



Nero

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Takes a fresh look at the life of Nero (r. AD 54–68), providing insight into the inner conflicts of a Roman society in transition and challenging preconceptions of a figure dismissed by a hostile source-tradition as tyrannical, deluded and ineffectual.

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Key Sales Points:

- Reassesses and reframes Nero as a dynamic young emperor, popular with ordinary people.
- Draws on the latest international research to offer a balanced and insightful re-evaluation of Nero.
- Explores key moments that shaped Nero's reign, his relationship with the elite and ordinary people, and the manipulation of his legacy.
- Brings together works from the British Museum's own collection, and loans from major national and international institutions, including from the Louvre, Museo Nazionale Romano and Museo Archeologico di Napoli.
- Highly illustrated with remarkable objects – some rarely seen – associated with Nero's rule, from breathtaking luxury items to humble graffiti.
- Coincides with a major exhibition at the British Museum in Spring 2021.

Contents:

- Introduction – approaches to Nero; the source tradition
- Nero and the family of Augustus – Augustus and the system of the *principate*; Julio-Claudian society; Nero's family
- Power and succession – Nero's accession; expectations of the new reign; poetry and imagery
- Conflict and reform – Nero and the military; external conflicts; the Armenian War; Britain and the Boudicca rebellion
- Spectacle and splendor – Nero's reforms and major projects; public entertainment; Nero on stage
- Passion and discord – the imperial family; Nero's wives and daughter
- Fire – the great fire of Rome of AD 64
- The new Apollo – Nero's palaces and the Domus Aurea; luxury and elite society; diplomacy and triumph
- Crisis and death – internal conflict and elite resistance; rebellion; Nero's death; civil war; 'False Neros' and Nero's enduring popularity
- Bibliography
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Introduction



- Modern, negative perceptions of Nero are based almost exclusively on ancient literary sources
- Reality is of a young boy, facing the challenges of ruling vast empire

Statue of young Nero,
Louvre, Paris

Nero and the family of Augustus

- The imperial family derives its claim to power from Augustus through the female line of succession
- Nero is adopted as heir by emperor Claudius over his own son Britannicus



Chalcedony cameo bust of Agrippina, mother of Nero
British Museum

Power and succession



- Nero's ascent to power is smooth – the transition has been well planned with the support of Agrippina and the imperial guard
- There are great expectations for Nero's reign as a new 'golden age'

Marble relief with members of the Praetorian Guard
Louvre, Paris

Conflict and reform



- Nero inherits a number of significant conflicts when he comes to power; rival powers and newly conquered territories need to be dealt with
- These include trouble with the Parthians and an uprising in Britain
- Such conflicts provide an opportunity for Nero to prove himself as a strong, military ruler

Bronze head of Nero
British Museum

Spectacle and splendour



- Building up and beautifying the heart of the empire is a fundamental preoccupation
- Nero enthusiastically embraces infrastructure projects and reforms that provide for the populace

Antefix in the shape of a mask, possibly tragic, representing Bacchus or maenad
Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples

Passion and discord



- Factions and in-fighting are rife at court
- Nero orders his mother's death and Claudia Octavia, his wife, is also exiled and later executed
- Nero marries Poppaea Sabina, conscious of his need for an heir, but their daughter dies

Female portrait, perhaps of Nero's wife Poppaea Sabina
Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome

Fire



- Fires and natural disasters are common in the ancient world
- The great fire of Rome in AD 64 was one of the defining events of Nero's reign
- As is expected of the emperor, Nero leads the reconstruction and relief effort, but he is later blamed by his enemies for starting the fire

Burned remains of an iron grating
Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome

The new Apollo



- Nero's reign reaches its climax in the years following the fire
- Rome is restored and great building projects like the construction of the Domus Aurea allow Nero to entertain the elite classes and receive diplomatic visits

Fragment of a gilded wall painting from the Domus Aurea; a griffin and a finial supporting a sphinx
British Museum

Crisis and death



- Despite Nero's popularity among the populace, groups of disaffected senators begin to conspire against him
- Nero is declared an enemy of the state and is forced to commit suicide
- Violent civil war follows his death, but Vespasian, one of Nero's former generals, eventually emerges triumphant as the head of a new dynasty

Arrowhead and spearhead(?) from Bedriacum
Museo Civico Ala Ponzone, Cremona