



# The Imperial Message

Nero's propaganda and its  
reception

Lieke Meulenbroek, Student no. 3504077  
Bachelor Thesis, written for:  
Onderzoeksseminar III: Urbs Roma  
Dr. S. Stevens  
April 13, 2012

Word count: 12,028

---

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Chapter 1: Nero, a Brief Biography. ....	5
Chapter 2: Nero and Military Power .....	9
Material evidence .....	9
Actions .....	11
Chapter 3: Nero and Women.....	14
The best mother .....	14
Numismatics .....	14
Inscriptions.....	15
Statues .....	15
Octavia III .....	17
Poppaea and Claudia .....	17
Statilia.....	18
Chapter 4: Nero and the Senate .....	20
Chapter 5: Nero and Imitatio Augusti .....	22
Divus Claudius .....	22
Britannicus .....	23
Other emperors .....	24
Chapter 6: Nero and Building .....	25
Public building .....	26
Private building .....	27
Chapter 7: Nero and Divinity .....	30
Deification in the Roman Empire.....	30
Nero and the divine .....	31
Chapter 8: Nero and the People: the Reception of an Emperor.....	33
Conclusion.....	36
Bibliography .....	38

## Introduction

When anyone, at any age, starts to learn about Classical Antiquity, Nero is an inevitable – and juicy- subject. The ‘Crazy Emperor’, who seemed to honestly believe in his own divinity and did not care for his people, helps sketch a past so different from our own present, in all aspects, that it almost seems like a fantasy. This vision of Nero has long gone uncontested, with historians relying mostly on the ancient writers like Suetonius, Tacitus and Cassius Dio. Upon further inspection, however, some parts of it do, actually, seem to be just that: fantasy. History, as they say, is written by the victors, those who need to clearly depict their own superiority with regard to their predecessors.

Personal interest in Roman propaganda, and especially that of the early Empire motivated me to choose this particular subject for my bachelor thesis. In writing this paper, I hope to separate the truth from the lies when it comes to Nero and his propaganda. In doing so, a short explanation of the term ‘propaganda’ seems prudent. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it, among other things, as: ‘The systematic propagation of information or ideas by an interested party, esp. in a tendentious way in order to encourage or instil a particular attitude or response. Also, the ideas, doctrines, etc. disseminated thus; the vehicle of such propagation.’<sup>1</sup> Despite the anachronism inherent in the term (it was coined by the Catholic Church), it would still be appropriate when associated with the Roman Empire. Emperors from Augustus on had clear ideas of what image they wanted to send out, in matters of religion, politics and the army. Successful or not, they all clearly thought about their message, and what consequences it would have upon their own rule.

I will explore several aspects of Neronian propaganda and the extent to which it was effective during his lifetime. By placing these actions within Roman tradition, a different view on Nero can be presented. Traditionally, Nero is not seen as an emperor who put conscious thought into his actions, and Tacitus, Suetonius and other historians would have us believe all he did was indulge himself—at least, past the ‘good five years’ that many historians have accepted as a fact.<sup>2</sup> Typically, the good years end after Nero’s matricide, after which he ventured into more extreme practices such as the theatre, sports and an extravagant building project. Although these things were clearly a departure from his previous behaviour, placing them in

---

<sup>1</sup> Oxford English dictionary, prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner), Volume 12, page 632 (Oxford 1989).

<sup>2</sup> This comes from the *quinquennium Neronis*, a phrase coined by Aurelius Victor (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 5.1-2) and thereafter used by many different historians. There does not seem to be a consensus on which years the *quinquennium* encompassed, however.

their context and looking at some critical modern literature might change one's mind and consider the fact that there may have been more to Nero than impulse and insanity. For this reason I will also discuss, where necessary, how the negative opinion of Nero came to be, and explain why this, too, was not an abnormal string of events.

The paper will be divided into several parts. After a short biography, I will explore Nero and his initial propagandistic message in relation to several groups or pertaining to certain subjects: the military and Nero's efforts to be seen as a military man; Nero's relationship with the women in his life and how the public saw them through propaganda; the Senate and finally, '*imitatio Augusti*', meaning the extent to which Nero looked towards his predecessors in finding his own way to rule. After that, I will look at Nero's building practices and their meaning, the extent of the emperor's divine identification and, finally, the reception by the citizens of the Roman Empire. The voice of these 'silent' people is difficult to find, but certain events can indicate their opinion.

I will look at material remains, such as inscriptions, decrees, statues, coinage and whatever remains of Nero's building programme. There may be several interpretations for some of these sources because of the *damnatio memoriae* Nero was subject to after his death. I will also look at classical historians such as Suetonius and Tacitus, who have written expansively, but not always very critically, about this subject. Of course I will also use modern secondary sources.

When reading ancient sources, we must often be even more critical of them than we have to be for modern, secondary sources. Historians did not feel as if they were obligated to tell the truth, and often inserted anecdotes and hearsay to get their point across. The goal was more important than the means with which the goal was reached, at least for most of the bigger writers. As will become clear in this paper, the historians who wrote about Nero and his reign had a strong bias against him. All of them wrote under the rule of a new dynasty, which understandably needed to legitimise itself, and it helped their own position to slander the previous ruler. Like Ovid had been banished under Augustus for writing too openly, so other writers were at risk of punishment if their writings did not agree with the current emperor.<sup>3</sup> As well as that, as we will see, Nero was mostly popular with the lower classes, who did not write any influential works. The higher classes, including Senators, were mostly the ones to write about history and other subjects, and so it is their opinion that has been transferred to the

---

<sup>3</sup> S. Hales, *The Roman house and social identity* (Cambridge 2003) 26.

present day. With this in mind, some elements of their work should be doubted, if not dismissed completely. For this reason material evidence becomes incredibly important in the research process.

## Chapter 1: Nero, a Brief Biography.

Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, Nero for short, was the last emperor in the Julio-Claudian line that followed Augustus' installation of the Principate. He was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December, A.D. 37. as Lucius Domitius Ahenobarbus, a son to Agrippina II and Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus. He grew up in Antium, a coastal city not too far from Rome, and from a fairly young age was tutored by the famous philosopher Seneca.<sup>4</sup> Later he found a mentor in Sextus Afranius Burrus, prefect of the Praetorian Guard from A.D. 51. until A.D. 27. His father's heritage was noble, being an old Republican family, but they were known to be prideful and impatient.<sup>5</sup> When young Nero was three years old, his father passed away, possibly explaining the close bond he had with his mother for many years. In His mother married then-emperor Claudius, and in A.D. 50 he was adopted and became next-in-line for the throne under the name Tiberius Claudius Nero Caesar (or sometimes, Nero Claudius Caesar Drusus Germanicus).<sup>6</sup> He was also immediately engaged to Claudius' daughter Octavia. Nero's focus on *pietas* with regard to his family was already clear at this point, as he honoured his birth father in many ways as soon as he was adopted.<sup>7</sup>

Claudius' son by birth, Britannicus, was several years younger than Nero. When Claudius died in A.D. 58, Britannicus was not yet old enough to become emperor, and through the ministrations of his mother Agrippina Nero ended up on the throne.<sup>8</sup> After an adolescence of education in the arts as well as rhetorics, Nero had never expected to become emperor, and we can imagine he was not overjoyed when he found himself on the throne.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the people of Rome were excited to see a new, young emperor. Upon his accession, Seneca wrote several pieces seemingly intended to legitimise the new emperor's rule, most importantly *De Clementia*, as well as the *Apocolocyntosis*, which simultaneously portrayed Claudius as an incompetent fool and by contrast made Nero look like a welcome change. Nero's relationship with the Senate could only be an improvement upon the one Claudius had had, and this is

---

<sup>4</sup> A. Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca: De despoot en de denker* (Amsterdam 2010) 53.

<sup>5</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 53.

<sup>6</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 111. For a detailed timeline of Nero's titlature, please refer to: R. K. Sherk, *The Roman empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Cambridge 1993) 102-115.

<sup>7</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 53.

<sup>8</sup> Cass. Dio 61, 33-35.

<sup>9</sup> Suet., *Nero*, 20.1; see Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 114-116 for more information on Agrippina's politics as well as pre-imperial actions Nero undertook. These include games as well as clear displays of *pietas*.

what *De Clementia* wanted to show: the perks of the Principate, also for the Senate, as well as a good way of ruling for the young emperor.

Nero's mother exercised a large amount of influence on Nero until her death in A.D. 59.

Although the details are unclear, many view her death as an incident of matricide.

Supposedly, Nero had tried to shipwreck his mother; when that did not work, he had her stabbed when she washed up on the shore.<sup>10</sup> With Seneca's help, he started to sully his mother's reputation, even accusing her of an assassination attempt on her own son.<sup>11</sup>

Considering the grip the emperor had on the Senate they remained quiet, as they had done during the death of Britannicus.<sup>12</sup> Up until that point, he had been a relatively calm and 'normal' emperor, who tried to legitimise his rule in slightly unconventional ways but otherwise did little out of the ordinary. After this, he altered his course and put less credence in the words of others.

