

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO
THE AGE OF NERO



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.

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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' <i>Ara Pacis</i> 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 <i>Consolations</i>). 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.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

- 51 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.
- 54 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.
- 55 Nero murders his brother Britannicus on February 12, one day before his official entry into adulthood.
- 56 Tacitus (d. after 117 CE) is born; he will write the *Annales* about half a century after Nero's death.
- 57 Paul is arrested in Jerusalem and held for two years. Upon his release, he exercises his right to be judged in Rome.
- 58 War breaks out with Parthia.
- 59 Nero murders his mother Agrippina, who was becoming increasingly intrusive. Seneca writes a letter for him explaining his actions to the Senate. The Stoic Thræsea Paetus walks out of the meeting.
- 60 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.
- 62 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.
- 63 The Parthian king Tiridates lays his crown before an image of Nero, signifying he is a subject of Rome. Thræsea Paetus stops attending meetings of the Senate at all.
- 64 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.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

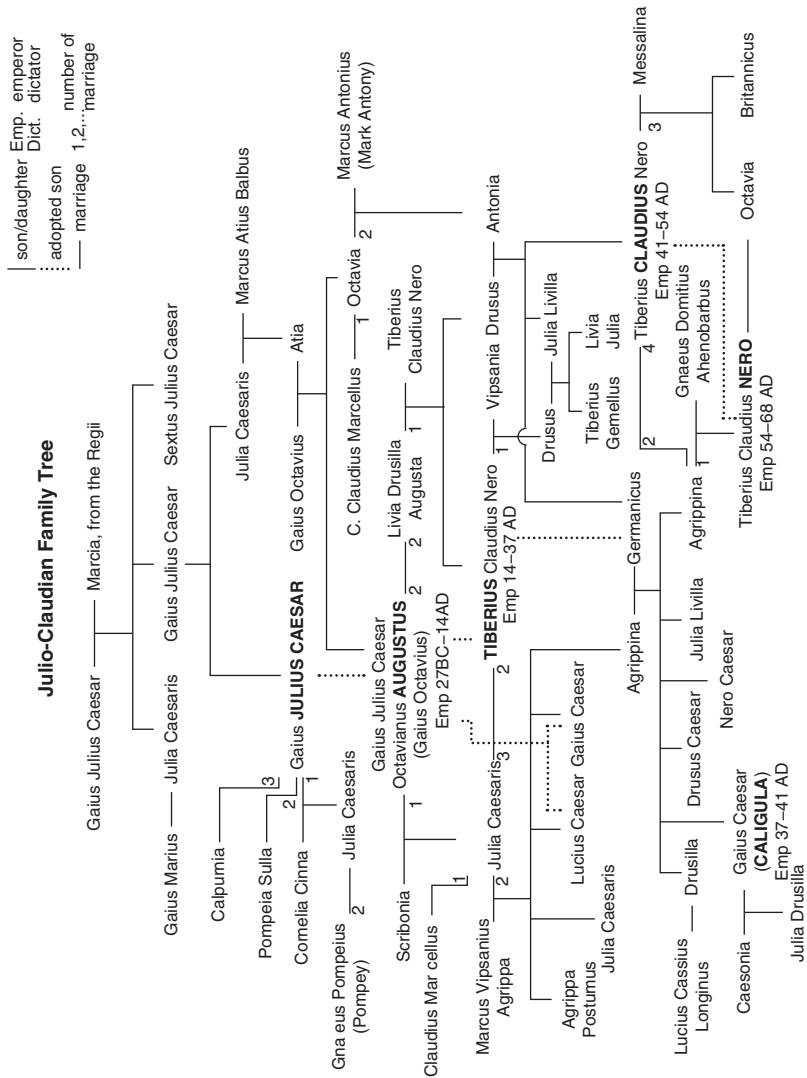
64–8	According to the Acts of Paul, Nero condemns Paul to death by decapitation at some point in this four-year period. It is unclear what Paul’s actual fate was.
65	Work begins on the Domus Aurea and the Colossus of Nero (modified to the Colossus Solis after Nero’s death by Vespasian). The Circus Maximus 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.
66	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.
67	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.
68	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, Vitellius, Vespasian).
69	Vespasian is proclaimed emperor. Suetonius is born (d. after 122 CE), whose <i>Lives of the 12 Caesars</i> will come out more than half a century after Nero’s death.
72	Vespasian begins construction of the Colosseum in Rome, partly to cover up the Domus Aurea.
80	Titus officially opens the Colosseum in Rome with a 100-day gladiator spectacular.

