continues the prophet's work (Wright: 70–125). Because of Baruch's role as scribe, past scholarship has viewed him as the author of the narratives concerning Jeremiah and the editor of at least an early form of his work. Nevertheless, there is no clear proof for such a contention, particularly as scholars have come to understand the complexity of the compositional growth of Jeremiah, which appears in two major forms, the shorter Hebrew *Vorlage* for the Septuagint version of the book and the longer Hebrew version that now appears as the MT.

The name, Neriah, appears in nine Hebrew bullae, stamped clay seals for ancient documents, found in Jerusalem and environs, but only one clearly refers to Neriah the scribe and father of Baruch. This is Avigad's bulla number 9 in the collection, which reads, "Belonging to Berekhyahu son of Neriyahu the scribe" (MT *lbrkyhw ben nryhw hspr*; Avigad: 28–29). The name, Berekhyahu ben Neriyahu, is a longer form of the name, Baruch ben Neriah, although the name, *Bārûk ben Nēriyyāhû*, appears in Jer 36:32. Although the bulla was likely discovered in Jerusalem, it was removed and sold to an antiquities dealer, which precludes any reliable scientific analysis of its archaeological context.

Bibliography: ▪ Avigad, N., *Hebrew Bullae from the Time of Jeremiah: Remnants of a Burnt Archive* (Jerusalem 1986). ▪ Muilenberg, J., "Baruch the Scribe," in *Proclamation and Presence* (ed. J. I. Durham/J. R. Porter; Richmond, VA 1970) 215–38. ▪ Wilcoxen, J. A., "The Political Background of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," in *Scripture in History and Theology*, FS J. Coert Rylaarsdam (ed. A. L. Merrill/T. W. Overholt; Pittsburgh, PA 1977) 151–66. ▪ Wright, J. E., *Baruch ben Neriah: From Biblical Scribe to Apocalyptic Seer* (Columbia, SC 2003).

Marvin A. Sweeney

Nero

I. Greco-Roman Antiquity and New Testament
II. Judaism
III. Christianity
IV. Literature
V. Visual Arts
VI. Film

I. Greco-Roman Antiquity and New Testament

The reports of ancient historians about Nero (Tacitus, *Ann.* 13–16; Dio 61–63; Suetonius, *Nero*) were all written after his death and concordantly depict him as the low point and inglorious end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Already most of their (lost) sources, Cluvius Rufus, Fabius Rusticus, and Plinius maior, seem to have been biased against Nero (cf. Josephus, *Ant*. 20.154). In contrast coins and inscriptions, as well as literary works created during his reign provide valuable insight into Nero's self-representation and contemporary reception and help to correct this one-sided picture.

The later emperor Nero was born L. Domitius Ahenobarbus on December 15, 37 CE in Antium. His father Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus died already in 40 CE. His mother Agrippina the Younger, a granddaughter of Augustus, was sent to exile by Emperor Gaius Caligula, her brother. After the emperor's death she returned and married his successor, her uncle Claudius. Nero was adopted by him in 50 CE, married his daughter Octavia in 53 CE, and was developed as potential successor. After Claudius's death (probably poisoned by Agrippina) Nero was proclaimed emperor by the Pretorian guard on October 13, 54 CE. Shortly thereafter, the Senate decreed him the *tribunicia potestas* and the *imperium proconsulare*. His official name was now Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus.

Nero had his predecessor and adoptive father consecrated as *divus Claudius* and legitimized himself on coins as *divi filius* (e.g., H. Mattingly [ed.], *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*: I, 200, No. 1, 4, 7). In contemporary poetry his reign is celebrated as the return of the Golden Age (Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 4.1; Calpurnius Siculus, *Eclogae* 1, 4, 7; Carmen Einsidlense 2). Since Nero had achieved this without preceding civil wars, he even surpassed the example of Augustus (Seneca, *Clem*. 1.9.1). However the idea of a happy *quinquennium Neronis*, during which the stoic philosopher Seneca as Nero's advisor ruled the Roman Empire, is a modern construct based on a misunderstanding of late sources (Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus* 5.2–4). Its use as an explanation for supposedly positive remarks about Rome in the NT (Rom 13:1–7) is implausible.

There is numismatic evidence for a friendly attitude towards the Senate and for Agrippina's prominent position during Nero's first years of government. Nero's interest in the arts is also well documented: he donated the penteterial Neronia and performed himself as singer, poet, dancer, and charioteer. After the classic poetry of Augustus's reign, Neronian literature was a second heyday of epic, bucolic, satire, tragedy, novel, letter writing, and philosophical treatises.

In the NT Nero is the *Kaisar* resp. *Sebastos* to whom Paul appeals, when he is brought before the courts (Acts 25:8, 10–12, 21, 25; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19; cf. 2 Tim 4:16). Within the biblical text he is not mentioned by name (but in the *textus receptus* of 2 Tim 4:22 with the subscript). He is not judged either positively or negatively.

In 55 CE Nero had Britannicus, Claudius's son, murdered. He also alienated himself from his mother and ordered her death in 59 CE. In 64 CE the Great Fire of Rome occurred. Facing subsequent unrest, Nero had "Chrestiani" executed as guilty of arson (Tacitus, *Hist*. 15.44.2–5; cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2). Possibly the deaths of Peter and Paul are connected with these measures against Christ-believers in Rome (John 13:36; 21:18–19; 2 Pet 1:14; Acts

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

20:25, 38; 2 Tim 4:6; 1 Clem. 5; Tertullian, *Praesc.* 36.3; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25.5–8; Lactantius, *Mort.* 2.6). The construction of the huge palace complex *domus aurea* after the fire lowered Nero's popularity and contributed to the tensions with the senatorial elite. The Pisonian conspiracy of 65 CE was revealed and suppressed. Numerous executions and forced suicides followed, including Seneca's.

