
DAILY COIN RELIEF!

A BLOG FOR ANCIENT COINS ON THE PAS BY SAM MOORHEAD & ANDREW BROWN

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The Coinage of Gaius ‘Caligula’, AD 37-41

Caligula was the youngest son of Germanicus (died AD 19) and Agrippina Senior (died AD 33), and nephew of Tiberius (AD 14-37). He succeeded Tiberius in AD 37 at the age of 25. His actual name was Gaius, but he was nicknamed Caligula because when he was a child he would dress up as a soldier and wear the half-boot (*caliga*). After a good start to his reign he apparently became insane (possibly due to illness) and he became more and more depraved and autocratic, until he was murdered by some Praetorian Guards on January 24th, AD 41. In his reign, it should be remembered that Adminius (or Aminius), one of Cunobelinus’ sons and King of Kent, fled to Caligula to seek aid against his brothers Caratacus and Togodumnus. This resulted in Caligula’s abortive expedition to Britain; his army apparently mutinied because they did not want to cross ‘Ocean’ and instead Caligula had his men pick up seashells on the French coast and claimed a victory over ‘Ocean!’



The coinage of Caligula is quite rare in Britain. There are almost 70 pieces on the database (and a couple of Renaissance and modern forgeries – see SUR-EE2CC8 and LIN-EE6103). Dio Cassius tell us that bronze coins of Caligula were melted down (as part of what we would call today *Damnatio Memoriae*):

‘... but [the Senate] hated the memory of Gaius so much that they decreed that all the bronze coinage which had his likeness stamped upon it should be melted down.’ (Dio Cassius 60 22 3)

There is a debate about how feasible this would have been, but it is interesting that the bronze portrait *asses* of Caligula (see **Fig. 14**) are really quite rare and that the Agrippa *asses*, albeit most of the British finds are later copies, are really quite common (see **Figs. 15-16**). This has been fully explored by Andrew Burnett who believes that not only the portrait base-metal

coins of Caligula were withdrawn, but also quite probably the gold and silver.¹ I will return to this topic during the discussion below.

Silver coins of Caligula

In all, there are only 16 *denarii* on the Database. This small number is not merely due to the fact that he only ruled for just over three years. The PAS finds come out at only around 5 coins per year; for Tiberius, the number is over 10 coins per year, which is way more (even if it does include some plated copies) (See **Daily Coin Relief 3**). This might support the supposition, noted above, that his silver coins might have also been subject to demonetisation. It is also worth noting that any Caligulan *denarii* that did survive would have been removed from circulation quite swiftly after AD 64 when Nero reduced the fineness and weight of the *denarius*.

It is not known for certain where Caligula's gold and silver coins were struck. The famous numismatist, Harold Mattingly (editor of RIC and BMC), reckoned that the earliest *denarii* were struck at Lugdunum (Lyon) where they had been struck under Tiberius (see **Daily Coin Relief 3**); these early coins give Caligula a bare head. Then, possibly within a year, the mint was moved to Rome where the emperor was depicted with a laureate head. Some dispute Mattingly's hypothesis and claim that the mint of Lugdunum continued to strike for longer; two later dies, with Caligula laureate, were found near Lugdunum. However, in assessing the evidence, C. H. V. Sutherland (author of the revised RIC volume I) still follows Mattingly's interpretation, which is what I use here.

Lugdunum, AD 37-8 (Figs. 1-3)

There are seven *denarii* of Caligula from Lugdunum on the PAS Database (including one piece from the Welsh IARCW data). The coins honour various past members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty: Augustus, Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. The Lugdunum coins can be distinguished from the Rome pieces by the **bare head** of Caligula on the obverse.

Coins honouring Augustus (27 BC – AD 14):



Fig 1. Silver denarius of Caligula (AD 37-41), honouring Augustus Mint of Lugdunum, AD 37-41
Obv. C CAESAR AVG GERM P M TR POT COS; Bare head of Caligula right
Rev. No legend. Radiate head of Augustus right, between two stars
RIC I, p. 108, no. 2
WREX-64F355; see also SF-02617A and SUR-1B9C73 for same type

¹ A. M. Burnett, 'The authority to coin in the late Republic and the early Empire', *Numismatic Chronicle* 1977, pp. 37-63.



