The age of Nero has appealed to the popular imagination more than any other period of Roman history. This volume provides a lively and accessible guide to the various representations and interpretations of Emperor Nero as well as to the rich literary, philosophical, and artistic achievements of his eventful reign. The major achievements of the period in the fields of literature, governance, architecture, and art are freshly described and analyzed, and special attention is paid to the reception of Nero in the Roman and Christian eras of the first centuries CE and beyond. Written by an international team of leading experts, the chapters provide students and non-specialists with clear and comprehensive accounts of the most important trends in the study of Neronian Rome. They also offer numerous original insights into the period, and open new areas of study for scholars to pursue.

Shadi Bartsch is the Helen A. Regenstein Distinguished Service Professor in Classics at the University of Chicago. Her work focuses on the literature and philosophy of the Neronian period in Rome. She is also the inaugural director of the Stevanovich Institute on the Formation of Knowledge, an initiative to study the cultural and historical roots of different forms of knowledge, and she held a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2007–8. Her most recent books are The Mirror of the Self (2006) and Persius: A Study in Food, Philosophy, and the Figural (2015).


Cedric Littlewood is an associate professor in the Department of Greek and Roman Studies at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. He is the author of Self-Representation and Illusion in Senecan Tragedy (2004).
THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
THE AGE OF NERO

Edited by

SHADI BARTSCH
University of Chicago, Illinois

KIRK FREUDENBURG
Yale University, Connecticut

CEDRIC LITTLEWOOD
University of Victoria, British Columbia
## CONTENTS

List of Illustrations  
List of Contributors  
Acknowledgments  
Timeline of Events  
List of Abbreviations  
Julio-Claudian Family Tree  
Map of the Roman Empire in 69 CE

Introduction: Angles on an Emperor  
SHADI BARTSCH, KIRK FREUDENBURG, AND CEDRIC LITTLEWOOD

**PART I: NERO’S WORLD**

1  Nero the Performer  
   MATTHEW LEIGH  
2  Nero and the Senate  
   JOSIAH OSGOOD  
3  Nero’s Imperial Administration  
   CARLOS F. NOREÑA  
4  Nero’s Women  
   ANTHONY A. BARRETT

**PART II: NERONIAN LITERATURE**

5  Post-Augustan Revisionism  
   CEDRIC LITTLEWOOD  
6  Lucan’s *Civil War* in Nero’s Rome  
   GARETH WILLIAMS
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Petronius, Realism, Nero</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Kirk Freudenburg</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Ain’t Sayin’”: Persius in Neroland</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Daniel Hooley</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Part III: Neronian Seneca</strong></td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Senecan Drama and the Age of Nero</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Chiara Torre</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Philosophers and the State under Nero</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Shadi Bartsch</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Seneca and the Quest for Glory in Nero’s Golden Age</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Catharine Edwards</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Part IV: Nero’s Monumental Rome</strong></td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Art and the Decadent City</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Caroline Vout</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Staging Nero: Public Imagery and the Domus Aurea</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Eugenio La Rocca</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Burning Rome, Burning Christians</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>John Pollini</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Nero’s Memory in Flavian Rome</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Eric Varnier</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td><strong>Part V: The Nerios of Reception</strong></td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Nero: The Making of the Historical Narrative</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Donatien Grau</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Saint Paul and the Christian Communities of Nero’s Rome</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>J. Albert Harrill</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The Image of Nero in Renaissance Political Thought</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Peter Stacey</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Resurgences of Nero in the Enlightenment</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Elena Russo</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONTENTS

20 Nero in Hollywood 318
MARTIN M. WINKLER

PART VI AFTER THE LAST LAUGH 333

21 The Neronian “Symptom” 335
ERIK GUNDERSON

Appendix: Nero’s Image: The Four Portrait Types 354
(notes by Eugenio La Rocca)
General Bibliography 359
Index 396
ILLUSTRATIONS

3.1 Map of the Roman Empire in 69 CE. Ancient World Mapping Centre © 2016 (awmc.unc.edu). Used by permission.

4.1 Denarius, Nero, and Agrippina, 54 CE. Photo Andreas Pangerl www.romancoins.info.

4.2 Relief depicting Nero and Agrippina. Sébasteion, Sevgi Gönül Gallery, Aphrodisias. NYU – Aphrodisias Excavations.


12.2 Portrait of Nero, 64–8 CE, Worcester Art Museum, inv. no. 1915.23 (Photo: Museum).

12.3 Central octagonal of vault mosaic showing Odysseus and the Cyclops, room 13, Domus Aurea, Rome, 64–8 CE (Photo: DAIR 70.2074).