Three years after the death of his mother, Nero divorced his first wife, Octavia III and re-married Poppaea, with whom he was said to have had an affair for three years before that.<sup>13</sup> In A.D. 62, Burrus passed away of unknown causes; three years later, in A.D. 65., Seneca was accused of plotting against the emperor and was forced to commit suicide.<sup>14</sup> Now, Nero was left without any of his previous pillars of support and advice. His rule changed considerably, with his normal methods of legitimation out of the way. As before, he presented himself as the culmination of the glorious Julio-Claudian dynasty, he was now more free to do what he wished. The Senate hardly bothered him. In A.D. 64, after the great fire that destroyed the majority of Rome (three districts were completely destroyed, and an additional seven only barely scraped through), he had a gigantic palace built in the middle of the city.<sup>15</sup> During the years A.D. 66-67 he went on a "grand tour through Greece, where he attended all the major athletic competitions, and was able to return to Rome a victor, hailed as a god and the ruler of the entire world.<sup>16</sup> All through these years, Nero had established himself as an artist, regularly staging performances where he sang and played instruments (naturally, he was later said to have had very little talent in these fields). We must bear in mind the position of actors within Roman society: while they were lauded for amusing the masses, they were also the subject of

---

<sup>10</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.8.

<sup>11</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.11-13.

<sup>13</sup> O. Hekster, *Romeinse keizers: De macht van het imago* (Amsterdam 2009) 137.

<sup>14</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 138.

<sup>15</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 206.

<sup>16</sup> S.E. Alcock, 'Nero at play: The emperor's Grecian odyssey' in: J. Elsner, J. Masters (eds.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, history and representation* (Chapel Hill 1994) 99.

absolute disdain because they used their bodies to earn money, and were hardly even seen as citizens.<sup>17</sup>

Although he had maintained his popularity amongst the populace, the Senators had never warmed to Nero. They had kept their silence for years, but in A.D. 68. Gaius Julius Vindex, a governor from Gaul, rose in opposition. Although he and the troops of Servius Sulpicius Galba were quickly defeated by imperial troops, the Senate finally saw its chance to get rid of their nemesis and declared Nero a *hostis*, or public enemy, on the eighth of June A.D. 68.<sup>18</sup> Following a letter claiming he would be punished in a most gruesome manner, he committed suicide, assisted by his private secretary.<sup>19</sup>

He was the first Julio-Claudian not to be buried in the Mausoleum of Augustus. He did receive a worthy funeral, mostly thanks to his mistress and nurses.<sup>20</sup> Despite his dishonourable passing, his grave was often honoured even many years after his death. Publicly, however, he was quickly demonised. The Senate made Nero subject to *damnatio memoriae*, which meant that all depictions of the emperor, as well as mentions of his name in inscriptions, were to be removed. Some historians argue that it was Nero's philhellenism, or love of Greece and Greek things, that caused him to be so ferociously condemned, because he attempted to internalize Hellenistic political culture into a city that was far from ready to accept these actions.<sup>21</sup> The overly large statue in front of the Golden House, the Greek games and the theatrical performances were, perhaps, too much. Others put the blame on the Senators as well as Nero's successors, who had to legitimise themselves by demonising another.<sup>22</sup> Whatever the case may be, in the years following his death not everyone seemed to be happy Nero was gone: at least three fake Nero's popped up after his death, claiming to be the deceased emperor. Their reception seems to have been generally positive.<sup>23</sup>

Our own view on Nero is not just a product of the writings of Suetonius, Tacitus and other classical authors, although their scathing reports written under later emperors certainly did not help his case. There was also a strong Christian aversion to the emperor, perhaps attributable

---

<sup>17</sup> C. Edwards, 'Beware of imitations: theatre and the subversion of imperial identity' in: Elsner, *Reflections of Nero*, 83-97, 83-86.

<sup>18</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 148.

<sup>19</sup> Suet. *Nero* 49.

<sup>20</sup> Suet. *Nero* 50.

<sup>21</sup> P. Stewart, *Statues in Roman society: representation and response* (Oxford 2003) 171.

<sup>22</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 152.

<sup>23</sup> Hekster 149; for examples, see: Tac. *Hist.* 2.8-9 ('The fame of the pretender was increasing from day to day'; Suet. *Nero* 57.2 ('[...] some person of obscure birth gave himself out for Nero, that name secured for him so favourable a reception from the Parthians, that he was very zealously supported, and it was with much difficulty that they were prevailed upon to give him up.')

to the fact that he had made scapegoats of the Christian community in Rome after the great fire of A.D. 64.<sup>24</sup> So extreme was the aversion to Nero that he was sometimes called the antichrist, and if he ever returned to Earth it would signal the beginning of the Apocalypse. The Greek 'Neron Caesar', when transliterated to Hebrew, had the numeric equivalent of 666: the number of the Devil in Christian tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Looking at these sources it seems clear why Nero was demonised, and one would even get the feeling he deserved it. Objectively, however, the amount of demonic qualities Nero possessed may have been far smaller than we have always believed.

---

<sup>24</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 15.44.2.

<sup>25</sup> C.A. Corey, *The book of Revelation* (Collegeville 2006) 61.

## Chapter 2: Nero and Military Power

Throughout Roman history, and even more during Imperial Roman history, the military has played a large role. Augustus knew how to control this class of Roman society and use them in his favour, Caligula was initially loved and welcomed by them, and Claudius was chosen by them in the confusion created by Caligula's death. Most of the previous emperors, however, had attained major military victories, which Nero had not. Still, this does not immediately mean the military had lost in power; simply that the emperor managed them in a different way. Another mark of importance was the assertion of the emperor's domination over the provinces, which was generally done by displays of power. This chapter will deal with both the material evidence of Nero's relation with the armed forces, and his actions.

### Material evidence

The majority of Nero's references to the military can be found on numismatic materials, although several statues of Nero wearing military gear were also found. Several Neronian coins refer to the emperor's military prowess, despite it being relatively small. Figure 1 (see Appendix, separately enclosed) is one of the coins that directly refers to a military victory. Struck for several years starting in A.D. 64, the obverse shows a typical bareheaded portrait of Nero, encircled by his title. The reverse shows a detailed image of triumphal arch, crowned with a *quadriga*. It refers to Domitius Corbulo's success in Armenia, where the general had successfully beaten the Parthians and subsequently regained the land that they had declared free from Roman domination.<sup>26</sup> Just as beautifully detailed as the famous coin displaying the harbour of Ostia, it sends a clear message: the emperor is still responsible for the grandness of the Roman Empire. The arch no longer stands in Rome, making this coin the only piece of evidence left for the arch, which was probably finished around A.D. 62. The themes of the arch were relatively common, as was the location on the Capitoline hill.<sup>27</sup> On numismatic evidence, the arch is not shown from the front, as was usual; instead it is shown in perspective so that the colossal statue of Mars in the alcove on the side of the arch can be seen.<sup>28</sup> Lack of space does not allow for an elaboration on all aspects of the arch, but many elements incorporated in it, such as the iconography, the use of reliefs on the arch itself and the pillars

---

<sup>26</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.23-26.

<sup>27</sup> F.S. Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome: a study of the Roman Honorary Arch before and under Nero* (Rome 1985) 64.

<sup>28</sup> Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero*, 81.

were incredibly innovative and would serve as an example for later arches.<sup>29</sup> Although the artistic novelty of the arch may not have registered with the general populace, it was obviously a well-thought-out symbolic gesture, meant to convey the military power of the emperor.

Several other coins show Nero's interest in sending out military propaganda. A coin from between A.D. 62 and 68 (figure 2) shows a scene of *decursio*, with Nero on a prancing horse, accompanied by a second horseman holding a *vexillum*. The *vexillum* was a symbol of military units, comparable to banners or flags.<sup>30</sup> *Decursio* was the practice of cavalry manoeuvres for the praetorian soldiers that Nero instated.<sup>31</sup> It had the double function of being military training as well as being a ceremonial exercise. Several mints showed a similar scene, marking the importance of the message.

A similar military tradition, and one that emperors over time repeatedly portrayed themselves doing, was the *adlocutio*. In this ceremony the emperor addressed his troops. On an A.D. 63 coin (figure 3), Nero is addressing what looks like the praetorian guard. Next to him is a praetorian prefect, and below them are stood three soldiers carrying standards. The emperor's status is made clear through his size and his pose, the right hand raised in the traditional gesture for the *adlocutio*. This ceremony marked important events in the empire, either for the military itself or for the emperor, such as accession to the throne. The emperor would raise his right hand and talk to the troops, thus forging a closer bond with the military. This tradition went back to pre-imperial times, but became especially important during the principate.<sup>32</sup>

Other coins refer to Nero's military prowess. If nothing else, these coins are a continuation of previous emperors' propaganda. Figure 4 shows Nikè, the goddess of victory (both military or otherwise, such as in games); Figure 5 shows Virtus, the personification of bravery, holding a spear in one hand and the *parazonium* in the other. The *parazonium* was an elongated dagger that Virtus was usually pictured carrying, and it was a largely symbolic weapon used to rally the troops.<sup>33</sup>

An obvious reference to the troops is seen in figure 6, showing a legionary standard.

---

<sup>29</sup> Kleiner, *The arch of Nero*, 79-81.

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.dorchester.com/shop/roman\\_type/sestertius\\_nero.htm](http://www.dorchester.com/shop/roman_type/sestertius_nero.htm) (accessed 17-3-2012).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.forumancientcoins.com/numiswiki/view.asp?key=Adlocutio> (accessed 9-4-2012).