Fig. 2. Silver *denarius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), honouring Augustus
Mint of Lugdunum, AD 37-41
Obv. C CAESAR AVG GERM P M TR POT; Bare head of Caligula right
Rev. DIVVS AVG PATER PATRIAE; Radiate head of Augustus
RIC I, p. 108, no. 10
SUSS-9F0A53

Coins honouring Germanicus, the father of Caligula (died AD 19):



Fig. 3. Silver *denarius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), honouring Germanicus
Mint of Lugdunum, AD 37-8
Obv. C CAESAR AVG GERM P M TR POT; Bare head of Caligula right
Rev. GER[MANICVS CAES P C CA]ES AVG GERM, Bare head of Germanicus right
RIC I, p. 108, no. 12
NMS-543554; see also IOW-C65CC8

For a coin from Lugdunum honouring Agrippina the Elder, the mother of Caligula (died AD 33) see IARCW-63DAF864 (no image)

Mint of Rome, AD 37/8-41 (Figs. 4-7)

There are 8 *denarii* of Caligula from the Mint of Rome on the PAS Database. They continue the types of Lugdunum in honouring Augustus, Germanicus and Agrippina the Elder. The coins of Rome can be distinguished from those of Lugdunum by the depiction of Caligula with a **laureate head** on the obverse.

For a coin from Rome honouring Augustus, see NMS-73F884 (no image)

Coins honouring Germanicus, father of Caligula (died AD 19):

Fig. 4. Silver *denarius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), struck in honour of Germanicus
Mint of Rome, AD 37-8
Obv. C CAESAR AVG GERM P M TR POT;
Laureate head of Augustus right
Rev. GERMANICVS CAES P C CAES AVG
GERM; Bare head of Germanicus right
RIC I, p. 109, no. 18
LANCUM-D97B93



Coins honouring Agrippina the Elder, the mother of Caligula (died AD 33):



Fig. 5. Silver *denarius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), struck in honour of Agrippina the Elder
Mint of Rome, AD 37-8
Obv. C CAESAR AVG GERM P M TR POT;
Laureate head of Caligula right
Rev. AGRIPPINA MAT C CAES AVG GERM; Draped bust of Agrippina right
RIC I, p. 109, no. 14
SUSS-8B6801; see also PUBLIC-0D2C81

Fig. 6. Silver *denarius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), struck in honour of Agrippina the Elder
Mint of Rome, AD 40
Obv. C CAESAR AVG PON M TR POT III COS III;
Laureate head of Caligula right
Rev. AGRIPPINA MAT C CAES AVG GERM; Draped bust of Agrippina right
RIC I, p. 109, no. 22
WILT-EF1610



A coin proclaiming Caligula as *Pater Patriae* (Father of the Fatherland): 'The Senate and People of Rome [honour the emperor with the title of] Father of the Fatherland for saving the Citizens / State':



Fig. 7. Silver *denarius* of Caligula (AD 37-41)
Mint of Rome, AD 40
Obv. C CAESAR AVG PON
TR POT III COS III;
Laureate head of Caligula
right.
Rev. SPQR P P OB C S in
wreath
RIC I, p. 109, no. 28
DENO-D94D78

The distribution of silver *denarii* on the PAS Database

Fig. 8 shows that the *denarii* of Caligula are quite widely spread. It is possible to surmise that the group in and around Hampshire might relate to the initial invasion in AD 43 and shortly afterwards. The pieces in and around East Anglia could also date to the conquest period, but also to the Boudican Revolt (AD 60/1) and its aftermath. The coins in the West and Wales probably relate to the campaigns against the Welsh tribes in the first few decades after the invasion in AD 43.

