

NERO

This book portrays Nero, not as the murderous tyrant of tradition, but as a young man ever reluctant to fulfil his responsibilities as emperor and ever anxious to demonstrate his genuine skills as a sportsman and an artist. This reluctance caused him to allow others to rule, and rule surprisingly well, in his name. On its own terms, the Neronian Empire was in fact remarkably successful. Nero's senior ministers were many and various, but notably they included a number of powerful women, such as his mother, Agrippina II, and his second and third wives, Poppaea Sabina and Statilia Messalina. Using the most recent archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and literary research, the book explores issues such as court politics, banter and free speech; literary, technological and scientific advances; the Fire of 64, 'the persecution of Christians' and Nero's 'Golden House'; and the huge underlying strength, both constitutional and financial, of the Julio-Claudian Empire.

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NERO

Emperor and Court

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To Vicky, Neil, Ella and Daniel

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> xiii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xv
<i>Figures</i>	xvii
<i>Tables</i>	xviii
Introduction	I
PART I BACKGROUND	5
1 Nero, ‘Bad’ or ‘Good’?	7
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Biography	7
1.3 Demonisation	7
1.4 Rationalisation	9
1.5 Reassessment	10
1.6 Caveats	12
1.7 Initial Success	13
1.8 Senatorial Tradition	18
1.9 Nero and the Senate (i)	21
1.10 Achievements	30
2 Agrippina and Her Legacy	32
2.1 Introduction	32
2.2 Life and Career to the Accession of Nero	32
2.3 Long-Term Planning	35
2.4 ‘Queen Mother’	42
2.5 The Acte Affair	51
2.6 Legacy	55
3 The Establishment Team	56
3.1 Introduction	56
3.2 The Team	59
3.2.1 The Court	59

3.2.2	Intimates	60
3.2.3	Military Prefects	60
3.2.4	<i>Liberti</i>	62
3.2.5	The Outer Circle	65
3.3	<i>Consilium</i>	67
3.3.1	Structure and Operation	67
3.3.2	Legal Business	70
3.3.3	Inclusivity	78
4	Dissimulation?	81
4.1	Delegation	81
4.2	Dissimulation and Dissidence?	82
4.3	Paradox and Confusion?	83
4.4	Doublespeak?	86
4.5	A Carnival of Fear?	87
4.6	The Problem of the Sources	88
4.7	The Problem of Prejudice: the Strength of the Principate	89
4.8	Nero and the Senate (ii)	93
4.9	Exclusion	97
4.10	The Power of Gossip	99
4.11	Dissimulation?	100
5	Frankness and Enquiry	101
5.1	Nero	101
5.2	Neronian Literature	101
5.2.1	Petronius, Seneca	101
5.2.2	Critics of Nero	105
5.2.3	Lucan and Cornutus	107
5.3	Saying the Unsayable	116
5.4	Wider Neronian Culture	119
5.4.1	Architecture and Art	119
5.4.2	Science	121
5.4.3	Geography	124
5.4.4	Nero?	127
5.5	Protected Nero	129
6	Warfare and the Generals	131
6.1	Introduction	131
6.2	Armenia (i)	131
6.2.1	Background	131
6.2.2	Corbulo (i)	134
6.3	The New Order and Britain	136
6.4	The Black Sea	139
6.5	Armenia (ii)	140

Contents

ix

6.6	The Generals	142
6.6.1	Corbulo (ii)	142
6.6.2	Consuls and Generals	144
6.7	The Caucasus and Judaea	148
6.7.1	The Caucasus	148
6.7.2	Judaea	151
6.8	Conclusion	152
7	Politics	153
7.1	Power-Groups	153
7.2	Seneca's <i>De clementia</i> : Stoicism and Politics	156
7.3	Nero's Team and Its Aims	162
7.4	Nero's Break-Outs	164
PART II ASSESSMENT		169
8	Killer? I: 54–62	171
8.1	Introduction	171
8.2	Claudius	171
8.3	M. Junius Silanus	172
8.4	Britannicus	174
8.5	Agrippina	176
8.5.1	Recovery (55–58)	176
8.5.2	Destruction (58–59)	179
8.6	The Year 62	187
8.6.1	Burrus?	187
8.6.2	Succession	189
8.6.3	Rubellius Plautus, Faustus Cornelius Sulla	191
8.6.4	Octavia	193
8.6.5	Doryphorus, Pallas	193
8.7	Conclusion	194
9	Killer? II: 62–68	197
9.1	Introduction	197
9.2	D. Junius Silanus	197
9.3	The Pisonian Conspiracy	197
9.3.1	Introduction	197
9.3.2	Membership	198
9.3.3	Course	200
9.3.4	Motives	203
9.3.5	Assessment	209
9.3.6	Punishment	210
9.3.7	Conclusion	218