Cicero refers to the *adlocutio*: Cic. *Prov.* 4.9.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.forumancientcoins.com/numiswiki/view.asp?key=parazonium> (accessed 10-4-2012).

An A.D. 65 mint (figure 7) shows the closed doors of the temple of Janus in Rome, which would only close in times of peace. This was to, once again, emphasise the Armenian victory. The legend says: *Pace P.R. terra marique parva Ianum clusit* (He closed the temple of Janus after establishing Roman peace on land and sea).<sup>34</sup>

### Actions

While material propaganda is incredibly important, and coins were seen all over the empire, an emperor's actions were always monitored. Whether the message was one that his subjects agreed with is always doubtful, but the emperors must have been overly aware that every action counted towards the image they projected. In military matters this was especially important. As mentioned earlier, the military had long been in a powerful position with regard to the Principate: they could make and break the current leader. They were the ones who had chosen Claudius as their emperor years before, and no one had argued.<sup>35</sup>

Despite some small altercations, Nero had never personally enjoyed a military victory.<sup>36</sup> After what some historians like to see as his 're-invention', he seemed to want to change this.<sup>37</sup> He did this in the shape of a 'tour' through Greece, which under Roman rule was named Achaia. The expedition lasted sixteen months and spanned the years A.D. 66-67. During this time, Nero participated in many athletic events, allowing him to finally return to Rome as 'Olympian Victor, Pythian Victor, Nero Hercules, Nero Apollo, 'the only victor of the Grand Tour, the only one from the beginning of time'.<sup>38</sup> Reportedly, he visited the following major festivals: Actian, Pythian, Isthmian, Nemean, Olympian, and Actian, Pythian and Isthmian again.<sup>39</sup> In order to complete this panhellenic circuit, many of the games had to be rescheduled in order to fit the emperor's wishes. Cassius Dio reports that Nero triumphed in Rome, carrying 1808 crowns won at the various festivals. One can imagine that this placed the emperor in the middle of society, but in a completely different manner than he had been before. Now he could boast about physical prowess, about a competition in which he

---

<sup>34</sup> B.H. Warmington, *Nero: Reality and legend* (London 1969) 121.

<sup>35</sup> Cass. Dio 60.1.

<sup>36</sup> I am referring, here, to both the struggle over the border province of Armenia, as well as other events, such as the struggle of the Roman army against that of the Celtic queen Boudicca in A.D. 61. Van Hooff calls this struggle a 'missed chance' for Nero to win a true military triumph (Van Hooff, 236).

<sup>37</sup> Typically placed after the quinquennium, when Nero changed his way of ruling to something more autocratic. This is a general change, of which the new drive for displays of physical prowess was an aspect.

<sup>38</sup> Cass. Dio 62.20.5; 21.1.

<sup>39</sup> Alcock, 'Nero at play' 111, note 5.

outshone everyone else. Perhaps it was not a typical military victory, but then again Nero probably had never wanted to be a typical emperor, or indeed emperor at all.<sup>40</sup>

With regard to popular opinion, it is almost certain that the emperor's presence in the East furthered his popularity there, but perhaps made him less popular back in Rome.<sup>41</sup> He reportedly took many prominent Romans with him on this tour, though the purpose of this is conflicted.<sup>42</sup> In historiographical tradition the 'expedition' came to be marked with failures, hubris and mockery, not only because of his athletic 'victories', but also because of other things: he made several attempts to dig a canal through the Isthmus and a brief liberation Greece.<sup>43</sup> He was mocked for all these things, but a closer look at precedents and contemporary practices may reveal another picture than simple madness.

The canal through the Isthmus is a clear case of the subjectivity of ancient (and more modern) historians. Nero was mocked, said to have broken the earth with a golden mattock, and never finished this project.<sup>44</sup> His delusions of grandeur must have caused him to attempt such a feat, which had never before been completed, so why would Nero be the exception? Of course, the mere sentiment expressed above belies subjectivity. As Alcock proves, Nero was far from the first one to attempt this feat (which was eventually only completed in 1893!).<sup>45</sup> Periander, Demetrios Poliorketes, Julius Caesar and Caligula had tried, and failed, before Nero. However, looking at his precedents, this was not just a crazy fantasy cooked up by a madman. It was, in fact, a very practical project, as it would have connected the Eastern and the Central Mediterranean, bypassing the dangerous route along the Peloponnesus.<sup>46</sup> This was not the first aquatic project Nero had started: there is evidence of other canals, or at least plans for them, on the Italic mainland, which would have made transportation easier and quicker. Examples are a canal from Ostia to Rome, and a canal that would have linked Lake Avernus to the Tiber.<sup>47</sup> Apart from the practical aspects, canals were tangible symbols of imperial domination, showing off the emperor's resources and his ability to manipulate the nature of his territories. This sent a message not only to the people living in the provinces, but also to

---

<sup>40</sup> Cass. Dio 61.4.

<sup>41</sup> V. Rüdiger, *Political dissidence under Nero: the price of dissimulation* (London 1993) 187.

<sup>42</sup> Cass. Dio 63.11, 4 says maybe it was because Nero hoped they would perish on this tour, which seems a rather far-fetched hope to have.

<sup>43</sup> Alcock, 'Nero at play', 98.

<sup>44</sup> Suet., *Nero* 19.2; Cassius Dio also writes about the digging of the canal (62.16.1-2), as does Philostratus (*Philostr. VA* 4.24).

<sup>45</sup> Alcock, 'Nero at play', 102.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

the military, who would have been the ones employed in the digging of the canals: Nero may not have conquered new land, but he *did* attempt to improve the existing territories with practical measures, a sign of his physical prowess.

Another event which was widely criticised by Roman historians was the carrying off of Greek cult statues to Rome. Many regarded this as indulging in selfish pleasure, an aspect of a Philhellene's obsession with no regard for the inhabitants of Greece.<sup>48</sup> Nero was said to have taken numerous Greek statues from towns such as Athens and Delphi and their holy places, either carrying them off to Rome or placing them in other Roman dominions.<sup>49</sup> This seemingly selfish act has the potential to mean something else, however. When looking at triumphs, cult statues from conquered lands often featured in the procession, symbolising the domination of the Romans over foreign gods and foreign cultures.<sup>50</sup> Famous, though not always celebrated military leaders had gone before Nero in doing this, such as Marcellus, Sulla and Augustus.<sup>51</sup> Placing such statues in a new, Roman context was a well-known tactic of domination, a symbol of Roman hegemony. If we allow ourselves for a moment to disregard Nero's reputation, why then can his acts not be interpreted within the same context? Nero may have been a philhellene, but this by no means has to imply that his actions were not well-thought-through, or that he acted less rationally than his precedents did.

Coupling the material evidence of the first part of this chapter and the historical events of the second half, I would postulate that the famous Artist Emperor did, in fact, show an interest in military matters, as well as asserting his power over the provinces. By portraying himself in military actions, as well as showing off the few actual military successes that happened under his rule, he showed the people and the armed forces that their leader was committed to these proceedings. As unconventional as it was, the tour through Greece was meant to show his domination over the provinces instead of military victories or beatdowns. Though the troops may not always have been satisfied with Nero, he clearly realised the importance of the army and their role in the legitimisation of his rule.

---

<sup>48</sup> Nero reportedly stole from Thespiai its famous Eros (Paus. 9.27.1-4), and other cult statues from Delphi (Paus. 10.7.1) and Olympia (Paus. 5.25.8-9; 5.26-3).

<sup>49</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 31, 148-9.

<sup>50</sup> M. Beard, 'The triumph of the absurd: Roman street theatre' in: C. Edwards, G. Woolf (eds.), *Rome the cosmopolis* (Cambridge 2006) 21-43, 24.

<sup>51</sup> Alcock, 'Nero at play', 100.

## Chapter 3: Nero and Women

It is a well-known fact that women did not play a prominent part in Roman public life, even when they were related or married to the imperial family. They may have had power behind the scenes, but they were only rarely used in propagandistic messages. Imperial Rome had briefly seen Livia portrayed on coinage, but until Nero very few female mortals were portrayed. Nero's intense, though seemingly dysfunctional, relationships with several women changed this trend, however. This chapter will illustrate this change, and why it was important.

### The best mother

Several women can be mentioned in relation to Nero. The first, and most influential one, was his mother, Agrippina Minor (A.D. 15 – A.D. 59). Although he had other advisors, notably the philosopher Seneca and prefect of the Praetorian Guard Sextus Afranius Burrus, Agrippina had practically put Nero on the throne.<sup>52</sup> As the sister of Emperor Caligula and the wife of Emperor Claudius, she had had a strong position in the imperial halls for many years. With the accession of her son, which was largely perpetrated by Agrippina herself, she became the priestess of the cult of Divus Claudius, her deified late husband.<sup>53</sup> A similar position had previously been filled by Livia, wife of emperor Augustus. Agrippina II met her end at the hands of her son in 59 AD, but before this she figured prominently on several coins and statue groups.