12.4 North wall of Triclinium A, Moregine, showing Apollo and the Muses Clio and Euterpe, Fourth style, first century CE (Photo: SAP 85182).

12.5 East wall of Triclinium A, Moregine, showing the Muses Urania, Thalia, and Melpomene, Fourth style, first century CE (Photo: SAP 85183).

12.6 South wall of room n in the House of the Vettii, Pompeii, showing the punishment of Dirce, 62–79 CE (Photo: Alinari).

13.1 Nero’s sestertius of 63 CE ca. Detail of reverse with the Arch of Nero.

13.2 Column plinth with female figures and Victories, probably from the Arch of Nero on the Capitoline Hill. Rome, Capitoline Museums.

13.3 Fragment of relief with Parthian warrior, probably from the Arch of Nero on the Capitoline Hill. Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano.
List of Illustrations

13.4 Nero’s dupondius of 63 CE ca. Obverse: Head of Nero (type 4) with corona radiata. 199

13.5 Gem. The Colossus in the Flavian age (from a plaster cast). Berlin, Pergamon Museum. 200

13.6 Multiplum of Gordianus III. Reverse: the Colosseum with the Colossus at left and the Meta Sudans at right. 201

13.7 Plan of the Golden House (in orange) superimposed on a plan of the valley of the Colosseum and surrounding areas: 1. The main entrance to the Domus Aurea from the Forum Romanum; 2. The hall of the Colossus; 3. The lake; 4–5. Claudian or Neronian buildings on the Palatine; 6. The pavilion of the Colle Oppio; 7. The temple of Claudius with gardens on the Caelian Hill; 8. Neronian or Flavian buildings under the northwest corner of the Trajan’s thermae. 204

13.8 Virtual reconstruction of the Domus Aurea seen from the south (Katalexilux Project 2011): 1. The main entrance to the Domus Aurea from the Forum Romanum; 2. The hall of the Colossus; 3. The lake; 4. Neronian buildings on the Palatine; 5. The pavilion of the Colle Oppio; 6. The temple of Claudius with gardens on the Caelian hill; 7. Neronian or Flavian buildings under the northwest corner of the Trajan’s thermae. 205

13.9 Rome, so-called Domus Transitoria on the Palatine Hill. Painted decoration from the vault. 205

13.10 Virtual reconstruction of the east side of the nymphaeum-substruction of the temple of Divus Claudius on the Caelian Hill. 207

13.11 Plan of the Neronian building on the slopes of the Colle Oppio. 208

13.12 Pompeii, Casa di Marco Lucrezio Frontone. Fresco painting: landscape with a villa, from the north wall of the tablinum. 209

13.13 Rome, Neronian building on the slopes of the Colle Oppio. Vault fresco painting, from room 119. 211


14.2 Day 3 of the fire. After Panella 2011: fig. 10a.3 (S. Borghini and R. Carlani). 216

14.3 Day 7 of the fire. After Panella 2011: fig. 10a.4 (S. Borghini and R. Carlani). 217
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