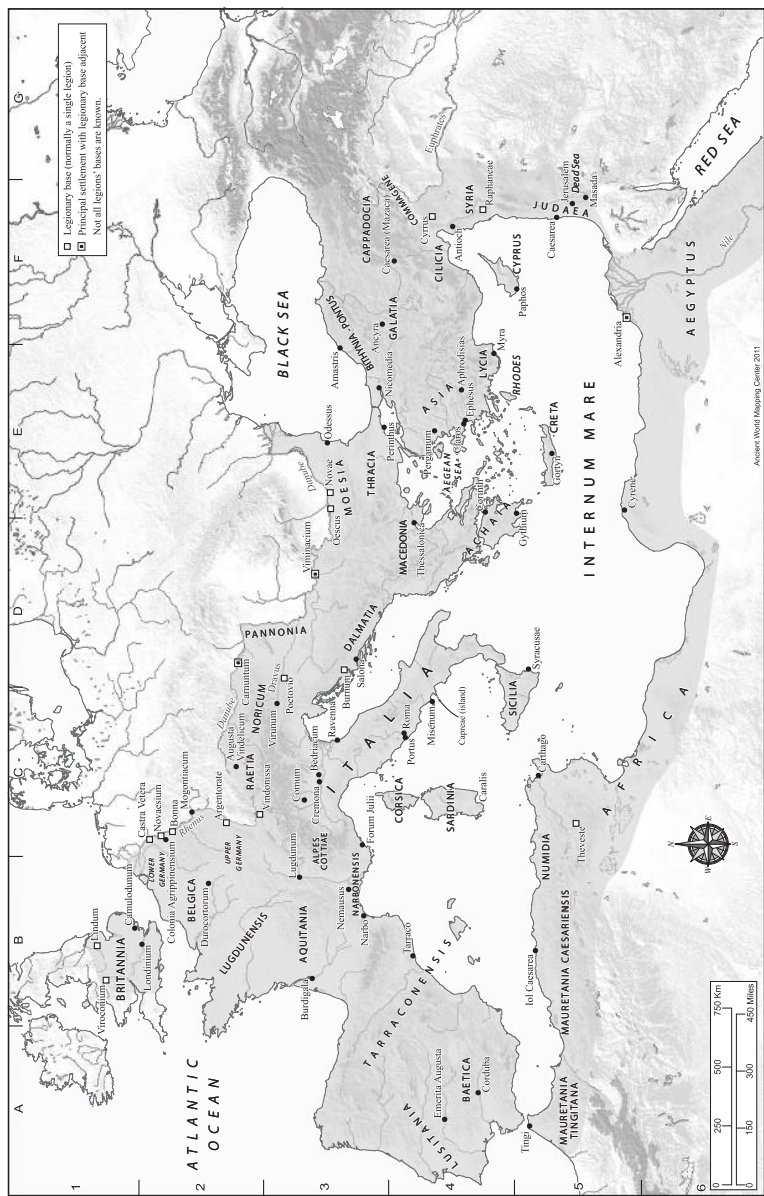
ABBREVIATIONS



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
OBC	J. Barton and J. Muddimann, The Oxford Bible Commentary (2001)
OCB	B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan Oxford Companion to the Bible (1993)
OCD	S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth Oxford Classical Dictionary (3rd edition 1966)
ODWR	J. Bowker, The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions (1997)
OLD	A. Souter, J. M. Wylie, and P. G. W. Glare et al. Oxford Latin Dictionary (1982)
PIR ²	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–)
RIC ²	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–)

JULIO-CLAUDIAN FAMILY TREE





Map of the Roman Empire in 69 CE. Created by Ancient World Mapping Center