9.4	Poppaea	219
9.5	Antonia	219
9.6	The Last Killings	220
9.6.1	Introduction	220
9.6.2	The Vinician Conspirators	222
9.6.3	Corbulo (iii)	224
9.6.4	The Scribonii	227
9.6.5	The Victims of Helius	228
9.6.6	Deaths in Greece	231
9.7	Conclusion	232
10	Arsonist, Persecutor and Ruthless Property Developer?	233
10.1	Arson: The Case For	233
10.2	Arson: The Case Against	234
10.3	Why Nero?	236
10.4	Christians as Scapegoats	244
10.5	The Golden House	248
11	Divinity, Madness, Acting, Ideology, Burn-Out	264
11.1	Divinity	264
11.1.1	Nero-Apollo?	264
11.1.2	Golden Age?	267
11.1.3	Hellenistic Kingship?	270
11.1.4	Nero the Mortal	272
11.1.5	The Colossus	274
11.2	Madness?	276
11.2.1	Psychoanalysing Nero?	276
11.2.2	Degrees of Irrationality	277
11.3	Acting	286
11.4	Ideology	293
11.5	Burn-Out?	294
12	Depravity?	295
12.1	Introduction	295
12.2	Indiscipline	296
12.3	Lust	310
12.4	Extravagance and Avarice	314
12.5	Cruelty	317
13	Finance	326
13.1	Introduction	326
13.2	Problems	327
13.2.1	Potential Stress	327
13.2.2	Signs of Stress?	337

	<i>Contents</i>	xi
13.3	Solutions	342
13.3.1	Introduction	342
13.3.2	Income	348
13.3.3	Management	350
13.3.4	Coin Reform	354
13.4	The Legacy of Helius	364
PART III END		369
14	Entr'acte: Greece	371
14.1	Introduction	371
14.2	Greece	372
14.3	Philhellenism	373
14.4	Ideology	374
14.5	Inducements	378
14.6	Chronology	379
14.7	Helius	380
14.8	'Triumph'	382
15	Fall	387
15.1	Introduction	387
15.2	The Lull Before the Storm	387
15.3	Vindex	389
15.4	Galba	394
15.5	Macer	398
15.6	Verginius Rufus	401
15.7	Desertion	405
15.8	Death	410
16	Conclusion	416
	<i>References</i>	422
	<i>Index</i>	434

Preface

This book began as a short survey of the ‘office of emperor’ in the first century AD. My plan was to catalogue its main characteristics and then illustrate their operation by reference to the reigns of particular rulers. Having roughed out a list of characteristics, I looked first at Nero but quickly discovered that my list hardly fitted his principate. In addition, as a later Roman historian used to imperial decline, I was struck by how successful his period of office was despite the very negative impression of him given by the sources and began to feel that the Empire could not have been run as they describe. I decided that Nero’s administration deserved its own study, which then took some years to complete. My principal theme – that Nero never acted alone – also probably derives from the Late Empire, in which there was always a plurality of political actors: multiple emperors and heirs, wives, sisters, eunuchs, generals, bishops, holy men etc.

I was able to present my first thoughts on Nero at a symposium held in St Andrews in 2008. I must thank Alisdair Gibson for inviting me to attend and for seeing my paper through to publication in 2013. I am likewise grateful to Julia Hillner, Jane Rempel and Charles West for encouraging me to talk on Nero and the Fire at a Sheffield Medieval and Ancient Research Seminar (MARS) meeting in 2010. I owe much of what I say about Nero’s charioteering to a paper read by Dr Andy Fear, University of Manchester, to MARS in February 2012. Julia Hillner and members of the Sheffield Late Antiquity Reading Group also heard me on Agrippina in 2016 and offered useful comments and advice on further reading. Guidance on assessing Nero’s mental and physical condition was given by Professor Anthony Barker, Department of Medical Physics, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield; Professor David Clarke and Dr A. Sunderland, School of Psychology, University of Nottingham; and Professor Mike Gleeson, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Science, Loughborough University. In this respect, I am particularly indebted to Oliver James, author of *They F*** You Up* (2007), for his prompt and

positive response to my request for help. Dr Werner Lütkenhaus, a former pupil at Nottingham, Simon Malloch, Department of Classics, University of Nottingham, and Professor Morris Silver, Department of Economics, City College of the City University of New York, kindly read and commented on elements of the text. Professor Eric Moormann, Radboud Universiteit, helped me understand aspects of Neronian architecture and supplied me with hard-to-get material. Professor Lawrence Keppie, Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, gave me useful topographical information. Welcome long-term encouragement and support came from Professor Maureen Carroll, Department of Archaeology, University of Sheffield; Professor Nick Henck, Faculty of Law, Keio University; Professor Fritz-Heiner Mutschler, Department of Classics, Universities of Dresden and Peking; and former Sheffield pupil, Adrian Pearson. I particularly appreciate the suggestions of the two anonymous readers of Cambridge University Press, most of which I have attempted to incorporate in my text. Throughout, the Press's patient and indefatigable Michael Sharp has given me indispensable encouragement and support.