14.4 Day 9 of the fire. After Panella 2011: fig. 10a.6 (S. Borghini and R. Carlani).
15.1 Tomb of the Domitii, Pirro Ligorio, Effigies Antiquae Romae 1561 (1773 edition by Carlo Losi), Atlanta, Emory University, Rose Manuscript Archives and Rare Book Library and the Michael C. Carlos Museum.
15.2 Nero, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, inv. 616, photo E. Varner.
15.3 Nero, Rome, Museo Palatino, inv. 618, photo E. Varner.
15.4 Nero/Vespasian, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, inv. 53, photo E. Varner.
15.5 Nero/Titus, Rome, Galleria Borghese, inv. 748, photo E. Varner.
15.6 Domitian, Rome, Palazzo dei Conservatori, inv. 1156, photo E. Varner.
15.7 Nero/Domitian, Naples, Museo Nazionale Archeologico, inv. 6061, photo E. Varner.
15.8 Nero/Augustus, Rome, Musei Vaticani, Sala dei Busti 274, inv. 715, photo E. Varner.
15.9 Nero/Titus or Domitian, Museo Nazionale Romano, Chiostro Piccolo, inv. 587757, photo E. Varner.
20.1 Publicity still of Nero (Peter Ustinov) and Poppaea (Patricia Laffan) in Quo Vadis (1951). Jerry Murbach Collection.
20.3 Nero (Peter Ustinov) on his bed in Quo Vadis (1951). Screenshot.
A.1 Type 1 portrait of Nero, Louvre Inv. No. MR 337 (Ma 1210; N 1580).
A.2 Type 2 portrait of Nero (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Cagliari).
A.3 Type 3 portrait of Nero (Museo delle Terme, Rome).
A.4 Type 4 portrait of Nero, gilded bronze (previously in the Alex Guttmann collection, present whereabouts unknown).
CONTRIBUTORS

ANTHONY A. BARRETT
Department of Classics, Near Eastern, and Religious Studies
University of British Columbia

SHADI BARTSCH
Department of Classics
University of Chicago

CATHARINE EDWARDS
Department of History, Classics and Archaeology
Birkbeck, University of London

KIRK FREUDENBURG
Department of Classics
Yale University

DONATIEN GRAU
Guest Curator, Getty Museum

ERIK GUNDERSON
Department of Classics
University of Toronto

J. ALBERT HARRILL
Department of History
Ohio State University

DANIEL HOOLEY
Department of Classical Studies
University of Missouri-Columbia

EUGENIO LA ROCCA
Scienze dell’Antichità
Università di Roma “La Sapienza”
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

MATTHEW LEIGH
Faculty of Classics
St Anne’s College, Oxford University

CEDRIC LITTLEWOOD
Department of Greek and Roman Studies
University of Victoria

CARLOS F. NOREÑA
Department of History
University of California, Berkeley

JOSIAH OSGOOD
Department of Classics
Georgetown University

JOHN POLLINI
Departments of History and Art History
University of Southern California

ELENA RUSSO
Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures
Johns Hopkins University

PETER STACEY
Department of History
University of California, Los Angeles

CHIARA TORRE
Dipartimento di Studi Letterari, Filologici e Linguistici
Università degli Studi di Milano

ERIC VARNER
Department of Art History
Emory University

CAROLINE VOUT
Faculty of Classics
Christ’s College, Cambridge University

GARETH WILLIAMS
Department of Classics
Columbia University

MARTIN M. WINKLER
Department of Modern and Classical Languages
George Mason University
The editors would like to acknowledge the helpful report received from our anonymous reviewer at Cambridge University Press as well as thank the contributors for their patience during an unusually long process of fruition. True to form, Nero defeated our expectations in refusing to let us, like Seneca, retire from dancing attendance upon him for as long as possible. We hope the outcome will be of appropriately dramatic interest.

We extend thanks as well to our copy-editor at Cambridge University Press and to our editor, Michael Sharp, and editorial assistant, Emma Collison, for their assistance with this volume.
TIMELINE OF EVENTS

