. He neither shouted out in terror nor did he call to his friends, whether because he did not trust them or because he was too confused to think clearly. Groaning in agony, he tried to make his escape by running forward. Cornelius Sabinus was there waiting for him, having anticipated how he was likely to react. He knocked Gaius to the ground and as he struggled to his knees the conspirators surrounded him and at a single word of command from Cornelius they hacked at him with their swords, shouting encouragement to each other and acting as if they were in competition. Id the end it was Aquila who delivered the *coup de grace*, striking the blow that finally finished him off. All our sources are agreed on that point. But the honours really go to Chaerea. He may have had the help of many others in carrying out the deed, but he was the first to think of the idea, and much the first to come up with a method of execution. He was the first to risk speaking to the others and that took some courage. Then, when they individually accepted the murder plot, he brought the scattered elements together and welded all the details into a coherent plan. Where intelligent leadership was needed, he proved the outstanding personality, with a gift for inspirational oratory to spur them on when their courage faltered. And then, when the critical moment for action arrived, it is clear that he made the first move and bravely seized the chance to strike, leaving Gaius nearly dead and a sitting duck for the others. In short, justice requires that, whatever the others may have done, the credit should be given to the intelligence, courage, and hard work put into the operation by Chaerea.

So died the emperor Gaius, lying where he fell, robbed of life by his many wounds.

**The Assassination of Gaius, AD 41 - *Suetonius***

**Prescribed Source – Suetonius *Gaius* 56-59**

56. Such frantic and reckless behaviour roused murderous thoughts in certain minds. One or two plots for his assassination were discovered; others were still maturing when two tribunes of the praetorian guard put their heads together and succeeded in killing him, thanks to the cooperation of his most powerful freedmen and the praetorian prefects. Both of these tribunes had been accused of being implicated in a previous plot and, although innocent, realized that Gaius hated and feared them. Once, in fact, he had subjected them to public shame and suspicion, taking them aside and announcing, as he waved a sword, that he would gladly kill himself if they thought him deserving of death. After this he accused them again and again, each to the other, and tried to make bad blood between them. At last they decided to kill him about noon at the conclusion of the Palatine Games, the principal part in this drama of blood being claimed by Cassius Chaerea. Gaius had persistently tested Cassius, who was no longer young, for his supposed effeminacy. Whenever he demanded the watchword, Gaius used to give him ‘Priapus’ or ‘Venus’; and if came to acknowledge a favour he always stuck out his middle finger for him to kiss, and wiggled it obscenely.

57. Many omens of Gaius’ approaching death were reported. While the statue of Jupiter at Olympia was being dismantled before removal to Rome at his command, it burst into such a roar of laughter that the scaffolding collapsed and the workmen took to their heels, and a man named Cassius appeared immediately afterwards saying that Jupiter had ordered him in a dream to sacrifice a bull. The Capitol at Capua was struck by lightning on the Ides of March, which some interpreted as portending another death of the same sort that had previously occurred on that day. At Rome, the Palatine steward’s lodge was likewise struck, and this seemed to mean that the master of the house stood in danger of attack by his own guards. On asking the astrologer Sulla for his horoscope, Gaius learned that he must expect to die very soon. The oracle of the goddesses of Fortune at Antium likewise warned him, ‘Beware of Cassius!’; whereupon, forgetting Chaerea’s nomen, he ordered the murder of Cassius Longinus, the consular governor of Asia. On the night before his assassination he dreamed that he was standing beside Jupiter’s heavenly throne, when the god kicked him with the great toe of his right foot and sent him tumbling down to earth.

Some other events that occurred on the day of his death were read as portents. For instance, blood splashed Gaius as he was sacrificing a flamingo; Mnester danced the same tragedy that had been performed by the actor Neoptolemus during the games at which King Philip of Macedonia was assassinated; and a farce called *Laureolus*, at the close of which the leading character, a highwayman, had to die while escaping and vomit blood, was immediately followed by a humorous epilogue – the comedians were so anxious to display their proficiency at dying that they flooded the stage with blood. An evening performance by Egyptians and Ethiopians was also in rehearsal – a play staged in the underworld.

58. On 24 January then, at just about the seventh hour, Gaius could not make up his mind whether to rise for lunch; he still felt a little queasy after too heavy a banquet on the previous night. However, his friends persuaded him to come out with them along a covered walk, and there he found some boys of noble family, whom he had summoned from Asia to perform on stage, rehearsing their presentation. He stopped to watch and encourage them, and would have taken them back to the theatre and held the performance at once had their principal not complained of a cold. Two different versions of what followed are current. Some say that Chaerea came up behind Gaius as he stood talking to the boys and, with a cry of ‘Take this!’, gave him a deep sword wound in the neck, whereupon Gaius Sabinus, the other conspirator, stabbed him in the breast. The other version makes Sabinus tell certain centurions implicated in the plot to clear away the crowd and then ask Gaius for the day’s watchword. He is said to have replied ‘Jupiter’, whereupon Chaerea, from his rear, yelled ‘So be it!’ and split his jawbone as he turned his head. Gaius lay twitching on the ground: ‘I am still alive!’ he shouted, but word went round, ‘Strike again!’ and he succumbed to further wounds, including sword thrusts through the genitals. Gaius’ bearers rushed to help him at the first alarm, using their litter poles as spears, and soon his German bodyguard appeared – too late to be of any service, though they killed several of the assassins and a few innocent senators into the bargain.