In 66 CE Nero set off on a journey through Greece. He was celebrated there as a singer and charioteer. The declaration of freedom for Achaia – in reality almost without consequences – brought him enthusiastic approval (Inscriptiones Graecae VII 2713; cf. also the rather positive statements Plutarch, *Sera* 567F–568A; Pausanias, *Descr.* 7.17.3).

The Judean war broke out in 66 CE, partly because Nero had chosen incompetent governors for this province. Nero does not seem to have taken the uprising very seriously. He delegated its suppression to Vespasian. In 68 CE Iulius Vindex, governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, rebelled against Nero. Although the revolt was without success, the Pretorian guard changed sides and choose Vindex's supporter Galba, governor of Hispania Tarraconensis, as emperor. On June 8, 68 the Senate declared Nero a *hostis publicus*. He escaped from Rome and on the following day committed suicide on the estate of his freedman Phaon.

The Senate decreed a *damnatio memoriae*. However, Nero was by no means unpopular among the entire population at that time. Already Otho and Vitellius tried to take up positive sentiments in the Roman populace towards Nero (Suetonius, *Otho* 7.1; *Vit.* 11.2). Pretenders, so called false Neros, gathered supporters (Suetonius, *Nero* 57; Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8). The legend of *Nero redivivus* found its way into Jewish and Christian apocalypticism: In Sib. Or. 4.119–124; 5.25–34 Nero returns from the East and takes revenge on Rome, executing the divine judgment for the destruction of Jerusalem. In Rev 13:1–18; 17:1–18 the antichrist is pictured as Nero. In ancient Christianity, Nero became known as the first persecutor (Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.3) and functioned as a paradigm of the end tyrant or antichrist.

Bibliography: ▪ Champlin, E., *Nero* (Cambridge, MA/London 2003). ▪ Elsner, J./J. Masters (eds.), *Reflections of Nero: Culture, History & Representation* (London 1994). ▪ Griffin, M. T., *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (New Haven, CT 1984). ▪ Pichlmayr, F. (ed.), *Sexti Aureli Victoris Liber de Caesaribus* (Stuttgart/Leipzig 1993). ▪ Schubert, C., *Studien zum Nerobild in der lateinischen Dichtung der Antike* (BzA 116; Stuttgart/Leipzig 1998). ▪ Siculus, *Bucolica aetatis Neronianae* (ed. D. Korzeniewski; Darmstadt 1971). ▪ Smallwood, E. M. (ed.), *Documents Illustrating the Principates of Gaius, Claudius and Nero* (Cambridge 1967).

Stefan Krauter

II. Judaism

▪ Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism ▪ Rabbinic Judaism

A. Second Temple and Hellenistic Judaism

Nero is referred to by Flavius Josephus in three of his works (*Jewish War*, *Jewish Antiquities*, and *The Life*). During his visit to Rome in 63–64 CE, Josephus claims direct interaction with members of Nero's household (*Life* 16). The emperor is not depicted by Josephus as displaying specific antipathy or opposition towards Jews. He increased the territory ruled by Agrippa II (*J.W.* 2.252; *Ant.* 20.159) and assigned control of Armenia Minor to Aristobulus, son of Herod of Chalcis (*Ant.* 20.158). In the dispute regarding the height of the temple wall, Nero allowed the extension to stand (*Ant.* 20.193–95). Josephus's interest in Nero centers on the war that commenced in 66 CE. As emperor, Nero was used as a chronological point of reference for some of the key moments early in the conflict (*J.W.* 1.20; 2.284, 555; 3.339; *Ant.* 20.257, 259). Josephus's primary interest in Nero relates to the role of the emperor in the outbreak of the war. Josephus provides a critical depiction of Nero's character and actions, and it is evident he did not hold back on the level of criticism. There are slight variations in the way Josephus expresses his views. In *War* Nero abuses fortune and displays madness and cruelty, which is best represented by his treatment of family members (*J.W.* 2.250–251). Josephus then adds further criticism of Nero's behavior when recounting the death of the emperor (*J.W.* 4.491). In *Antiquities* Josephus has a different focus. He does not provide any commentary when introducing Nero, so the murder of family members and many others is simply stated (20.153). Instead, he uses the introduction of Nero as an example of how one should write history. Josephus claims there are positive and negative accounts of Nero and they all lack credibility. In contrast, Josephus writes in order to provide an accurate and honest account (*Ant.* 20.154–57). The account of Nero's actions is also presented in a slightly different manner in the *Jewish War* and *Antiquities*. In *War* Josephus links Nero's resolution of a dispute in Casearea Maritima with the outbreak of the war (*J.W.* 2.270, 284), but otherwise pays no attention to the actions of the emperor. In *Antiquities* several decisions by Nero feature as examples of how a ruler should not behave in order to keep the peace. Guided by poor and corrupt counsel, Nero made decisions that incited trouble (*Ant.* 20.182–84) and he appointed a corrupt, lawless governor (*Ant.* 20.252–57); all of these decisions directly acted as causes of the war. Josephus's negative depiction of Nero is also evident in the reference to the emperor's death. His reign was characterized by poor counsel and the abuse of power (*J.W.* 4.491–93), and he left the empire in a state of disorder (*J.W.* 1.5).

Bibliography: ▪ Champlin, E., *Nero* (Cambridge, MA/London 2003).

James McLaren

B. Rabbinic Judaism

Although Nero was emperor at the time of the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against Rome in 66 CE – one of the most dramatic events in Jewish history – he was almost entirely pushed out of rabbinic

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

cultural memory. Nero's earliest mention is found in Avot de-Rabbi Natan, though the date of the passage, like the work itself, is uncertain. The aggadic passage notes that during the siege of Jerusalem Rabban Johḥanan ben Zakkai fled the city and reached the camp of Vespasian, where he predicted Vespasian would become emperor. Shortly afterward, letters came from Rome, saying "Nero the emperor is dead, and the Romans have made you emperor" (ARN B 6), which may reflect awareness of the fact that emperors had to receive formal appointment from the Senate. Thus, while the story ignores the dramatic events of the "Year of the Four Emperors" (69 CE) and the civil war, it retains a core of historical knowledge.