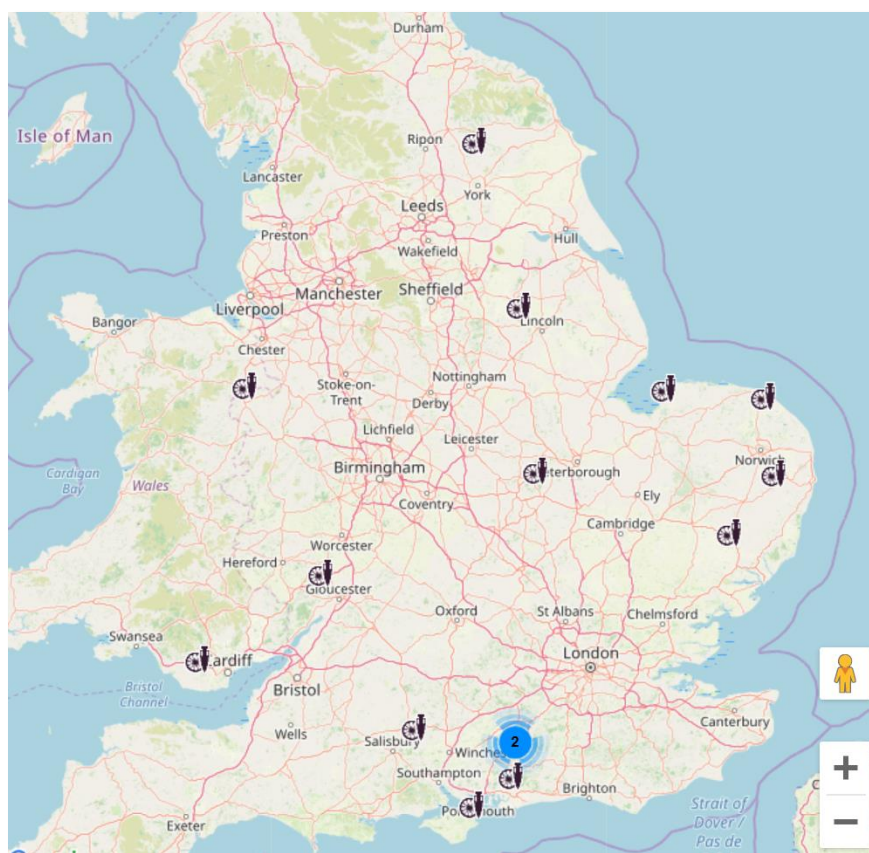


Fig. 8. Distribution of silver *denarii* of Caligula in England and Wales

The Base-Metal Coinages at the Mint of Rome

Sestertii and dupondii

Sestertii and *dupondii* of Caligula are particularly rare in Britain. There are only five which are definitely ancient losses in England. There are two particularly fine *sestertii* honouring Agrippina the Elder (Caligula's mother who died in exile in AD 33) (**Fig. 9**), one from Devon and the other from Berkshire; it does seem that these are the only coins of their type to be recorded as finds from anywhere in Britain. Another *sestertius*, from a beach on the Isle of Wight, shows the emperor sacrificing (**Fig. 10**). The two *dupondii* honour Caligula's father Germanicus (**Fig. 11**) and his deceased brothers Nero and Drusus (**Fig. 12**).



Fig. 9. Copper-alloy *sestertius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), struck in the name of Agrippina the Elder, his mother (died AD 33)

Mint of Rome, 37-41

Obv. AGRIPPINA MF MAT C CAESARIS AVGVSTI; Draped bust of Agrippina right with hair in queue

Rev. SPQR (above) MEMORIAE/AGRIPPINAE (in two lines); Carpentum (imperial carriage) left, drawn by two mules

RIC I, p. 112, no. 55

BERK-6C41FC; also see DEV-EEA7E1

Fig. 10. Copper-alloy *sestertius* Caligula (AD 37-41)

Mint of Rome, AD 37-8

Obv. C CAESAR AVG GERMANICVS P M TR POT, with PIETAS in exergue; Pietas seated left, holding patera with left arm resting on small facing figure.

Rev. DIVO AVG; hexastyle temple surmounted by quadriga, in front of which Gaius sacrifices at altar with patera; one attendant leads a bull to altar, another holds a patera.

RIC I, p. 111, no. 36.

IOW-DB8501





Fig. 11. Copper-alloy *dupondius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), honouring Germanicus' retrieval of the legionary standards in AD 17 from the Germans (which had been lost at the Battle of the Teutoburger Forest in AD 9)

Mint of Rome, AD 37-41

Obv. GERMANICVS / CAESAR in two lines across field; Germanicus standing left, raising right hand and holding aquila in left hand

Rev. SIGNIS - RECEPT / DEVICTIS - GERM, Germanicus in ornamented slow quadriga right, holding eagle-tipped sceptre.

RIC I, p. 112, no. 57

BERK-B69FD1



Fig. 12. Copper-alloy *dupondius* of Caligula (AD 37-41), honouring Nero and Drusus Caesars, brothers of Caligula (died AD 31-3)

Mint of Rome, AD 37-8

Obv. NERO ET DRVSVS CAESARES; Nero and Drusus Caesar riding right with cloaks flying.

Rev. C CAESAAR AVG GERMANICVS PON M TR POT around S C.

RIC I, p. 110, no. 34

ESS-8B8D77

Asses

Asses are more plentiful on the PAS Database with about 43. However, most of these are *asses* struck in the name of Agrippa (which are nearly all contemporary copies), which are discussed below (**Figs. 15-16**). Of the other three pieces, one is struck in the name of Germanicus (**Fig. 13**) and the other two are of the only portrait *as* of Caligula, the type of coin that was apparently withdrawn and melted down (**Fig. 14**).



Fig. 13. Copper-alloy *as* of Caligula, struck in the name of Germanicus (died AD 19)
Mint of Rome, AD 37-8
Obverse: [G]ERMANICVS CAESAR T AVG[VST F DIVI AVG N]; Bare head left.
Reverse: [C CAESA]R AVG GERMANICVS PON [M TR POT]; Legend surrounding a large SC.
RIC I, p. 110, no. 35.
IOW-31EDD4; see also SUSS-2300D1

Fig. 14. Copper-alloy *as* of Caligula (AD 37-41)
Mint of Rome, AD 37-41
Obv. C CAESAR DIVI [AVG PRON AVG P M TR P III/IIII P P]; Bare head left
Rev. VESTA, S C; Vesta seated left on throne, holding patera and transverse sceptre
RIC I, p. 111, cf. nos. 38 and 47
NCL-14D845; see also NARC-E91FB1



The rarity of these portrait *asses* does support the possibility that many of them withdrawn from circulation. Furthermore, they were not copied in the next couple of decades in contrast to several Claudian types and the Agrippa *as* (see below), which were copied in copious quantities. Is it just that there were very few coins to copy?