BCE
49  Julius Caesar crosses the Rubicon and invades Italy.
48  Caesar defeats Pompey at the battle of Pharsalus. Pompey is murdered in Egypt.
47  Caesar is appointed dictator for ten years.
44  Caesar is murdered on the Ides of March by Brutus, Cassius, and their conspirators. The Senate recognizes Octavian as his heir, but Mark Antony refuses to cooperate.
43  Octavian and the consuls of 43 defeat Mark Antony at Mutina, but both consuls are killed. Octavian is made consul and establishes the second triumvirate, an alliance with Mark Antony and the wealthy Lepidus. They kill their enemies.
42  Caesar is deified. Octavian and Antony at Philippi defeat Brutus and Cassius, who commit suicide.
38  Octavian marries Livia Drusilla (b. 58), mother of Tiberius and of Nero Claudius Drusus, with whom she was pregnant when divorced by Tiberius Claudius Nero.
32  Hostilities lead to the collapse of the triumvirate/Mark Antony divorces Octavia.
31  The Battle of Actium occurs on September 2, with Octavian and Agrippa triumphant over Mark Antony and Cleopatra.
30  Mark Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide.
29  The Forum of Caesar is constructed in Rome.
27  Octavian “transfers the state to the Roman people” and takes the name Augustus. The first Pantheon is built in Rome and dedicated by Marcus Agrippa.
19  The Arch of Augustus is built in Rome to commemorate victory over the Parthians.
17  Augustus adopts Agrippa’s and Julia’s two sons, Gaius and Lucius, as his own sons.
Timeline of Events

11 Tiberius marries Julia, Augustus’ daughter.
9 Augustus’ *Ara Pacis* is dedicated in Rome.
6 Tiberius retires to Rhodes.
4 Seneca and Yeshua (Jesus) are both born.
2 Augustus inaugurates the Temple of Mars Ultor in Rome to commemorate his victory at the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE. Tiberius and Julia divorce; Julia is exiled.

CE

2 Tiberius returns to Rome.
4 Gaius dies. Augustus adopts Tiberius, and Tiberius adopts his nephew Germanicus.
14 Augustus dies at the age of seventy-six. Tiberius succeeds him. Agrippa Postumus is executed.
26 Tiberius retires to Capri. Sejanus is left in charge of the administration of the empire.
30 Yeshua (Jesus) is crucified.
31 Sejanus is executed for conspiracy against Tiberius.
32 or 36 Saul of Tarsus has a conversion on the road to Damascus and becomes Paul, the follower of Christos.
34 The poet Persius is born.
37 Tiberius dies; Caligula ascends the throne. Nero is born on December 15 to Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus and Agrippina the Younger, sister of Caligula.
39 Caligula exiles Nero’s mother, Agrippina the Younger. Messalina bears Caligula’s uncle, Claudius, a daughter (Octavia). Lucan at Corduba is born in Spain.
41 Caligula is murdered on January 24, and Claudius ascends the throne. Seneca is banished from Rome on a charge of adultery (and spends his time writing the three *Consolations*). Messalina bears Claudius a son (Britannicus). Claudius allows the return of Agrippina the Younger.
48 Messalina is put to death for promiscuity and conspiring against Claudius.
49 Claudius marries his niece Agrippina the Younger. Seneca is brought back from exile to be tutor to Nero.
50 Emperor Claudius adopts Nero (Agrippina’s son). Nero is now Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus. Claudius names Nero as his successor, and Nero marries Claudius’ daughter, Octavia.
50–1 Paul meets with the Jerusalem church over whether Gentile converts have to be circumcised. Paul claims that Peter, James, and John accepted his mission to the Gentiles at this meeting.
Nero is proclaimed an adult in 51 at the age of fourteen. He is appointed proconsul, addresses the Senate, appears in public with Claudius, and shows up in coinage.

Claudius dies (possibly poisoned by Agrippina). Nero becomes emperor at age sixteen, taking the name Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus. Seneca and Burrus, the prefect of the guard, are his tutors. Coinage shows Nero and his mother Agrippina together, unusual in the Roman world. Agrippina scandalously tries to sit down next to Nero while he meets with an Armenian envoy, but Seneca stops her. Sometime this year or next Seneca publishes the Apocolocyntosis, and in this year or the next, Seneca writes the de Clementia, addressed to Nero.

Nero murders his brother Britannicus on February 12, one day before his official entry into adulthood.

Tacitus (d. after 117 CE) is born; he will write the Annales about half a century after Nero’s death.

Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and held for two years. Upon his release, he exercises his right to be judged in Rome.

War breaks out with Parthia.

Nero murders his mother Agrippina, who was becoming increasingly intrusive. Seneca writes a letter for him explaining his actions to the Senate. The Stoic Thrasea Paetus walks out of the meeting.

Nero establishes the quinquennial Neronia, a festival of music, oratory, and poetry. Lucan praises him in a panegyric. Boudica, a queen in Britannia, leads a revolt, but is defeated in 61. Paul arrives in Rome and is rearrested for two years.

Nero marries his mistress Poppaea Sabina, divorcing (and murdering) Octavia. Prefect of the guard Burrus dies. Seneca asks for permission to retire from public affairs (and probably starts writing the Epistulae Morales). The satirist Persius dies from a stomach ailment.

The Parthian king Tiridates lays his crown before an image of Nero, signifying he is a subject of Rome. Thrasea Paetus stops attending meetings of the Senate at all.

The great fire of Rome breaks out on the night of July 18, and burns over five days, destroying or damaging ten of the fourteen Roman districts. The fire is followed by the persecution of the Christians. Nero creates a new urban development plan and starts building the Domus Aurea. On its grounds is the Colossus of Nero. Nero sings for a public audience in Naples, his first public performance.
According to the Acts of Paul, Nero condemns Paul to death by decapitation at some point in this four-year period. It is unclear what Paul’s actual fate was.

Work begins on the Domus Aurea and the Colossus of Nero (modified to the Colossus Solis after Nero’s death by Vespasian). The Circus Maximus in Rome is rebuilt to hold 250,000. The Pisonian Conspiracy to assassinate Nero fails. Seneca (despite his probable innocence) is forced to commit suicide, as are writers Petronius and Lucan. The quinquennial Neronia is held again, and Nero sings. A pregnant Poppaea dies after being fatally kicked in the stomach by Nero.

The first Jewish–Roman war breaks out, which ends in 73 with Roman victory. Thrasea Paetus is forced to commit suicide, as is another Stoic, Barea Soranus (probably in the same year). Helvidius Priscus is exiled. A spectacle of Tiridates’ investment as king of Armenia is staged in Rome.

Nero participates in the Olympic Games at Olympia, racing a chariot and singing and acting. He wins all the prizes. Nero marries Statilia Messalina. Nero goes on an extended tour of Greece with many singing performances. He tries to dig a canal through the isthmus of Corinth, but the project fails.

Vindex leads a revolt; Galba’s troops in Spain hail Galba as emperor. Nero is forced to commit suicide on June 9 (the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty). Year of the four emperors begins (Galba, Otto, Vittelius, Vespasian).

Vespasian is proclaimed emperor. Suetonius is born (d. after 122 CE), whose Lives of the 12 Caesars will come out more than half a century after Nero’s death.

Vespasian begins construction of the Colosseum in Rome, partly to cover up the Domus Aurea.

Titus officially opens the Colosseum in Rome with a 100-day gladiator spectacular.
ABBREVIATIONS

AE      L’Année Epigraphique (1888–)
CCSL    Corpus Christianorum, series Latina (1953–)
CIL     Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (1863–)
EA      Epigraphica Anatolia
IG      Inscriptiones Graecae (1873–)
ILS     H. Dessau, Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae (1892–1916)
NOAB    B. M. Metzger and R. E. Murphy, The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha: An Ecumenical Study Bible (1994)
NYRB    New York Review of Books
OCB     B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan Oxford Companion to the Bible (1993)
PIR²    E. Groag and A. Stein et al. Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saeculi I, II, III (2nd edition 1933–)
RE      A. Pauly, G. Wissowa, and W. Kroll, Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft (1893–)
RIC²    C. H. V. Sutherland and R. A. G. Carson, Roman Imperial Coinage (2nd edition 1984)
SEG     Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum
SNTSMS  Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SVF     H. von Arnim, Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (1903–)
Map of the Roman Empire in 69 CE. Created by Ancient World Mapping Center.