No research is possible without good library facilities, and for these I owe much to the Hallward Library, University of Nottingham for its physical and its online stock. Odd gaps were filled by the University Library, Sheffield and, especially, by Sue Willetts and the impeccable postal loan service of the Joint Library of the Hellenic and Roman Societies, London. Prof. Dr Renate Bol, University of Mainz, Dr Julie Lenaghan, Aphrodisias Excavations, Oxford, Mr Simon Parkin, Roma Numismatics Ltd, London and Dr Elena Stolyarik, American Numismatic Society, went well beyond the call of duty in supplying me with photographic images.

I first came into contact with Nero through Jack Roberts, who taught me Latin at Sale Boys' Grammar School and who organised a memorable sixth form trip to Italy in 1963. I owe him a great debt, which I am delighted to have the opportunity to acknowledge here. I must, again, thank my wife, Gillian, for her unstinting patience and support. I wrote this book during a period of great family change and dedicate it to my daughter, Vicky, her husband, Neil Sampson, and their children, Ella and Daniel. The appearance of Ella and Daniel significantly increased the time it took to write this book but was of course hugely welcome and, I hope, by preventing me from rushing completion, significantly improved its quality.

Abbreviations

References to ancient authors and texts follow the conventions of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. The following abbreviations are used both in footnotes and in the References section.

<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
atkinsglobal	http://www.atkinsglobal.com/en-gb/media-centre/news-releases/2010/group/2010-01-11 [11/01/2010].
Barrington Atlas	R. J. Talbert (ed.), <i>Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World</i> , Princeton NJ, 2000
<i>BMCR</i>	<i>Bryn Mawr Classical Review</i>
<i>CAH</i> 9 ²	<i>Cambridge Ancient History Vol. IX</i> (2nd edn). <i>The Last Age of the Roman Republic, 146–43 BC</i> , J. A. Crook, A. Lintott and E. Rawson (eds), Cambridge, 1992
<i>CAH</i> 10 ²	<i>Cambridge Ancient History Vol. X</i> (2nd edn). <i>The Augustan Empire, 3 BC–AD 69</i> , A. K. Bowman, E. Champlin and A. Lintott (eds), Cambridge, 1996.
<i>CAH</i> 12 ²	<i>Cambridge Ancient History Vol. XII</i> (2nd edn). <i>The Crisis of Empire, AD 193–337</i> , A. K. Bowman, P. Garnsey and Averil Cameron (eds), Cambridge, 2005
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>EEC</i>	A. Di Bartino (ed.), <i>Encyclopedia of the Early Church</i> , New York NY, 1992
<i>FRHist.</i>	T. J. Cornell (ed.), <i>The Fragments of the Roman Historians</i> , Oxford, 2013
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>OCD</i> [#]	S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth and E. Eidinow (eds), <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> (4th edn), Oxford, 2012

*RIC 1*²*Roman Imperial Coinage* vol. 1 (2nd edn), H. V. Sutherland and R. A. G. Carson, London 1984*RIC 2*²*Roman Imperial Coinage* vol. 2, part 1 (2nd rev. edn), I. Carradice and T. V. Buttrey, London, 2007

Figures

1	The West and Greece	<i>page</i> 5
2	Claudius and Agrippina: jugate busts	39
3	Aphrodisias: Claudius and Agrippina	40
4	Aphrodisias: Agrippina and Nero	41
5	Olympia: the Metröon grouping	41
6	Nero and Agrippina: facing busts	44
7	Nero and Agrippina: jugate busts	48
8	The ruling segments	80
9	Africa and the Indian Ocean	125
10	The protecting hierarchy	129
11	The East	132
12	Baiae and its region	185
13	The 'Golden House' complex	239
14	Fleshy Nero	303
15	Fleshy Vespasian	303
16	Triumphal routes	385

Tables

1	Leading <i>liberti</i>	<i>page</i> 63
2	The Pisonian conspirators, actual and alleged	212
3	Estimated main extraordinary annual Neronian expenditure	335
4	Roman coin tariffs	355