In the Babylonian Talmud (edited 6th–7th cent.), the rabbis use legendary elements and their own imagination to develop Nero's character in ways that suit their own ideological needs. In the long story describing Jerusalem's destruction, it is said that the Roman emperor sent Nero (!) to conquer Jerusalem (bGit 56a). Nero tried to avoid Jerusalem's conquest and sought to check, through various omens, prevalent in antiquity, whether he had indeed been sentenced to destroy the city. He fired arrows at the four winds of heaven, but all the arrows fell in the direction of Jerusalem. He then asked a boy to recite a verse for him. The verse the boy recited was, "I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel, and they shall act in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath" (Ezek 25:14). Edom is the common nickname for Rome in rabbinic literature. Nero understood that he would be punished were he to destroy Jerusalem. He chose instead to flee and convert to Judaism. In his analysis of this story, Rubenstein argues that the talmudic storyteller uses Nero as a literary foil in order to pass judgment on the rabbis: Nero's consultation of Scripture, his insight into the divine plan, and his wise action in joining the people of Israel, are contrasted with the excessive caution and equivocation of the rabbis whose failures are blamed for the final destruction. The story goes on to state that among Nero's descendants was R. Meir (ca. mid-2nd cent.), one of the greatest rabbis of all generations, a detail that completes the storyteller's unusual "rehabilitation" and appropriation of Nero. The story is based on Eastern legends that Nero did not die but fled to the east where he prepared his forces for the onslaught against Rome. In this legend, the emperor, whose life undermined all political norms, became a symbol of divine opposition to Rome and his imagined conversion gave the Jews a cultural victory and a powerful ally.

Bibliography: ▪ Bastomsky, S. J., "The Emperor Nero in Talmudic Legend," *JQR* 59 (1969) 321–25. ▪ Cohen, N. G., "Rabbi Meir, a Descendant of Anatolian Proselytes: New Light on His Name and the Historic Kernel of the Nero Legend in Gittin 56a," *JJS* 23 (1972) 51–59. ▪ Maier, H. O., "Nero in Jewish and Christian Tradition from the First Century to the Reformation," in *A Companion to the Neronian Age* (ed. E. Buckley/M. T. Dinter; Oxford 2013) 385–404. ▪ Rubenstein, J. L., "Bavli Gittin 55b–56b: An Aggadic Narrative in Its Halakhic Context," *HS* 38 (1997) 21–45.

Meir Ben Shahar

III. Christianity

Due to his rule as a megalomaniacal tyrant over the Roman Empire and his role as the brutal persecutor of Peter and Paul, Nero became a legendary figure in Christian texts shortly after his reign (54–68 CE). The uncertainty about his demise and persistent rumors that he was either hiding in the east or would be resurrected and return to retake his throne, made him a focus of apocalyptic fantasies by the late 1st century. Sibylline Oracles and The Martyrdom of Isaiah, for example, presented him as the fallen angel Beliar, who would persecute the Christian faithful and wreak havoc on the Roman world. Revelation 13 and 17 portrayed him as a beast from the abyss, who would serve the great dragon Satan in initiating the events of the end time struggle and Christ's final return (the 666 number of the beast equals Nero Caesar). These fantasies soon coalesced with biblical warnings about the false prophets, man of sin, and antichrist who would lead the saints astray in the last times (Matt 24, 2 Thess 2, and 1 John 2) so that Nero emerged in patristic thought as a monster of fearsome proportions.

His role as the persecutor of the apostles was enshrined in historical records (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44 provided the most detailed pagan account while Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.25 recorded Christian traditions), and in the tomb shrines and Constantinian basilicas constructed over the burial sites of Peter at the Vatican Hill and of Paul on the Ostian Way. Lactantius, the early 4th-century Christian apologist, in his grisly pamphlet *The Death of the Persecutors*, labeled Nero the "first persecutor" of the faithful and the prototype "evil beast" (*mala bestia*) for wicked rulers who torture Christians (*Mort.* 2).

During the imperial persecutions and the troubled times of the 3rd to 5th centuries, Christian believers and patristic writers often sought solace in their apocalyptic scriptures, and composed commentaries on them that mused on the end time scenario in which Nero played a role. Latin Christians in the west developed the belief in two antichrists, with *Nero redivivus* carrying out a three-and-a-half year persecution in Rome, and an Eastern antichrist seducing and oppressing Judaea before overthrowing Nero and wreaking havoc on the world, forcing Christ to return for the *eschaton* and judgment day. Victorinus, the late 3rd-century bishop of Poetovio, wrote the first full *Commentary on Revelation*, and identified Nero as the beast who would start the end time persecutions (*In Apocalypsin* 13, 17). Commodian, a 3rd-century Christian poet, predicted the sequence of two antichrists, with Nero coming first

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

in the west (*Instructiones* 41; *Carmen de duobus populis* 823–936). Martin of Tours in the late 4th century and Sulpicius Severus in the early 5th century followed this scenario, with Nero as the precursor of the final antichrist (*Dialogi* 2.14; *Chronica* 28–29). Both Lactantius and then Jerome (early 5th cent.) indicated that many Christians believed that Nero, who was the first persecutor, would return at the end to become the last persecutor (*Mort.* 2; *Comm. in Dan.* 2.28, 30). Augustine of Hippo in 5th-century North Africa admitted the common view of Nero as an antichrist; but following 2 Thess 2 and 1 John 2, he expressed more concern about heretics and schismatics who denied the doctrines of the church and, thus, prepared the people of God for the final antichrist (*Civ.* 19.19).

In the troubled times of the early medieval west, many commentaries were written on the book of Revelation and Nero often appeared in them as the prototype of persecutors and the precursor or partner of the final antichrist. The *Illuminated Instructions* of Paulus Alvarus from 9th-century Spain and the *Letter on the Origin and Time of the Anti-Christ* by Adso from the 10th-century Francia are typical examples of this. Nero as a *mala bestia* and an apocalyptic monster would have a long afterlife in Christian imagination.

