

Nero in Greece

Objectives

This lecture discusses the relationship between one emperor and the province of Achaia. The documentation for a “special relationship” is both full and difficult because of the nature of Nero’s reign and its aftermath. This lecture will set Nero’s activities in the context of Augustan and Julio-Claudian policy towards the Greek and in the context of Nero’s wider political and cultural interests. It will also introduce issues of imperial patronage and “philhellenism” that will recur in the discussion of the emperor Hadrian on Thursday.

The facts...

September 66 Nero left for Greece

Performances in the major games
at Olympic, Isthmian, Nemean and Pythian Games

November 67 Freedom of the Greeks declared at Isthmian Games

Early in 68 returned to Italy, and committed suicide later that year

SOURCE DIFFICULTIES

B.H. Warmington, Nero: Reality and Legend (1969) 108-22

M.T. Griffin, Nero. The end of a dynasty (1984) 208-220

What Tacitus might have said..

Nero in the Annals (last section lost)

suicides

theatre, acting

a downward spiral (involving Rome and senate as well as N.)

Suetonius’ account

see handout for *Life of Nero* 22-4

Cassius Dio

see handout for book 62, 8-19

Inscriptions? Coins?

-effects of damnatio memoriae

-coins (see below)

NERO'S ACTIONS IN GREECE

Which Greece did Nero visit?

S.E. Alcock. 1994. Nero at play? The emperor's Grecian odyssey, in J. Elsner and J. Masters (eds.) Reflections of Nero: culture, history and representation (London) pp. 98-111

the festival cycle - Isthmia, Olympia, Delphi
other sanctuaries: Argive Heraion, the Spring of Amphiaraus at Lerna
Corinth

NOT Athens or Sparta

Trying to cut through the Isthmus

“attempted by Demetrius the King, Caesar the dictator, the emperor Gaius and Domitius Nero, an impious project as the deaths of all of these men makes clear”
Pliny the Elder Natural History 4.4.10

The freedom of the Greeks

- see inscriptions in module booklet
- Pliny the Elder Natural History 4.6.22
“freedom was given to the whole of Achaia by Domitius Nero”

In emulation of Hellenistic monarchs? of previous emperors?
Any practical reasons?

Vespasian's reversal of the policy
“the Greeks had forgotten how to be free” (Pausanias 7.17.4 - see below)

NERO IN GREEK MEMORY

- False Neros
- Plutarch: the last lines of the *Life of Antony*

Now there remained two daughters more of Octavia and Antonius: Domitius Aenobarbus married the one; and the other, which was Antonia, so fair and virtuous a young lady, was married unto Drusus, the son of Livia, and son-in-law of Caesar. Of this marriage came Germanicus and Claudius: of the which, Claudius afterwards came to be emperor. And of the sons of Germanicus, the one whose name was Caius came also to be emperor: who after he had licentiously reigned a time, was slain, with his wife and daughter. Agrippina also (having a son by her first husband Aenobarbus, called Lucius Domitius) was afterwards married unto Clodius, who adopted her son, and called him Nero Germanicus. This Nero was emperor in our time, who slew his own mother, and had almost destroyed the empire of Rome through his madness and wicked life. He was the fifth in descent from Antony.

Plutarch *Life of Antony* 87

- Pausanias (see below)

Mad, bad or philhellenic?

PAUSANIAS ON NERO

[2.17.6] Of the votive offerings [at the Argive Heraion] the following are noteworthy. There is an altar upon which is wrought in relief the fabled marriage of Hebe and Heracles. This is of silver, but the peacock dedicated by the Emperor Hadrian is of gold and gleaming stones. He dedicated it because they hold the bird to be sacred to Hera. There lie here a golden crown and a purple robe, offerings of Nero.

[2.37.5] I saw also what is called the Spring of Amphiaraus and the Alcyonian Lake, through which the Argives say Dionysus went down to Hell to bring up Semele, adding that the descent here was shown him by Palymnus. There is no limit to the depth of the Alcyonian Lake, and I know of nobody who by any contrivance has been able to reach the bottom of it since not even Nero, who had ropes made several stades long and fastened them together, tying lead to them, and omitting nothing that might help his experiment, was able to discover any limit to its depth.