59. He died at the age of twenty-nine after ruling for three years, then months and eight days. His body was moved secretly to the Lamian Gardens, half-cremated on a hastily built pyre, and then buried beneath a shallow covering of sods. Later, when his sisters returned from exile, they exhumed, cremated and entombed it. But all the city knew that the gardens had been haunted until then by his ghost, and that something horrible appeared every night at the scene of the murder until at last the building burned down.

His wife Caesonia died at the same time as he, stabbed with a sword by a centurion, and his little daughter’s brains were dashed out against a wall.

**The Assassination of Gaius, AD 41 - *Dio***

**Prescribed Source – Dio, *Roman History* 29.1–30.3**

Since Gaius continued to play the complete madman in every way, a conspiracy was formed against him by Cassius Chaerea and Cornelius Sabinus, even though they were tribunes in the Praetorian Guard. There were a good many people involved in it, fully aware of what was going on, among whom were Callistus and the prefect of the Praetorian Guard.

Practically all of Gaius’ entourage were persuaded to take part in it, both to further their own interests and to benefit the state. Furthermore, those who chose not to join the conspiracy concealed their knowledge of it, since they were glad to see a plot forming against him.

Those who carried out the assassination were those I have mentioned. Chaerea was in general rather an old-fashioned sort of man and he also had particular grounds for anger; for Gaius kept accusing him of being effeminate, even though he was the most robust of men. Whenever it was his turn to collect the password, Gaius would give him one such as “Lust” or “Venus”. An oracle had come to Gaius’ attention a short time before, warning him to be aware of Cassius. Gaius thought that it referred to Gaius Cassius, who was then governor of Asia, since he was descended from that Cassius who had assassinated Julius Caesar. He, therefore, had him arrested and brought to Rome. But in fact the divine power was warning him about this Cassius Chaerea. An Egyptian called Apollonius similarly foretold the whole story in his native land because of this he was summoned to Rome and brought before the emperor on the very day on which Gaius was destined to die. Since his punishment was postponed for a little while, he was saved.

The assassination was carried out as follows. Gaius was celebrating a festival on the Palatine, in which he was putting on a spectacle. While this spectacle was taking place, he himself was eating and drinking, and providing a banquet for the others. Even Pomponius Secundus, who was consul at the time, was eating his fill, sitting at the emperor’s feet and constantly bending over to kiss them. Pained as they were by these disgraceful proceedings, Chaerea and Sabinus, nevertheless, kept themselves under control for five days. But when Gaius himself wanted to dance and act in a tragedy, and proclaimed a three-day extension of the festival for this very purpose, Chaerea and his supporters could endure it no longer. They waited for Gaius to leave the theatre to watch the boys of the aristocratic families whom he had summoned from Greece and Ionia to sing the hymn composed in his honour. They intercepted him in a narrow alley and murdered him. Once he was down on the ground, none of those present could restrain themselves. Everybody kept stabbing him savagely, even though he was dead; some even tasted the flesh. His wife and daughter were promptly murdered.

So Gaius, after doing all this within the space of three years, nine months and twenty- eight days, learnt by experience that he was not a god.

 He was now spat upon by those who used to prostrate themselves in his honour, even when he was not present. He became a sacrificial victim of those who used to call him ‘Jupiter’ and ‘god’ in speeches and in written texts. Statues and images of him were ripped down, as the people especially remembered the terrible things that they had suffered at his hands. All the soldiers in his Germanic bodyguard rioted and raised such disturbances that they caused further deaths.

The crown remembered what he had once said to the people, “If only you all had one neck!” They then pointed out that it was he who had one neck, while they had many hands. And when the Praetorian Guard started to break ranks and run around trying to find who had murdered Gaius, Valerius Asiaticus, a man of consular rank, brought them to order in a remarkable way as follows. He climbed up to a place from where he could easily be seen and shouted “I wish that I had killed him!” This alarmed them and they stopped rioting.

All those who in any way acknowledge the authority of the senate kept their oaths and remained quiet. While this was going on around the corpse of Gaius, the consuls, Sentius and Secundus, immediately transferred the public funds from the treasuries to the Capitol. They then posted the majority of the senate and a sufficient number of soldiers to guard these funds, to ensure that there was no looting as the hands of the masses. These men then held discussions with the prefects of the Guard and the supporters of Sabinus and Chaerea about what course of action to take.