Bibliography: ▪ Champlin, E., *Nero* (Cambridge, MA/London 2003). ▪ McGinn, B., *Anti-Christ: Two Thousand Years of Human Fascination with Evil* (San Francisco, CA 1994). ▪ Odahl, C. M., *Constantine and the Christian Empire* (London [2]2013). ▪ Rougé, J., "Neron à la fin du IVe et au début du Ve siècle," *Latomus* 37 (1978) 73–87.

Charles M. Odahl

IV. Literature

Nero has never been absent from legend and literature. But in the 17th century an unprecedented proliferation of Nero fiction began. It seemed to culminate in the 19th century, but actually continued into the 21st. Most of this literature fits into one of three types: the historical novel that portrays Christian life in the days of Nero, the novel that features a Nero character to convey a universal moral message, and the fictional exploration of Nero's possibly misunderstood personality.

As is to be expected, the historical novel in the service of Christian apologetics is the earliest and most successful type. In the very first example, the Acts of Peter (ca. 200 CE), the focus is on the trials and triumphs of the early-Christian community. Nero himself stays in the background as the evil emperor ultimately responsible for the martyrdom of Peter and Paul. The relevant stories found their way into the 13th-century *Golden Legend*, cropping up in its chapter on the apostle Peter (Voragine: 342–45).

In modern times, the Neronic setting is still a favorite for the portrayal of early Christian life. One example is the novel *Octavia*, written by Anton Ulrich, Duke of Braunschweig, published in various forms between 1677 and the early 1700s. Here the focus is on Octavia, Nero's spouse who manages to escape and avoid being assassinated by her husband. Believed to be dead, she survives with the help of Christian friends who hide her in subterranean Rome – in the catacombs. The Armenian king Tyridates, whom Nero wants to be his successor, falls in love with Flora – Octavia's pseudonym – but she avoids him; as a Christian convert, she feels that her original marriage bond with Nero is still valid (Meid: 558–59).

More widely read than *Octavia*, and indeed enjoyed by an international readership, is Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Quo vadis?* (1896; see "Quo vadis"). This Polish author's work, translated into many languages, ranks as a Christian classic. Two intertwined stories are told: that of beautiful Lygia, a Christian with a Polish background whose servant rescues her from being publicly martyred after the great fire of Rome, and that of the apostle Peter who, when seeking to leave Rome, has a vision of Christ who asks him *quo vadis* ("where are you going?"), which prompts the apostle to return to and remain in the city, where Nero has him crucified upside down.

Modern fiction in which the figure of Nero serves to convey a moral message is exemplified by a Danish and a German novel: *Either–Or* (*Enten–Eller*, 1843) by Søren Kierkegaard and *The Pretender* (*Der falsche Nero*, 1936) by Lion Feuchtwanger. Kierkegaard's novel-like philosophical essay considers the Roman emperor as someone with an "aesthetic" attitude towards life – a sensualist with unlimited power and resources. But despite its seemingly endless possibilities, the aesthetic life brings no satisfaction. The emperor craves enjoyment and diversion but becomes increasingly bored and melancholic. In his boredom, Nero burns down half of Rome and sadistically enjoys the resulting anxiety and terror he creates in those around him who never know whether or not a friendly glance is actually a death sentence. The relevant passage appears in a letter Judge William sends to a friend whom he knows to be an aesthete and whom he urged to adopt a normal, ethical, Christian life (Kierkegaard: 186–87). While Kierkegaard's Nero passage presents a straightforward argument, Feuchtwanger tells a story, replete with action and suspense, about the pitfalls of political ambition. His hero is someone who pretends to be Nero. No contemporary reader will miss the political overtones – pseudo-Nero's biography echoes that of Hitler, and the fire of Rome echoes the fire that burned down the Reichstag, the Berlin parliament building, in 1933.

The third type of Nero fiction argues that the traditional portrayal of Nero as a psychologically deranged person is probably misleading. Thus, in his 1876 *Nero* tragedy, the German playwright Adolf Wilbrandt presented a political leader with the soul

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

Fig. 9 F. Lippi, *Saint Peter and Simon Magus before the Emperor Nero* (1483–84)

of a saint, and in Margaret George's *The Splendor before the Dark* (2018), the reluctant emperor wants to be an artist rather than a political leader, and accordingly fails as a man of politics. Biblical characters are absent from this revisionist fiction.

Bibliography. ***Primary:*** ▪ Anton Ulrich Herzog von Braunschweig und Lüneburg, *Die Römische Octavia*, in id., *Werke*, vols. 1–3, 6–7 (ed. J. Borghardt/M. Munding et al.; Stuttgart 1993–2013). ▪ Feuchtwanger, L., *The Pretender* (trans. W. Muir/E. Muir; New York 1937). ▪ George, M., *The Splendor before the Dark: A Novel of the Emperor Nero* (Berkeley, CA 2018). ▪ Kierkegaard, S., *Either–Or* (trans. H. V. Hong/E. H. Hong; Princeton, NJ 1987). ▪ Sienkiewicz, H., *Quo vadis?* (trans. W. S. Kuniczak; New York 2000). ▪ Voragine, J. de, *The Golden Legend* (trans. W. G. Ryan; Princeton, NJ 2012).
Secondary: ▪ Böhm, C., *Nero und die Deutschen* (Hamburg 2021). ▪ Gerothwohl, M. A., "Nero in Modern Literature," *History* 2 (1913) 161–68. ▪ Grau, D., *Néron en Occident: une figure de l'histoire* (Paris 2015). ▪ Kugelmeier, C., "Nero," in *Historische Gestalten der Antike* (ed. P. von Möllendorff et al.; Stuttgart 2013) 691–706. ▪ Maier, H. O., "Nero in Jewish and Christian Tradition from the First Century to the Reformation," in *A Companion to the Neronian Age* (ed. E. Buckley/M. T. Dinter; Chichester 2013) 385–404. ▪ Meid, V., *Die deutsche Literatur im Zeitalter des Barock* (Munich 2009). ▪ Schmidt, J., *Quo vadis?: Woher kommst du? Unterhaltungsliterarische konfessionelle Apologetik im viktorianischen und wilhelminischen Zeitalter* (Bern 1991). ▪ Wozniak, M./M. Wyke (eds.), *The Novel of Neronian Rome and Its Multimedial Transformations: Sienkiewicz's Quo vadis?* (Oxford 2020).