### Numismatics

The first example is the obverse of a *denarius* from A.D. 54 (figure 9), minted in Rome. The legend says: *Agripp(ina) Aug(usta) divi claud(ii) Neronis caes(aris) mater*".<sup>54</sup> The reverse shows an image of the deified Claudius. The same images were also featured on *aurei*.<sup>55</sup> Although the emperor is mentioned here, it is only in relation to his mother. His full title has been relegated to the obverse of the coin. This was understandably shocking: a woman was given a more prominent place on a coin than the emperor himself. Several grammatical structures also point towards an inequality in power: Agrippina's name and title are in the

---

<sup>52</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 116.

<sup>53</sup> C.B. Rose, *Dynastic commemoration and imperial portraiture in the Julio-Claudian period* (Cambridge 1997) 46.

<sup>54</sup> RIC 7.

<sup>55</sup> RIC 6.

nominative clause, whereas Nero's was in the dative.<sup>56</sup> The implication of using the first clause for the woman and the third for the emperor himself was that the emperor was subject to his mother, that she held the power, not him. This probably caused quite the commotion, and a new, adapted mint came out only several months later (figure 10). The inscription on the obverse was changed, and Nero clearly has the upper hand on this coin, his face obscuring his mother's and his full title clearly declared where everyone would see it. These images, both former and latter, were repeated on many of the Eastern Mediterranean coins, where the original Roman mints were used as examples.<sup>57</sup>

### Inscriptions

Agrippina's influence extended to inscriptions as well. It was usual for an emperor to refer to his lineage in letterheads and inscriptions, but before Nero only the paternal line was referred to.<sup>58</sup> Nero, perhaps because his mother's lineage was so impressive, started featuring matrilineal connections.<sup>59</sup> The majority of these were structured as follows:

*'Divi Claudii Filius Germanici Caesaris Nepos Ti. Caesaris Pronepos Divi Augusti  
Abneppos'.*<sup>60</sup>

Nero is named as the son of the deified Claudius, but this connection is followed by the matrilineal connections to Germanicus, Tiberius and Augustus. In this manner Nero was related both to Julian *and* Claudian *divi*. Inscriptions of this kind are found all over the empire, and its source should be clear: letters sent by the emperor were headed with this title, and although it was a new formula it was rapidly followed by provincial rulers.<sup>61</sup>

### Statues

Not many statues of Nero have survived, due to *damnatio memoriae*, and in the confusion following Agrippina's death many, although not all, statues of the emperor's mother were destroyed as well. Only one group depicting both Nero and Agrippina has survived, in the *Sebasteion* in Aphrodisias (see figure 8). It was located in the north portico of this building, and faced a relief cycle of nearly a hundred metres long depicting the Julio-Claudian

---

<sup>56</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 47.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 133.

<sup>60</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 47.

<sup>61</sup> A few examples are: CIL III 6123 and ILS 232 ; an example of this title being used by provincial rulers is ILS 233.

emperors and their divine origins. The positioning of Nero and Agrippina on the relief may represent Nero as the culmination of the dynasty's achievements.<sup>62</sup>

Part of the relief in which this group figures was already dedicated during the reign of Claudius, but it was finished under Nero. The relief shows Nero being crowned with a laurel wreath by Agrippina, who herself is wearing a diadem and is holding a *cornucopia* in her other arm.<sup>63</sup> Although Nero's arms have not survived, he probably held a spear in his right hand and an orb in the left. Interestingly, Nero, well-known for his lack of military victories, is the only emperor on this *Sebasteion* who was shown wearing military garb. Rose states clearly that the pose, attributes and the dress of the couple were based on the cult statues of Augustus and Roma in Pergamum.<sup>64</sup>

The power relations depicted in this scene are highly unusual as well. The imagery is not so strange, but an imperial benefactor was usually crowned by a personification, not another member of the imperial family.<sup>65</sup> It is an image that shows Agrippina's dominance, and illustrates the thoughts and views of the designer on the power Agrippina wielded.

In order to understand the significance of this statue group, as well as inscriptions, when relating them to imperial propaganda, we must remember that plans for statues or statue groups had to be approved by the emperor himself.<sup>66</sup> Generally, a donor would compose an arrangement for a statuary group before sending a request for permission to erect it to the emperor. The emperor could then approve the model, or modify it. The design of the donor was based on their interpretation of the Imperial family, and thus can be a good reflection on the success (or lack thereof) of Imperial propaganda. Despite regional variations, the relationship between family members as seen by the population of a far-away province would be a product of direct Imperial propaganda: inscriptions, letters and coinage.<sup>67</sup>

Although Nero seems to have wanted to discredit his mother, the events following her death probably confused many officials in the outlying region. An example of this confusion can be

---

<sup>62</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 47; For a detailed description on this relief, as well as other parts of the *Sebasteion*, refer to: R.R.R. Smith, 'The imperial reliefs at the *Sebasteion* at Aphrodisias' *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987) 88-138.

<sup>63</sup> The diadem was another unusual honour. Gods and personifications, such as Roma, were often depicted wearing this headgear. They were closely associated with Hellenistic royalties and Olympic gods, and were, as such, not often used during someone's lifetime. The diadem featured mostly on later Neronian art.

<sup>64</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 47.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> For an elaboration on the process of dedication, see Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 51-53.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart, *Statues in Roman society*, 271.

seen in Epidauros, where one of the statues of Agrippina was destroyed while the other was not.<sup>68</sup>

### Octavia III

As with Nero and his mother, it is difficult to find much material evidence of Octavia III, considering the destruction of Nero's image sometimes resulted in that of others as well. Nero's first wife, Octavia III, was not a newcomer to imperial propaganda: she was the daughter of emperor Claudius and had been depicted on provincial coinage and in statuary groups from a young age.<sup>69</sup> Like Agrippina, this put Octavia in a position of strength which is mirrored in the language and imagery used to describe her. At Conssus the imagery on coinage assimilated Nero and Octavia to Helios and Selene; in Sardis Octavia was referred to as 'thea', or goddess.<sup>70</sup> Despite this, there are not many surviving references to Claudius' daughter, leaving us with only one statuary base.<sup>71</sup> In 62, Nero divorced her and she was exiled, and although historians think she was not denounced, Nero *did* re-marry and it was only proper for his ex-wife, fallen from grace, to be removed from the public eye.<sup>72</sup>

### Poppaea and Claudia

Nero's second wife was named Poppaea, and she gave the emperor a daughter named Claudia. The child died when she was only 4 months old, but both she and her mother were immediately honoured by the state. They were both named as 'Augusta', and for Poppaea this was commemorated on a set of coins in A.D. 64/65 (figure 11).<sup>73</sup> On it we can see Nero and Poppaea, with a legend saying 'Augustus' and 'Augusta'. The imperial couple's poses are near identical, and thanks to their attributes we can identify the association with the supernatural. Both carry *paterias* in their hands, and Nero is shown wearing a radiate crown and a sceptre while Poppaea carries a *cornucopia*. This would have associated her with the personification of Concordia, who in her turn was associated with marital harmony within the imperial family.<sup>74</sup> We can assume this was a familiar image, as Concordia was featured on other contemporary coinage as well. Although this may seem like a fairly common coin, then, the presentation of a living emperor and empress was quite the opposite, with Claudius and

---

<sup>68</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 47.

<sup>69</sup> RIC I, 124 (Claudius).

<sup>70</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 48; RPC 2999, RPC 3000 (Nero).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> RIC 44, 45 (Nero).

<sup>74</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 49.

Agrippina being the only precedents.<sup>75</sup> Just like Octavia, the eastern provinces honoured Nero's second wife: in Smyrna a standing Nikè with a wreath and a *cornucopia* was featured underneath the legend 'Nikè Poppaea', and in Sardis a similar type had the legend 'Augusta'. The reason for Poppaea's assimilation with Nikè in these regions is unclear, although it might relate to the success of Nero's general in Armenia.<sup>76</sup> This is one of the few instances where a woman is linked to a political theme instead of traditional feminine themes such as fertility or the harvest.<sup>77</sup>

Poppaea passed away in A.D. 65, reportedly from a kick in the stomach by Nero while she was pregnant.<sup>78</sup> Immediately after her death she was deified, and now both her and her late infant daughter were connected to Augustus, Livia and Claudia during sacrifices.<sup>79</sup> A shrine was dedicated to Poppaea shortly after her death. The inscription was dedicated to Poppaea Sabina, Goddess Venus.<sup>80</sup> The town of Luna, in Etruria, set up monuments to both Nero and Diva Poppaea and Claudia, and Paneas in Syria struck coins showing both Diva Poppaea and Diva Claudia in temples.<sup>81</sup> As can be seen in figure 12, Poppaea is seated, and carries a *cornucopia*, an imitation of Concordia that we have seen previously.

### Statilia

Statilia Messalina was Nero's third and last wife. She accompanied the emperor on his tour through Greece (see 'Nero and the military'), and as such was awarded many honours as the empress was seen throughout Greece and Asia Minor.<sup>82</sup> Three mints struck coins with Statilia's portrait, and statues of her and Nero invoked as Zeus Eleutherios were set up in the temple of Apollo in Ptoia.<sup>83</sup> The unusual thing about this was the fact that they shared the temple, and it must have been a special honour to have set the temple up as such.<sup>84</sup> In Rome itself, evidence is lacking. Statilia was only married to Nero for two years before his death, most of which was spent abroad accompanying her husband on his Grecian tour.