The 'Agrippa' *as*

The most common coins of Caligula found in Britain were struck in the name of Marcus Agrippa, the key general in Augustus' reign – he was instrumental in the victory at the naval battle of Actium (31 BC) when Octavian (Augustus) defeated Antony and Cleopatra.² This coin alludes to that victory with Agrippa wearing a rostral crown (*rostrum* is a ship's prow and you can see this on the top of Agrippa's head below) and Neptune.

However, nearly all of these Agrippa *asses* are contemporary copies which means that they were probably produced in the north-western provinces during the reign of Claudius (AD 41-54) (see Andrew's **Daily Coin Relief 4**). There are about forty of these pieces on the PAS Database (including 14 from Wales) and some more editing is required. This number of copies suggests a larger number of original coins in circulation, and one could argue that their relative ubiquity supports the notion that Caligula's portrait *asses* survive in such few numbers because they were removed from circulation.

² D. Stuttard and S. Moorhead, *31 BC – Antony, Cleopatra and the Fall of Egypt* (British Museum Press, 2012)

Fig. 15. Copper-alloy contemporary copy of an *as* of Caligula (AD 37-41), struck in honour of Agrippa (died 12 BC).

Prototype: Mint of Rome

Obv. M AGRIPPA L F COS III; Head of Agrippa left, wearing rostral crown

Rev. S C; Neptune standing left, holding dolphin and trident

RIC I, p. 112, cf. no. 58

SF-9D508E



Fig. 16. Copper-alloy contemporary copy of an *as* of Caligula (AD 37-41), struck in honour of Agrippa (died 12 BC).

Prototype: Mint of Rome

Obv. M AGRIPPA L F COS III; Head of Agrippa left, wearing rostral crown

Rev. S C; Neptune standing left, holding dolphin and trident

RIC I, p. 112, cf. no. 58

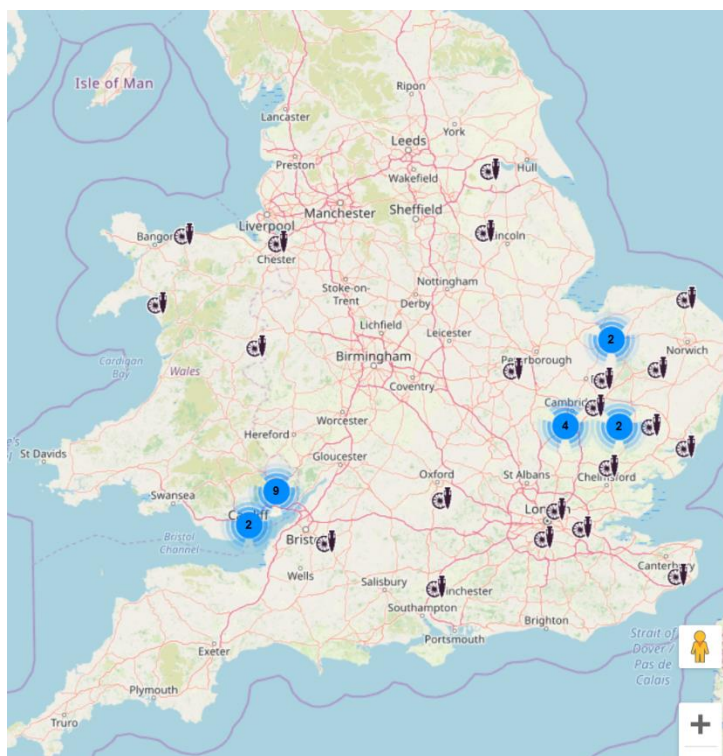
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The distribution of 'Agrippa' *asses* in England and Wales

Fig. 17 shows the distribution of the Agrippa *asses* in England and Wales. It shows a clear concentration around London and East Anglia, almost certainly relating to the conquest period, development of London (a number have also been found in the recent excavations at the Bloomberg site), and the Boudican Revolt (AD 60/1). The other major groupings appear to relate to Roman military activity in Wales.

Fig. 17 The distribution of Caligulan 'Agrippa' *asses* as recorded on the PAS Database.



The PAS Database, unlike hoards and assemblages from particular sites, is less prone to overt bias in the relative numbers of coins found. With this in mind, I do believe that the silver and base-metal coin finds of coins in Caligula do further reinforce Andrew Burnett's argument that his coins were indeed removed from circulation.

Greenwich, 6 April 2020