Bernhard Lang

V. Visual Arts

Religious imagery featuring Nero (r. 54–68 CE) is not based on the Bible, where Nero is not mentioned by name, although several verses in Acts (25:11–12; 26:32) and Philippians (4:22) may be referring to him. In art Nero is portrayed as an adversary and antagonist of Christian faith. The cruel persecution of Christians was recorded by Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.40), who related that, after having accused the Christians of setting the Great Fire of Rome in 64 CE, Nero used them as living torches to illuminate the family's private gardens in the vicinity of what later became the Vatican. This rarely depicted event was painted by Henryk Siemiradzki in 1876 (*Nero's Torches*, oil on canvas, National Museum, Kraków) in the monumental academic style of the late 19th century to be exhibited at Accademia di San Luca in Rome the same year. It shows Nero, who is comfortably seated in his carriage, being brought to observe a group of Christians who are about to be burned alive in front of his Domus Aurea. According to early church tradition, Peter was allegedly also crucified, albeit upside down, as part of the Neronian persecution in the emperor's private circus in the Vatican. Within a century of Peter's death a shrine had grown around what was thought to be his grave along Via Cornelia, and later replaced by one of the most magnificent edifices of Christianity – the basilica of St. Peter in Rome. The martyrdom and crucifixion of Peter are represented in Filippino Lippi's *Disputation with Simon Magus before Nero and Crucifixion of St. Peter* (fresco, 1483–84; see fig. 9) in the Brancacci Chapel in Florence. In this painting Lippi resorted to iconography that had traditionally been employed in the scenes of Jesus before Pilate and Jesus before Caiaphas. Nero is seated on the throne on the right side of the fresco and is pointing to Peter with his outstretched right arm, which underlines the accusatory tone of the scene. Nero is seated on the right hand side in a drawing made by Ercole Setti (*Saint Peter Brought before Nero*, pen and brown ink on ivory laid paper, end of the 16th cent., Art Institute of Chicago). The ensuing drama is underlined by a dramatic and versatile movement of the figures leading to Peter, who is being led with his hands tied on his back to the Roman emperor.

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

Bibliography: ▪ Folds McCullagh, S./L. M. Giles, "Italian Drawings before 1600," in *The Art Institute of Chicago: A Catalogue of the Collection* (Chicago, IL 1997) 225–26, no. 2691.

Tijana Zakula and Cara Mayer Yepez

VI. Film

Not mentioned by name in the Bible, Nero is nearly "the cinema's ultimate 'bad guy'" (Winkler 2017a: 319). He is a filmic synonym for evil and is variously portrayed as a merciless tyrant, a ruthless dictator, a monster, a wannabe musician and poet, a ruthless persecutor of Christians, and seemingly "the lawless one ... destined for destruction" (2 Thess 2:3) that Paul preached about. He often appears as an immoral, childlike lunatic, a sexually-depraved megalomaniac, a pyromaniac, someone guilty of matricide, acting like an "antichrist" (1 John 2:18), impulsive, tyrannical, and a self-indulgent sadist who commits suicide.

Nero is a favorite of silent cinema. For example, in the dramatic short *Nerone* (dirs. Arturo Ambrosio/Luigi Maggi, 1909, IT, *Nero. Or The Fall of Rome*), the stocky, chinstrap-bearded Nerone (Alberto Capozzi) gesticulates prominently and suffers a "disordered brain," dumps his wife Octavia for another woman, and plays his lyre while Rome burns.

The landmark *Quo Vadis?* (dir. Enrico Guazzoni, 1913, IT) portrays Nero (Carlo Cattaneo) as a cleaned-chinned, corpulent Caesar mourning his dead daughter, composing music, singing, and playing the lyre. Nero secretly orders Rome set ablaze and brutalizes Christians, but he eventually is deposed, flees, and dies via assisted suicide.

Nerone e Agrippina (dir. Mario Caserini, 1914, IT, *Nero and Agrippina*) has a beardless, stocky, opulently-dressed, wildly gesticulating Nerone (Vittorio Rossi Pianelli) with woman problems, who plays a decorative lyre as Rome burns. Mentally unstable, Nero orders his domineering mother Agrippina killed. He also orders that the Christians be persecuted for burning Rome, but when he is politically deposed, he flees and reunites with his youthful (now Christian) lover, then commits suicide via a former slave.

The Sign of the Cross (dir. Frederick Thomson, 1914, US) features a Nero (Sheridan Block) who orders Rome's prefect, Marcus Superbus, to jail all Christians. Nero declares that the maid Mercia, Superbus's cross-carrying Christian girlfriend, is to be incarcerated. In prison, Mercia recounts Jesus's life to Superbus, who then petitions Nero for her life. Denied mercy, Superbus becomes a Christian (which outrages Nero), and alongside Mercia he is devoured by lions, an event which thoroughly entertains Nero.

The (now-lost) spectacle *Nero* (dir. J. Gordon Edwards, 1922, IT/US) portrays Nero (Jacques Grétillat) as a mad, corpulent, lecherous emperor who ostentatiously rides an elephant while Rome burns.

Another *Quo Vadis?* (dirs. Georg Jakoby/Gabriellino D'Annunzio, 1924, IT) stars a metal-hatted, extravagantly wicked, maniacal, beardless Nerone (Emil Jannings) who is described as "a satyr – cunning, indolent, cruel – master of the world, but never of himself" (Scodel/Bettenworth: 34). This bloated, frizzy-haired, evil emperor deliberately burns Rome, blames the Christians, and then sadistically slaughters them via lion-mauling and turning them into human torches. He repeatedly plays his lyre, suffers a ghostly hallucination and via a soothsayer's scrying, sees a dripping dagger and burning cross. Later, his baby son dies, he suffers revolution, and then commits assisted suicide.