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.; RIC 80; RIC 81; RIC 117; RIC 119 (Claudius).

<sup>76</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 49.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Suet. *Nero* 35.3.

<sup>79</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 49.

<sup>80</sup> P. Kragelund, 'The temple and birthplace of Diva Poppaea', *The Classical Quarterly* 60 (2010) 559-568, 559.

<sup>81</sup> For the inscriptions in Luna, see CIL 11.6955 and CIL 11.1331. CIL 11.1331 is also a good example of Nero's identification with both the Julian and the Claudian line.

<sup>82</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 49.

<sup>83</sup> For the full inscription on this matter, see IG 7.1, 2713.

<sup>84</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 49.

In conclusion, Nero's use of women in his propagandistic material was relatively innovative, at least when we look at Agrippina Minor's role in the image he projected. She had a far larger role in Roman public life than had been seen before, and sometimes this clearly went too far for contemporary Roman tastes. His wives and daughter were portrayed more conservatively, and he used their noble heritage (or, in Poppaea's and Claudia's case, their death and subsequent divine status) to legitimise his own rule.

## Chapter 4: Nero and the Senate

By 54 AD, the Senate knew that it had lost its previous power and influence in matters of the state. All pretence had been lost, and it was clear that the Roman Empire had but one leader. However, most emperors still had to deal with the Senate in their day-to-day business. How did Nero handle this precarious political situation?

After the appropriate time of mourning for his adoptive father's death had passed, Nero talked in front of the Senate. Despite the deification of Claudius, the speech, written by Seneca, emphasised that the wrongs done to the Senate under his rule would be put right again. He would no longer act as a judge in all private court cases. He would not allow bribery and trickery. Private matters and matters concerning the state would remain strictly separated, and most of all, the Senate would retain its ancient powers. The Italic mainland and its provinces would fall under the jurisdiction of the consuls and the Senate, whereas Nero would take care of military matters.<sup>85</sup> In short, he was promising to restore Imperial Rome to its original state, honest and safe, and create an environment in which the old ways could thrive.

Nero also showed his close relationship with the Senate, and the faith he put in them, to the empire at large. As can be seen on an A.D. 55 coin, the first ten years of Nero's rule all gold and silver coinage carried the inscription EX SC (*Ex Senatus Consulto*). This was a public honour to the Senate, signifying the desire of the new emperor to cooperate with the Senate.<sup>86</sup> In the first few years of his reign, the emperor seemed unsure in his policy: a conflict resulting from the influence of his teachers and his mother. Due to this conflict, Nero did not stick to one mode of legitimisation, and he tried to cooperate with the Senate as much as he tried to legitimise his own position by way of lineage.<sup>87</sup>

A change in this positive, if ambiguous policy came shortly after Agrippina's death. Although he maintained the support of the Roman people, he cut ties with the institutions he had trusted previously in his reign. He could no longer legitimise his rule by way of Senate, and did not even have military success to fall back on. His popularity with other groups made it less of a necessity for him to cater the Senate, and he became known for the execution of many senators. Other emperors had gone before him in the execution of senators, and by the time Nero turned against this class the memory of Claudius' actions in this field was still fresh.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 13.4.

<sup>86</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 132.

<sup>87</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 136.

<sup>88</sup> Warmington, *Nero*, 135.

He hardened his politics, and the *maiestas* law wreaked havoc upon the senatorial class and its opinion of the emperor. *Maiestas*, meaning treason, was prosecuted harshly from A.D. 62 on, and its effects even lead to a conspiracy in A.D. 65.<sup>89</sup> Although the attempt on Nero's life was averted, it did lead Nero to act even more strictly than he had done before, and numerous trials caused the higher classes to resent Nero more and more. Needless to say, the formal declaration of Nero as *hostis* in A.D. 68 shows that the earlier message he had sent was not sufficient to carry him through years of negligence.

---

<sup>89</sup> Warmington, *Nero*, 138-139.

## Chapter 5: Nero and *Imitatio Augusti*

“To establish still further his character, he declared, "that he designed to govern according to the model of Augustus;" and omitted no opportunity of showing his generosity, clemency, and complaisance.”<sup>90</sup>

Although the Emperor clearly deviated from Augustus' example later on in his ruling period, at first he did seem to want to legitimize his rule by using his predecessors as an example. Since Nero had no military successes, nor any other ways to legitimise his rule, he explicitly used his family in order to be accepted.

### Divus Claudius

Like his predecessor Tiberius, Nero tried to emulate previous emperors, at least at the beginning of his reign. Although the association with Claudius was sometimes a dubious one, Nero clearly preferred the perks of being a *divi filius*, the son of a god.

Immediately after Claudius' death, Nero started the construction of a massive temple devoted to *Divus* Claudius. The choice to refer to the late emperor as such was already a clear one: Claudius was the first to become *divus* in 40 years. The temple, built on the Caelian hill, measured 205 by 175 metres, which was the largest sacred space to be built in Rome up to that time.<sup>91</sup> The temple stood on a gigantic podium, although this podium was used as a *nymphaeum* when the construction of the temple for Claudius had ceased. The walls of the podium were thus completely covered in elaborate fountains, and this manipulation of nature was a typical Neronian display of power. On top of the podium stood the temple to *Divus* Claudius.

Coins, both in silver and gold, were struck for the newly deified Claudius as well. In figure 13, we see an *aureus* from A.D. 55. It shows Nero and Agrippina on the obverse (see ‘Nero and Women’) and Claudius on the reverse. The former emperor is depicted standing in a chariot drawn by elephants, and is perhaps flanked by Fides. The imagery implies the divine foundations of the new regime, as well as an association with Tiberius. A similar coin (figure 14) shows a portrait of *Divus* Claudius on the obverse, and an ornamental *quadriga* crowned with a smaller *quadriga*, which in turn is flanked on either side by Victories. On some Eastern

---

<sup>90</sup> Suet. *Nero* 10 (trans. Alexander Thomson 1889)

<sup>91</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 126. It should be noted that the temple was not finished until the Flavian dynasty, since Nero aborted the process before its end.

Mediterranean coinage, Nero's portrait was added to *Divus* Claudius, and sometimes even to Augustus and Tiberius.<sup>92</sup>

Naturally, the deification of Claudius by Nero had one goal only: to show where Nero came from and to emphasise that these origins were divine. Nero, as mentioned previously, was constructed to be the culmination of a glorious dynasty, and deifying his adopted father had no small part in this. Claudius had been popular with the people, and this strong propagandistic message must have helped in the process of accepting the new emperor.<sup>93</sup>

A note can be made about the extent to which Nero actually followed Claudius; as mentioned in the previous chapter, Nero's speech to the Senate may have mentioned that he would change the course that Claudius had taken, but then again Claudius had been incredibly unpopular with the Senate and had not done much to change this.<sup>94</sup> This manipulation of different groups was common, something that Augustus had been an expert at, and in either case the most important message, that of *pietas*, was clear to everyone.

### Britannicus

Nero's younger brother, Britannicus, passed away shortly after Nero's accession. Despite furious campaigning on Seneca's part to dismiss aspersions, Nero still remained a suspect for Britannicus' 'suspicious death'.<sup>95</sup> However the case may be, with Britannicus out of the way, Nero's position as emperor was strengthened. The boy would have been a contender for Nero's spot on the throne if he had not been too young to become emperor. Although the boy, who was a son of Claudius by birth, had never been emperor, Nero used his death to strengthen his own position within the empire. In an edict issued by Nero given in A.D. 55, the year Britannicus died, he is reported to have said:

“It was a national tradition to withdraw these untimely obsequies from the public gaze and not to detain it by panegyrics and processions. However, now that he had lost the aid of his brother, not only were his remaining hopes centered in the state but the senate and the people themselves must so much the more cherish their prince as the one survivor of a family born to the heights of power.”<sup>96</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 46; RIC 616 (Nero), RIC 620 (Nero), RIC 622 (Nero).

<sup>93</sup> For more information on Claudius' legitimation of his rule and the people he catered to the most, see: Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 78-81.

<sup>94</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 80.

<sup>95</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 131.

<sup>96</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 13.7, as translated by J. Jackson, Loeb edition, 1981.

Despite the fact that this may be interpreted as a sign of remorse, it is clear how the emperor used tradition and family for his own goals. This was not a new construct: previous emperors had often been depicted with their deceased siblings.<sup>97</sup> In one statuary group in Amisus, erected between A.D. 63-65, Nero, Poppaea and Britannicus were portrayed together. This was a well-established way for provincial towns to honour the emperor, and as such should not be interpreted as being especially strange or callous.<sup>98</sup>

### Other emperors

It is difficult to determine the extent to which Nero modelled himself on previous emperors besides Claudius. It is said that he acted with Augustus in mind when he displayed *liberalitas* (generosity), *clementia* (mildness) and *comitas* (charm).<sup>99</sup> However, the reason an emperor gets remembered is for his novelty, not his staying power, and this Nero displayed in spades. While he did look at tradition, he also *continued* it, using the acts of his predecessors to further himself. This is especially clear in his building, as well as the matter of imperial divinity, as we will read in the following chapters.

---

<sup>97</sup> Rose, *Imperial portraiture*, 48.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 131.