Within sound cinema, the famous Roman-Christian epic *The Sign of the Cross* (dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1932, US) stars Charles Laughton, a chubby English homosexual (Higham: 24–25) with an unctuous British accent playing the "sadistic and debauched emperor Nero, the epitome of Roman vice and decadence" (Malamud 2008: 159) and the fleshly "embodiment of infantile cruelty" (Winkler 2017a: 322). Laughton considered Nero "a ridiculous, flaunting queen, pampered and self-indulgent, a psychotic baby" (Higham: 35) and portrayed him as "feckless, theatrical, effeminate … an outrageous queen" (Callow: 51).

The movie opens with Nero manically laughing, composing poetry, and strumming his lyre on "the third night of the great fire, 64 AD." Nero cunningly blames the Christians for the conflagration, orders their extermination, and denies mercy for Mercia, Marcus Superbus's Christian lover. The film ends focusing upon a closed dungeon door replete with X cross beams and a white glowing Christian cross projected upon it. Interestingly, an emotionally vacillating Nero oversees the arena brutality, but he is absent as the Christian martyrs are devoured by lions. The movie was reissued in 1944 with WWII-bookend additions linking Nero with Benito Mussolini, and Allied bombers flying in Christian cross formation.

The renowned Roman-Christian epic *Quo Vadis* (dirs. Mervyn LeRoy/Anthony Mann, 1951, US), has Peter Ustinov portray the "divine Nero, prince emperor, supreme pontiff," "master of the world" (see fig. 10). This stout "son of Jupiter" and "lord of the earth" is vain, decadent, pompous, manipulatable, luxury-loving, and self-centered. He is a wannabe poet and lyre-player, but his only special gifts are "murder and arson, betrayal and terror." This maniac, madman, and monster, whom both Ustinov and LeRoy considered a "son of a bitch" (Ustinov: 177), burned Rome to create "Neropolis," blamed the Christians, and decreed their extermination.

Within the epic *Nerone e Messalina* (dir. Primo Zeglio, 1953, IT, *Nero and the Burning of Rome*), a stout, wreath-wearing, chinstrap-bearded Nero

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

Fig. 10 Nero in *Quo vadis?* (1951)

(Gino Cervi) achieves imperial power and then murders the people who helped him achieve it. Nero pursues a riotous, dissolute lifestyle, sometimes soothing himself with lyre-playing.

The sexploitation film *Nerone e Poppea* (dirs. Bruno Mattei/Anthony Pass, 1982, IT/FR, *Nero and Poppea: An Orgy of Power*) stars a thumb-sucking Nero (Rudy Adams) engaging in incest and adult breast-feeding with his mother. The film also features masturbation, rape, castration, torture, sadomasochistic whipping, and rampant fornication.

In *Quo Vadis* (dir. Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 2001, PL/US), the colorfully-clothed "divine" Nero (Michal Bajor) is a stocky, obnoxious madman called "the beast" (Rev 13:17–18). He loves his own music and is mentally plagued after he murders his mother.

The TV toga-movie *Imperium: Nerone* (dir. Paul Marcus, 2004, IT/DE/UK/FR/TN, *Imperium: Nero*) sympathetically humanizes "Lucius [bringer of light] Ahenobarbus Nero," who is portrayed as a cute, innocent, if traumatized youth (James Bentley). Nero grows into a cute, thin, clean-shaven, long-haired, kithara-playing, love-struck young man (Hans Matheson) living like a slave in exile. Recalled to Rome, he becomes Emperor "Lucius Claudius Nero" via his mother Agrippina's murderous machinations. Forced to marry Octavia, he abandons her for his slave-girl lover, Acte. Nero seeks a "just and merciful" empire, replaces gladiatorial bloodlust with the "Nuronia" (bloodless gymnastics, horsemanship, and music), pursues fair taxation, and institutes anti-corruption reforms. Events in his life, however, cause Nero to become increasingly deranged. Surprisingly, lions devouring Christians, Nero's monstrous madness, and orgiastic scenes of Neronian debauchery are missing from this movie.

Within comedy, the (now-lost) Roman farce *Nerone* (dir. Alessandro Blasetti, 1930, IT) starred Ettore Petrolini as the notorious emperor (subtextually Benito Mussolini) wearing a clown face, riding a bicycle, burning Rome with a match, and telephoning the fire department from his palace.

The song-filled *Fiddlers Three* (dir. Harry Watt, 1944, UK) features three characters who are struck by lightning at Stonehenge and are transported back in time to Imperial Rome where they run afoul of its corpulent, clean-shaven, cheerily debauched but "idiotic" Nero (Francis L. Sullivan), before returning home via a second lightning strike.

The slapstick *O.K. Nerone* (dir. Mario Soldati, 1951, IT, *O.K. Nero*) stars two sightseeing sailors mugged near the Colosseum in Rome and dream of meeting Nero (Gino Cervi). They share an orgy and watch Nero do American swing-dancing, play billiards, and race a chariot before they wake up.

The spoof *Mio figlio Nerone* (dir. Steno, 1956, IT/FR, *Nero's Mistress*, *Nero's Weekend*) showcases a frivolous Nero (Alberto Sordi) preferring singing to Roman politics. Fusing pomposity with childish naivete, this thin madman is disrupted by his domineering mother, but despite many farcical murder attempts, he forgives all. However, when he is artistically rejected, he sets Rome ablaze, strums his lyre, and sings joyously.

Le calde notti di Poppea (dir. James Reed, 1969, IT, *Poppea's Hot Nights*) features a plump, short, creepy, childlike, luxury-loving Nerone (Sandro Dori) indulging in orgiastic pleasures. Scheming, Nerone sets Rome ablaze, joyously sings, and plucks his lyre during the conflagration.

Spoofing Federico Fellini's *Satyricon* (1969, IT/FR), the joke-filled parody *Satiricosissimo* (dir. Mariano Laurenti, 1970, IT) depicts Franco and Ciccio at a Roman-themed country inn, falling asleep in a clearing, and waking up in ancient Rome. The city is ruled by a whiny-voiced Nerone (Giancarlo Badessi) who wears unflamboyant clothes and repeatedly thumbs-down defeated gladiators in the arena. The protagonists save Caesar from food poisoning and become court spies. Nerone gives his newly-minted spies matches to set Rome ablaze. Subsequently convicted for the conflagration, they fight gladiators, flee through a lion cage with a secret door, crash their escape chariot, and return home sitting inside their car. Back at the inn, they encounter ancient others as modern-day customers, including a thumb-damaged "Nerone" whom they dump food over and flee.

The low-budget, sexual-innuendo and double entendre-filled romp *Up Pompeii* (dir. Bob Kellett,

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

1971, UK) features the farcical retrieval of a misplaced scroll containing the signatures of senators willing to assassinate Nero (Patrick Cargill). Its thin, greying emperor is bored with feeding Christians to the lions, as he prefers wrestling and lyre-playing. He thinks people consider him "a fool … a playboy, a pleasure-seeker … a good musician" whilst one character repeatedly calls Nero "an honorable man."

The bawdy *Nerone* (dirs. Mario Castellacci/Pier Francesco Pingitore, 1977, IT) stars an insane, thin, Nerone (Pippo Franco) and features protesting Christians staging a union-style sit-in. Elsewhere, Nero jogs in his underpants and dances around a group of historical tyrants (e.g., Hitler, Stalin, Napoleon). Inside the arena, a dance-battle between Roman guards and Christians in cross-shaped dresses occurs.

Set in "Anno 817 Roma" (64 CE), the bawdy *Per amore di Poppea* (dir. Mariano Laurenti, 1977, IT, *For the Love of Poppaea*) stars soldiers Tizio and Caio who escape military enlistment by dressing as women slaves. The movie's Nero (Oreste Lionello) is a small, thin, effeminate, mop-headed emperor. He predominately wears white robes with curtain cord sleeves and platform shoes, but he is more eccentric than mad. When the two scoundrels accidentally set Rome ablaze, Nero blames the Christians whilst these two scoundrels flee.

History of the World: Part 1 (dir. Mel Brooks, 1981, US) features a plump, air-kissing Nero (Dom DeLuise) living in "Caesars Palace" that resembles the exterior of a Las Vegas casino. Nero is a money-loving, piggish glutton prone to vulgar burping and unapologetic public flatulence.

Within biblical cinema, Nero's powerful presence as an unseen scourge of Christians occurs within *Paul, Apostle of Christ* (dir. Andrew Hyatt, 2018, US), while in *The Apostle Peter: Redemption* (dir. Leif Bristow, 2016, CA, *Peter: The Redemption*), Nero (Stephen Baldwin) displays unhinged anti-Christian fervor and is a sexual predator who wears a distracting saw-tooth-fringe haircut. Surprisingly, this lyre-playing, one-dimensional evil emperor compassionately redirects aqueduct project funds to his struggling people, but he decrees the execution of Christians for setting Rome ablaze, burns martyrs to illuminate his garden, and violently tortures others. This "god of Rome" wants the imprisoned Christian Peter to confess to arson, admit heresy, and recant his faith, but being unsuccessful, Nero crucifies him upside down, as Peter requested (according to Christian, but not biblical, tradition).

The turgid biblical fiction *The Silver Chalice* (dir. Victor Saville, 1954, US) portrays Nero (Jacques Aubuchon) as "a jealous god" who is addicted to lavish eating and entertainment, whilst Greek artisan Basil casts a silver cup to house the Holy Grail. Peter, Luke, and Joseph of Arimathea make cameo appearances.

The religious fantasy *The Story of Mankind* (dir. Irwin Allen, 1957, US) has a decrepit Nero (Peter Lorre) who is described by his advocate, Mr. Scratch/The Devil, as

> one of my most talented disciples … evil and depraved whose debauchery and perversion surpassed even the wildest and wicked dreams of the most deluded … nursed on a witch's venom, twisted by endless orgies, this madman knew no end to violence, no limit to lunacy, he arranged the suicide of most of his closest friends, had his mother clubbed to death, and poisoned a lot of the people he knew and sort out other similar amusements.

As Nero-with-lyre excitedly watches Rome burn, Mr. Scratch/The Devil sums him up as a "murderer, maniac, rapist, pervert, matricide, arsonist, bigamist, and sometimes accomplished musician and singer for all social occasions."

Sword-and-sandal cinema such as *I dieci gladiatori* (dir. Gianfranco Parolini, 1963, IT, *The Ten Gladiators*) features a smug Nero (Gianni Rizzo) as the despotic object of an assassination plot-*cum*-revolt. Christians are devoured by lions (delighting Nero), Rome is aflame, and burning human crucifixes abound.

Il gladiatore che sfidò l'impero (dir. Domenico Paolella, 1965, IT, *Challenge of the Gladiator*) has a stout, smirking, chinstrap-bearded Terenzo (Walter Barnes), an ex-gladiator, impersonate Nero, as he resembles him closely. More mentally-challenged than mad, this phony Nero prefers personal combat (wearing a skimpy tunic) alongside (but not superior to) his subjects. Backdropped by numerous Nero references, this fake Nero fools the Romans and Thracians, battles Spartacus in the arena, and wins by cheating. When ultimately exposed, Terenzo claims emperorship but dies falling into a fiery pit whilst fighting Spartacus.