## Chapter 6: Nero and Building

“There was nothing, however, in which he was more ruinously prodigal than in building.”<sup>100</sup>

Early Imperial architecture was marked by simplicity. After the excesses of the late Republic, Augustus propagated modesty and simplicity, both in personal conduct and outward appearance. The Roman people seemed to think positively of the fact that Augustus had a relatively small and modest house (compared to late Republican standards), despite its actual size, which in total was not to be frowned at.<sup>101</sup> In light of this tradition, Nero’s personal palace certainly was a deviation, especially after his previous emulation of his predecessors. He had finished Caligula’s circus, completed construction on the harbour in Ostia, and built the market halls of the *Macellum Magnum*, an amphitheatre and baths on the Campus Martius.<sup>102</sup> These were acceptable projects, some of them commemorated on coins. But building projects have a strong influence upon any cityscape, and as such send a strong propagandistic message. A good emperor built good buildings, and those went a long way: it is with good reason that Augustus boasted about the marble city he transformed Rome into, and the prominent place Augustan buildings got on his *Res Gestae*. The amount of buildings on coinage is already a sign of this: wherever those coins went within the empire, Roman subjects would see what good the emperor had done and built. Spurred on by Seneca, the new emperor decided he had to send out his own message instead of looking at the example of others.<sup>103</sup> But Nero could arguably have built anything and it would have been construed as the plans of a despot. As Elsner argues, the quality of a building did not depend on the building itself, but entirely upon the quality, or perceived quality, of the emperor who ordered it.<sup>104</sup> When Caligula used the temple of Castor and Pollux as the vestibule to his own Palace, something which was fiercely condemned after his death, he was doing little more than what Augustus had done with the temple of Apollo and his own house. The fact alone that Caligula was demonised after his death made the difference.

---

<sup>100</sup> Suet. *Nero* 31.1.

<sup>101</sup> Hales, *The Roman house and social identity*, 64.

<sup>102</sup> Elsner, ‘Constructing decadence’ 119.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Your Principate is held to the foretaste you have given’, Sen. *Clem.* I.1.6.

<sup>104</sup> J. Elsner, ‘Constructing decadence: the representation of Nero as imperial builder’ in: J. Elsner, J. Masters (eds.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, history and representation* (Chapel Hill 1994) 112-130, 116-118.

Although it is difficult, in this case, to separate private building from public building (since both send a message: no palace, let alone Nero's Golden House, could be overlooked), I would like to separate this section in two.

### Public building

Although we think of the Golden House first, Nero was also responsible for a large number of public buildings that benefitted the citizens of Rome. He completed several aqueducts, namely the Aqua Claudia and the Aqua Anio Novus.<sup>105</sup>

Another large project that he finished was the building of the harbour at Ostia, which went along with the establishment of new granaries in both Rome and Ostia itself. Because of these projects the water and food supply became more stable, which must have registered with the people of Rome. The harbour at Ostia was commemorated on a coin in A.D. 64. Beautifully detailed, it shows several ships on the reverse, with Neptune sitting below, almost proudly. Nero's portrait graces the other side of the coin, with his usual title. Several other projects benefitted the citizens of Rome, such as the *Macellum Magnum*, a provision market built in A.D. 59, an amphitheatre built in A.D. 57 and, notably, new baths in the Campus Martius. Baths were an important way to connect with the people, considering the amount of time spent in them was quite considerable. Even Martial, writing under the anti-Nero Flavians, wrote: 'What is worse than Nero? What is better than his baths?'<sup>106</sup> As we would see later with the baths of Caracalla, baths went a long way in plying the citizens' favour. With these buildings, both material needs and the need for entertainment were fulfilled.

The amount of appreciation for the buildings, even for the emperor himself, would be hard to judge if we did not have the numismatic record. In this Nero did not seem extravagant. The coin of the temple of Janus, which we have already seen previously, is similar to the one issued by Augustus to signify his own establishment of peace. Similarly, coins depicting the *Macellum Magnum* (figure 15), the *Ara Pacis* (figure 17), the temple of Vesta (figure 18) and Nero's arch (figure 1) joined the coin showing the harbour of Ostia (figure 16). In this way, both useful public buildings and commemorative monuments are portrayed on coins, in a way that had become typical for the Julio-Claudian dynasty.<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>105</sup> For more information on Nero's aqueducts and their uses, please refer to: H. Dodge: 'Greater than the pyramids: the water supply of ancient Rome' in: J. Coulston, H. Dodge (eds.), *Ancient Rome: The archaeology of the Eternal City* (Oxford 2000) 166-209.

<sup>106</sup> Mart. *Spect.* 7.34.4.

<sup>107</sup> Elsner, 'Constructing decadence', 120.

## Private building

The *Domus Aurea* is often cited as Nero's grandest sign of despotism and excess. The construction of this massive complex was started in A.D. 64, after the fire that destroyed eleven of the fourteen districts of Rome.<sup>108</sup> Suetonius has a detailed description of the Golden House:

“Of its dimensions and furniture, it may be sufficient to say thus much: the porch was so high that there stood in it a colossal statue of himself a hundred and twenty feet in height; and the space included in it was so ample, that it had triple porticos a mile in length, and a lake like a sea, surrounded with buildings which had the appearance of a city. Within its area were corn fields, vineyards, pastures, and woods, containing a vast number of animals of various kinds, both wild and tame. In other parts it was entirely over-laid with gold, and adorned with jewels and mother of pearl. The supper rooms were vaulted, and compartments of the ceilings, inlaid with ivory, were made to revolve, and scatter flowers; while they contained pipes which shed unguents upon the guests. The chief banqueting room was circular, and revolved perpetually, night and day, in imitation of the motion of the celestial bodies. The baths were supplied with water from the sea and the Albula. Upon the dedication of this magnificent house after it was finished, all he said in approval of it was, "that he had now a dwelling fit for a man."<sup>109</sup>

A large park is also described by Tacitus.<sup>110</sup> Contemporary writing mocks the scale of this building, saying: “All Rome will be one house: to Veii fly, Should it not stretch to Veii, by and by.”<sup>111</sup>

As mentioned before, the *Domus Aurea* was Nero's semi-private residence, but (even if it did not cover all of Rome) it was a substantial structure, and not one only Nero and his family roamed about in. It was used to receive delegations, clients, and much official business was conducted in the emperor's private residence. Perhaps because of the prominent place the palace had within day-to-day business, they had grown more and more lavish since the death of Augustus. Tiberius' grotto at Sperlonga, Gaius' residence in the *Horti Lamiani* and Claudius' *nymphaeum* at Baiae are all good examples of the lavish building projects previous

---

<sup>108</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 140.

<sup>109</sup> Suet. *Nero* 31 (vert alexander thomson 1889)

<sup>110</sup> Tac., *Ann.* 15.42.

<sup>111</sup> Suet., *Nero* 39.

emperors had conducted. Even the decoration seemed to line up with tradition, such as the mosaics in the *nymphaeum* which can be related to those of the Baiae *nymphaeum*.<sup>112</sup>

If all of these things had precedents, then the *Domus Aurea* seems rather normal—but it was so widely condemned something must have put off the senators, besides a strong dislike of Nero. After all, some of his buildings were not disliked, or even liked, such as the aforementioned baths. The tipping point probably lay in the location of the lavish palace. The complaints mentioned above were not only related to the expensive materials but also to the scale, and the fact that it took up such a large part of the city, effectively changing the logistics of Rome's city centre. The other palaces were all villas, which by definition were built in the countryside. Tacitus laments that:

“The marvels [of the palace] were to consist not so much in gems and gold, materials long familiar and vulgarised by luxury, as in fields and lakes and the air of solitude given by wooded ground alternating with clear tracts and open landscapes.”<sup>113</sup>

So, while the taming of nature by way of aqueducts and *nymphaeums* was a celebrated and proud fact, some boundaries were not to be crossed. Besides that, it encroached upon the boundaries of the city, as well. Seeing as it took up most of the Palatine, Esquiline and the Caelian hills, the previously clearly-defined spaces of the city were no more. The gigantic complex must have been a city-within-a-city, and the people who had previously inhabited these spaces must have felt quite put out. However, with regard to Nero's later demonization, we must remember that the inhabitants of these spaces had either already belonged to the Imperial family, or patricians.<sup>114</sup> A theme that has previously established itself emerges here as well: those that felt duped by the emperor were the ones with the loudest voice after his death, and they were the ones to write history. After the fire of A.D. 64 Nero helped many of the bereaved citizens of Rome, and had new houses built with better protection against fire.<sup>115</sup> Not only that, but it may be possible that parts of the palace, such as the park, were open to the public.<sup>116</sup> This had previously not been possible, and as such it must have been a welcome change from before, when these parts of Rome had only been open to patricians and their clients. Most of those who were excluded by the *Domus Aurea*, which was built on soil destroyed by the fire were patricians.

---

<sup>112</sup> Elsner, 'Constructing decadence', 121.

<sup>113</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 15.42.

<sup>114</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 143.

<sup>115</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 140.

<sup>116</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 143.