L'incendio di Roma (dir. Guido Malatesta, 1965, IT/YU, *Fire Over Rome*) showcases Consul Marcus Valerius returning to Rome from Gaul with the Tenth legion, and highlights his difficulties with Nero (Vladimir Medar), a megalomaniacal, god-deluded dictator. This plump, "immortal," "divine" Nero orders Christians exterminated and tasks Marcus with its completion. Instead, Marcus battles the hated praetorian guards to protect Christian friends fleeing the catacombs, then resigns as consul to stymie his extermination responsibility. An affronted Nero disbands the Tenth legion and orders all traitors executed, Marcus crucified-cum-burned alive, then plays his lyre and composes verse to assuage his anger. Marcus and his soldiers escape prison to rescue his mother, and the martyrs being turned into human torches, but they fail. However, their ferocious flames set alight (unimpressive models of) the Eternal City as Nero composes poetry and plucks his lyre, but his fate is left unexplored. At film's end, a Jesus vision and the apostles Peter and Paul briefly

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023

appear to bolster the Christian ambience of this peplum film.

Nero stars in many historical documentaries, such as *Secrets of the Dead: The Nero Files* (dir. Klaus T. Steindl, 2019, US). He also appears subtextually within the sci-fi reboot *Star Trek* (dir. J. J. Abrams, 2009, US/DE) as "Nero" (Eric Bana), the disturbed Romulan from the future. This alien captain of a mining vessel (called Narada) mimics the earthly Roman emperor in maniacal behavior and deployment of destructive fire, which itself was subtly signposted by the soundtrack title, "Nero Fiddles, Narada Burns."

Bibliography: ▪ Arciniega, A. P., "'Rome Is No Longer in Rome': In Search of the Eternal City in Cinema," in *Imagining Ancient Cities in Film* (ed. M. G. Morcillo et al.; New York 2015) 163–83. ▪ Callow, S., *Charles Laughton: A Difficult Actor* (London 1987). ▪ Cyrino, M. S., *Big Screen Rome* (Malden, MA 2005). ▪ Dahm, M. K., "Performing Nero," *Didaskalia* 7.2 (2009; www.didaskalia.net). ▪ Higham, C., *Charles Laughton: An Intimate Biography* (Garden City, NY 1976). ▪ Malamud, M., "Swords-and-Scandals: Hollywood's Rome during the Great Depression," *Arethusa* 41.1 (2008) 157–83. ▪ Malamud, M., *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Malden, MA 2009). ▪ Mini, P., "Representations of the Christian Female Virtue in Roman Film Epics: *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *Quo Vadis* (1951)," in *The Reception of Ancient Virtues and Vices in Modern Popular Culture* (ed. E. Almagor/L. Maurice; Leiden 2017) 231–52. ▪ Raucci, S., "The Order of Orgies: Sex and the Cinematic Roman," in *Screening Love and Sex in the Ancient World* (ed. M. S. Cyrino; New York 2013) 143–55. ▪ Schenk, I., "The Creation of the Epic: Italian Silent Film to 1915," in *A Companion to Ancient Greece and Rome on Screen* (ed. A. J. Pomeroy; Malden, MA 2017) 37–60. ▪ Scodel, R./A. Bettenworth, *Whither Quo Vadis?* (Chichester 2009). ▪ Skwara, E., "*Quo Vadis* on Film (1912, 1925, 1951, 1985, 2001): The Many Faces of Antiquity," *Classica: Revista Brasileira de Estudos Clássicos* 26.2 (2013) 163–74. ▪ Ustinov, P., *Dear Me* (London 1977). ▪ Winkler, M. M., "Nero in Hollywood," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Nero* (ed. S. Bartsch et al.; Cambridge 2017a) 318–32. ▪ Winkler, M. M., "Good Nero; or, The Best Intentions," in *Classical Literature on Screen: Affinities of Imagination* (Cambridge 2017b) 297–312. ▪ Wyke, M., "Make like Nero! The Appeal of a Cinematic Emperor," in *Reflections of Nero* (ed. J. Elsner/J. Masters; London 1994) 11–28. ▪ Wyke, M., "Nero: Spectacles of Persecution and Excess," in *Projecting the Past* (New York 1997) 197–259.

Anton Karl Kozlovic

Nerva

M. Cocceius Nerva (b. November 8, 30 CE in Narni and d. January 27 [?], 98 CE in Rome) was Roman emperor (Imperator Nerva Caesar Augustus) from 18 September 96 until his death. He began his career as the leader of a cavalry squadron (*sevir equitum Romanorum*). At the *Feriae Latinae*, he was *praefectus urbi* and entered the Senate as *quaestor*. He was involved in the discovery of the Pisonian conspiracy in 65 CE, already having been given the title of pretor. Nerva received high honors for discovering the conspiracy. He reached consulship in 71 CE and was

Fig. 11 The Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome (28 BCE)

one of the few to be consul for a second time in 90 CE. Nerva held high priestly offices; he was *augur, sodalis Augustalis*, and as emperor also *pontifex maximus*. In 93 CE he underwent a (fictitious?) exile to Taranto.

Despite his career under Nero and Domitian, he ensured that no shame was brought onto himself and became emperor after Domitian's assassination. To secure his rule, he became consul for a third and fourth time and, with the encouragement of some senators from the province, he elected Trajan as his successor by adoption in 97 CE. Nerva introduced an alimentary foundation to increase population growth, through which children from poorer families were supported through the mortgage interest of state loans. He reformed the state postal service and successfully fixed problems in fiscal administration. During his reign, the Nervaforum (Forum Transitorium) was completed. Nerva was deified after his death and buried in the Mausoleum of Augustus (see fig. 11).

Bibliography: ▪ Grainger, J. D., *Nerva and the Roman Succession Crisis of AD 96–99* (London 2003). ▪ Schipp, O., *Die Adoptivkaiser* (Darmstadt 2011).

Oliver Schipp

Nest

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
II. New Testament
III. Judaism
IV. Christianity
V. Visual Arts
VI. Film

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

The noun *qēn*, "nest," is connected to birds (Deut 22:6; 32:11; Isa 10:14, 16:2; Job 39:27; Prov 27:8; *qinnîm*, "cells," is exceptional). The verb *q–n–n* is denominative (Ezek 31:6; Ps 104:17; Jer 48:48).

© Walter de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2023