After an examination of these facts, then, it seems a little clearer that Nero's building policy was not unprecedented. Numismatic evidence does not stray far from that of his precedents, and apart from the *Domus Aurea* not many buildings were in and of themselves the subject of dislike. Tacitus may speak disdainfully of the consecration of the gymnasium attached to the baths, or enjoyed the fact that the amphitheatre burned to the ground, but the complaints were not about the buildings in and of themselves.<sup>117</sup> They are about Nero's reputation as it reflected on these buildings. Perhaps the disdain would not have been quite as large if he had lived slightly longer, in order for people to have grown used to the new steps he took. When we look at Augustan Rome, even Claudian Rome had already changed significantly. Nero's successor, Vespasian, was incredibly traditional when compared to the Julio-Claudians. He concerned himself mostly with rebuilding, finishing (as in the case of the temple to Divus Claudius) or repurposing Neronian projects (such as the lake in the Golden House, which became the Flavian Amphitheatre).<sup>118</sup> However, his building policy seemed new when compared to Nero, and this is how historians writing under the Flavian dynasty made it seem: Vespasian was a good emperor because he was not Nero, the crazy despot who only thought of himself in all matters.

---

<sup>117</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.47, 15.22.

<sup>118</sup> Alcock, 'Nero at play', 123.

## Chapter 7: Nero and Divinity

“Amid untroubled peace, the Golden Age springs to a second birth;  
at last kindly Themis, throwing off the gathered dust of her mourning, returns to the earth;  
blissful ages attend the youthful prince who pleaded a successful case for the Iuli of the mother town”<sup>119</sup>

### Deification in the Roman Empire

When talking about the extent of divinity that was granted to Roman emperors, we have to walk a fine line. The difference between actual divinity and grandness that surpasses humanity laid in terminology. The first dynasty of the Roman Empire had perfected this, and the way that the greatness of the emperor was propagated was carefully thought-out. Poets could go further, and so could other artists, in their identification of the emperor with a god. Calpurnius’ poems, in which the new ruler is heralded, are a good example of this. If we interpret Calpurnius’ ‘Eclogues’ as a reflection of contemporary opinion on the emperor, it seems that the people surely believed Nero was a divinity. But the lavish compliments and prayers for the emperor’s kindness and the hope for a long life seem just as overdone as Tacitus’ disdain later on.<sup>120</sup>

In either case, Roman gods had always had a closer relationship with the human realm than the Judeo-Christian God has, and they were said to regularly interact with humans. Mythical humans could gain half-god status during their lifetime, and ascend to divinity after death; Emperors like Augustus and Claudius were *god-like* in life and only worshiped as gods in death, allowing their successors to use that status to advance their own. Herein lies the trick: even in those cases of revered emperors, they were declared to be *divus*, deified, not *deus*, god.<sup>121</sup> They could perhaps be compared to idols more than gods. While they had cults with priests they did not have blood sacrifices made in their honour, like the ‘proper’ gods did, nor did people display their portraits in their houses or ask them for particular favours such as

---

<sup>119</sup> Calp. *Ecl.* 1.42-45.

<sup>120</sup> Calp. *Ecl.* 4.121.

<sup>121</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 123. As mentioned, however, poets could take certain liberties and occasionally *did* refer to them as *deus*, such as in Calp. *Ecl.* 4.121.

healing.<sup>122</sup> Participation in the divine cult was nonetheless important, because it was seen as a sign of good Roman citizenship.

### Nero and the divine

As other emperors, then, Nero skirted around the edges of deification, sometimes taking it further than his predecessors had dared. The declaration of Divus Claudius served to make him the son of a deity and his mother the wife of one. Furthermore, it was traditional for an emperor to associate himself with one or more deities. Julius Caesar was memorably close with Venus, and Augustus had a patron deity in Apollo.<sup>123</sup> Claudius' deification was strongly emphasised, with a lavish funeral at which Nero spoke to emphasise this even more to the larger public. The temple to Divus Claudius on the Caelian hill was unforeseen in size (until 64, after which the construction of the temple was forgotten in favour of building a nymphaeum).<sup>124</sup>

When we look at Seneca's 'Pumpkinification' Nero is condoning a completely opposite image of Claudius but does imply his own divine status. In this work, his adoptive father is a klutz, but Nero is associated with the gods. Lachesis has gold woven in with her threads, which she uses to weave him *aurea saecula*, golden times. Apollo is overjoyed to see a fellow musician rule, and requests that the Fates give him a long life.<sup>125</sup> Nero is even physically compared to Apollo.<sup>126</sup> Although this initially may seem like a silly diversion, like we would laugh about a politician we do not agree with, the Pumpkinification was very popular just after Nero's accession, and as such must have influenced large parts of the upper echelons of Roman society.<sup>127</sup> Considering Seneca wrote this, known for serious works and not comedy, this could well be seen as a piece of propaganda.

In A.D. 55, Nero refused the divine honours given to him by an Egyptian *nome*, as well as other honours.<sup>128</sup> It was more usual for the Eastern provinces to bestow divine honours upon living rulers, whereas in Rome itself it was more common to do this after the ruler in question had passed away.<sup>129</sup> It was the emperor's prerogative to associate himself with the divine during his lifetime; in Nero's case, this was often Apollo.<sup>130</sup> Numismatics sometimes pointed

---

<sup>122</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 123.

<sup>123</sup> N.H. Ramage, A. Ramage, *Roman art: Romulus to Constantine* (Upper Saddle River 2009), 130-133.

<sup>124</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 126.

<sup>125</sup> Sen. *Apocol.* 4.1.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Van Hooff, *Nero en Seneca*, 126.

<sup>128</sup> R.K. Sherck, *The roman empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Cambridge 1993) 103, no. 62.

<sup>129</sup> Warmington, *Nero*, 120.

<sup>130</sup> Warmington, *Nero*, 102.

to Nero's association with the divine as well. The reverse of several issues showed a man playing the lyre (figure 19). As a fervent player of the instrument himself, this could be interpreted as a mere portrayal of the emperor, but it probably does not go too far to say that this could be Apollo, or even Nero as Apollo. This was not too shocking, but it became more unusual when coupled with radiate crown. As we saw in figure 11, Nero occasionally portrayed himself with this symbol, which was usually reserved only for deified emperors, but Nero started using it for his own portrait from A.D. 65 on.<sup>131</sup>

When it comes to his building programme, certain divine attributes have certainly called out to us. Not least of all was the 32-metre high statue of the emperor stood next to the Golden House. Made of gilded bronze, it was long thought to have represented Nero as a Sun God, and was reminiscent of the Colossus of Rhodes. When placed next to his new house, this would certainly *look* credible. However, a closer inspection of the statue's building process may give us another view on the matter. During Nero's reign the statue was never finished; instead Vespasian, Nero's successor, had the statue finished with the features of a Sun God instead of Nero.<sup>132</sup> Those aspects of the statue that made it superhuman were mostly its size. Emperors before him seemingly adopted a gliding scale when it came to the size of their statues, and Nero disregarded this entirely and made his statue many times larger than life-size. But the divine association may just have come from Vespasian's additions. After all, three separate historians refer to the statue, and all of them say that it was intended to be an image of the emperor, *not* the image of the emperor as a divinity.<sup>133</sup> While the association with the divine might still have been there, because of its size and the material used, as long as it was not outright stated that this was a statue of Nero as a god the traditions would have been kept to.

---

<sup>131</sup> Warmington, *Nero*, 121.

<sup>132</sup> Hekster, *Romeinse keizers*, 143.

<sup>133</sup> Plin. *H N* 34.45; Suet. *Nero* 31; Cass. Dio 65.15.1.

## Chapter 8: Nero and the People: the Reception of an Emperor

By this point, the construct around the figure of Emperor Nero is far less stable than it originally seemed. One of the most difficult things about interpreting propaganda is the reception of those who did not have their own voice: the ‘plebs’, the everyday working people milling around in the city of Rome. That the Senate had not taken well to Nero is clear, as well as the reasons and the consequences of their dislike, but did normal people feel the same way?

When contemplating this question, several incidents after Nero’s death may illustrate why the answer to this question may not be so clear-cut. Dio Chrysostom tells us that:

“For so far as the rest of his subjects were concerned, there was nothing to prevent his continuing to be Emperor for all time, seeing that even now everybody wishes he were still alive. And the great majority do believe that he is, although in a certain sense he has died not once but often, along with those who had been firmly convinced that he was still alive.”<sup>134</sup>

This is probably an allusion to three fake Nero’s that sprung up in the twenty years after Nero’s death.<sup>135</sup> The so-called ‘crazy emperor’, who ancient sources tell us was much reviled, was warmly welcomed by citizens of the Eastern Roman Empire even after he was supposed to have died. This is as strong an argument as any that popular opinion was not as negative as we would be led to believe. Of course, Greek subjects and those living further to the west should not be confused; Nero had briefly given Greece back its freedom, which would have done a great deal for his popularity amongst this group of citizens.<sup>136</sup> As mentioned earlier, in Greece Nero behaved in a manner that had been normal in the East for much longer than it had been in the West, and it was far easier for them to accept and welcome the Emperor than it was for Romans.<sup>137</sup> The emperor was a famous philhellene, and his representation and propaganda was easily accepted in the East. Following his death there seems to have been some confusion, as evidenced by a temple in Aphrodisias. The reliefs of Nero present in this temple have been treated strangely, half-destructed and half-not, as we saw earlier with

---

<sup>134</sup> Dio Chrys. *Or.* 21.

<sup>135</sup> Rudic, *Political dissidence under Nero*, 188.

<sup>136</sup> IG 7.1, 2713; for more information on this matter see Alcock, ‘Nero at play’, 102-103.

<sup>137</sup> Chaniotis, A., ‘The divinity of hellenistic rulers’, in: A. Erksine (ed.), *A companion to the hellnistic world* (Blackwell Publishing 2003) 431-445.

Agrippina.<sup>138</sup> Despite the decree of the Senate that Nero was to be subject to *damnatio memoriae*, the citizens of Aphrodisias seem to not have been sure how to handle the situation after his death. All the same, the general population of Rome did not seem to care much about the relative divinity of their emperor, and focussed on what he could do for them in terms of nourishment, amusement and safety.<sup>139</sup>

As mentioned before, the *Domus Aurea* and the land it overtook may not have mattered all that much to the general population of Rome. Perhaps it was even an improvement over the previous situation, as some parts of the palace, notably the parks, may have been open to the general public.<sup>140</sup> To be able to access those parts of the city that were previously only accessible as a client to one of the wealthier citizens must have left a good impression of the emperor on the citizens, and may have given them the feeling the city belonged to them a little more than it had before.

Although an unsavoury subject to the modern reader, and to later Roman historians as well, Nero's persecution of Christians may have been well-received by the citizens of Rome.<sup>141</sup> After the massively destructive fire of A.D. 64, all those people who had lost their homes and livelihoods must have wanted a scapegoat. And although it was very doubtfully correct to put the Christian population of Rome in this position, it would have appeased the bereaved.

Coins are an important form of propaganda, as they were easily able to send a message to different groups: be it the military, the Senate or the general populace. Many types of Neronian coins were pressed in *aurei*, *denarii* and *sestertii*, allowing all layers of the population to handle them and to see the message the emperor wanted to send.

Figure 20 and 21 show the people the charitable emperor, a man who was personally present when his people received gifts from him. Figure 20, a *Sestertius* from A.D. 63, shows Nero handing the *congiarium* to a togate citizen. While the practice originated in the Republic as gifting a measure of oil and wine to the people, during the Principate it had become a gift of silver, spices or corn.<sup>142</sup> Nero was the first emperor to put this practice on coins. On this particular coin he is joined by Minerva and Liberalitas, the goddess of generosity. Liberalitas

---

<sup>138</sup> Hekster 150

<sup>139</sup> Hekster 147

<sup>140</sup> Hekster 142

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> <http://www.forumancientcoins.com/numiswiki/view.asp?key=congiarium> accessed on march 19 2012

is also holding *tesserae*, which Nero seemed to have given out in a form of lottery.<sup>143</sup> This coin cannot have served as anything other than a message of generosity to the people, even so late in Nero's reign. The second *sestertius* is from A.D. 64-66 and portrays a similar scene of *congiarium*, where an attendant of the emperor is handing out coins to a togate citizen. Minerva stands in the background, near a temple.

Naturally, this positive image of Nero was not all that there must have existed. After Nero took home statues from all around Greece with him, the population there was quite unhappy. Others may have disapproved of Nero's theatrical performances, or wish for a more conservative emperor. Generally, however, it seems that Nero provided regular citizens with what they wanted, and the measures he took to keep them happy were mostly successful. After all, the opinion of the population was incredibly important, although it may not seem so at times. The mere fact that Nero was so viciously condemned after his death points to this fact. The condemnation was done vocally but also physically, visually. *Damnatio memoriae* was a powerful tool in the shaping of public memory and opinion. Stewart points out that the point of these actions was not so much *forgetting* of the condemned, but *remembering* that they were not worthy of a continued social existence.<sup>144</sup> Despite the removal of Nero's name and image, however, the previously indicated evidence shows us that those who remembered the emperor retained their positive opinion of him for quite a while.

---

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Stewart, *Statues in Roman society*, 272.

## Conclusion

What I have wanted to demonstrate with this paper is the ambiguity concerning the subject of Nero. The emperor who had had his role thrust upon him and who seemed to have theatrics in his blood, gives off a conflicted image.

The most important thing is placing Nero within the context of his time, and placing his critics within their own context. While he certainly may have not been the best emperor for his empire, he cannot have been the worst, either: a slightly preposterous man who did not keep entirely to the rules, and may have gone overboard on some things, but relatively harmless to the people. Naturally, those members of 'the people' who belonged to the Senate felt harmed by the emperor, and certainly did not seem to be above slander. The extreme extent to which this was carried out may actually have been a sign of his popularity: the better the actual situation was, the worse the propaganda to legitimise the new ruler had to be.

By taking a closer look at the role women played during Nero's reign, a large part of Nero's legitimisation of his rule is explained. Considering his lack of military successes, and an adoptive father who had not been celebrated by all layers of society, using women to strengthen his own position was an innovative tactic. His mother's bloodline made it possible for Nero to portray himself as the culmination of two strong, noble families. His wives, all from noble and respected families, became symbols of fertility within Neronian propaganda.

Despite the lack of military success, apart from several small incidents, Nero found enough ways to associate himself with the army, especially in numismatic material. He emphasised those victories he had achieved, and after that went on a different campaign entirely: a tour of sports competitions in Greece, where he could perform in the Philhellene role he had always wanted for himself, as well as show himself as physically strong. His return to Rome was accompanied by a triumph, and he carried home treasures like one would display booty captured from a newly-conquered land. Although unorthodox, and perhaps ill-advised, most of his behaviour seems to be in line with tradition.

The lengths to which Nero took his own deification is more difficult to interpret. Though he certainly went further than before in building the colossal image of himself next to his new Golden House, and the portrayal of himself wearing a radiate crown had never been done by a living emperor, it still seems unsure whether he meant to come off as a god. As was explained

in chapter 7, the line between ‘god’ and ‘god-like’ was a fine one, and has to be constantly re-interpreted within the confines of the Empire.

Ultimately, the question is this: what was the most important group to influence? All of the previously mentioned groups were important to an emperor’s rule. Few of them would write about the emperor, making the Senate one of the most important groups if he wanted to go down in history in a positive manner; but without the support of the military, it would be incredibly hard to stay on the throne. Then again, the majority of the empire was made up out of other people, who simply belonged to one group: the ‘plebs’. Every emperor, then, had to make their own decision as to which group they would cater to. Augustus had managed to do it all; later emperors often had to resort to only a select few. If it had been Nero’s conscious decision to no longer consider the Senate and instead turn to the people for approval, then he certainly seems to have succeeded.

We must be careful not to view Nero’s predecessors as saints. While Nero’s matricide and the death of his advisors were certainly despicable, other actions were not as unprecedented as we would like to think. Enemies had always been ‘taken care of’, either by making them politically harmless or removing them from the stage altogether. The unique circumstances surrounding Nero and his legacy – the end of one dynasty and the beginning of another, the culmination of a line of emperors that always seemed on the edge of spiralling out of control - - will always make our view of him ambiguous.

## Bibliography

### Primary sources

Calpurnius, *Eclogues*. Translation: J. Wight Duff, A. M. Duff (Loeb 1935).

Cassius Dio. Translation: E. Cary (Loeb, 1917, 1925, 1927).

Dio Chrysostom, *Orations*. Translation: J.W. Cohoon (Loeb 1940).

Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis*. Translation: W.H.D. Rouse (Loeb 1913).

Seneca, *De Clementia*. Translation: S. Braund (Oxford 2009).

Suetonius, *Vita XII Caesarum: Nero*. Translation: J.C. Rolfe (Loeb 1914).

Tacitus, *Annales*. Translation: J. Jackson (Loeb 1937).

Tacitus, *Historiae*. Translation: C.H. Moore (Loeb 1925).

### Secondary sources

Corey, C.A., *The book of Revelation* (Collegeville 2006).

Elsner, J., Masters, J. (eds.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, history and representation* (Chapel Hill 1994)

Hales, S., *The Roman house and social identity* (Cambridge 2003).

Hekster, O., *Romeinse keizers: de macht van het imago* (Amsterdam 2009).

Hooff, A. van, *Nero en Seneca: De despoot en de denker* (Amsterdam 2010).

Kleiner, F.S., *The Arch of Nero in Rome: a study of the Roman Honorary Arch before and under Nero* (Rome 1985).

Kragelund, P., 'The temple and birthplace of Diva Poppaea', *The Classical Quarterly* 60 (2010) 559-568.

Ramage, N.H., Ramage, A., *Roman art: Romulus to Constantine* (Upper Saddle River 2009).

Rose, C.B., *Dynastic commemoration and imperial portraiture in the Julio-Claudian period* (Cambridge 1997).

Sherk, R.K., *The Roman empire: Augustus to Hadrian* (Cambridge 1993).

Stewart, P., *Statues in Roman society: representation and response* (Oxford 2003).

Rudič, V., *Political dissidence under Nero: the price of dissimulation* (London 1993).

Schoolbook

Smith, R.R.R., 'The imperial reliefs at the *Sebasteion* at Aphrodisias' *Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987) 88-138.

Warmington, B.H., *Nero: Reality and legend* (London 1969).