[5.12.8] In the temple at Olympia are four offerings of Nero--three crowns representing wild-olive leaves, and one representing oak leaves. Here too are laid twenty-five bronze shields, which are for the armed men to carry in the race. Tablets too are set up, including one on which is written the oath sworn by the Eleans to the Athenians, the Argives and the Mantineans, that they would be their allies for a hundred years.

[5.25.8] There are also offerings dedicated by the whole Achaean race in common; they represent those who, when Hector challenged any Greek to meet him in single combat, dared to cast lots to choose the champion. They stand, armed with spears and shields, near the great temple. Right opposite, on a second pedestal, is a figure of Nestor, who has thrown the lot of each into the helmet. The number of those casting lots to meet Hector is now only eight, for the ninth, the statue of Odysseus, they say that Nero carried to Rome.

[5.26.3] Among the offerings of Micythus is Struggle carrying jumping-weights, the shape of which is as follows. They are half of a circle, not an exact circle but elliptical, and made so that the fingers pass through as they do through the handle of a shield. Such are the fashion of them. By the statue of Struggle are Dionysus, Orpheus the Thracian, and an image of Zeus which I mentioned just now. They are the works of Dionysius of Argos. They say that Micythus set up other offerings also in addition to these, and that they formed part of the treasures taken away by Nero.

[7.17.3-4] At a later time, when the Roman imperial power devolved upon Nero, he gave to the Roman people the very prosperous island of Sardinia in exchange for Greece, and then bestowed upon the latter complete freedom. When I considered this act of Nero it struck me how true is the remark of Plato, the son of Ariston, who says that the greatest and most daring crimes are committed, not by ordinary men, but by a noble soul ruined by a perverted education. The Greeks, however, were not to profit by the gift. For in the reign of Vespasian, the next emperor after Nero, they became embroiled in a civil war; Vespasian ordered that they should again pay tribute and be subject to a governor, saying that the Greek people had forgotten how to be free.

[9.27.3-4] Sappho of Lesbos wrote many poems about Love, but they are not consistent. Later on Lysippus made a bronze Love for the Thespians, and previously Praxiteles one of Pentelic marble. The story of Phryne and the trick she played on Praxiteles I have related in another place. The first to remove the image of Love, it is said, was Gaius the Roman Emperor; Claudius, they say, sent it back to Thespieae, but Nero carried it away a second time. At Rome the image perished by fire. Of the pair who sinned against the god, Gaius was killed by a private soldier, just as he was giving the password; he had made the soldier very angry by always giving the same password with a covert sneer. The other, Nero, in addition to his violence to his mother, committed accursed and hateful crimes against his wedded wives. The modern Love at Thespieae was made by the Athenian Menodorus, who copied the work of Praxiteles.

[10.7.1] It seems that from the beginning the sanctuary at Delphi has been plotted against by a vast number of men. Attacks were made against it by this Euboean pirate, and years afterwards by the Phlegyan nation; furthermore by Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, by a portion of the army of Xerxes, by the Phocian chieftains, whose attacks on the wealth of the god were the longest and fiercest, and by the Gallic invaders. It was fated too that Delphi was to suffer from the universal irreverence of Nero, who robbed Apollo of five hundred bronze statues, some of gods, some of men.

[10.19.2] When the fleet of Xerxes was attacked by a violent storm off Mount Pelion, father and daughter completed its destruction by dragging away under the sea the anchors and any other security the triremes had. In return for this deed the Amphictyons dedicated statues of Scyllis and his daughter. The statue of Hydna completed the number of the statues that Nero carried off from Delphi. Only those of the female sex who are pure virgins may dive into the sea.

Greek Coins Of Nero (from Braund *Augustus to Nero*)

262 bronze from Corinth

Obv. NERO CAESAR AUGUSTUS IMPERATOR around a radiate head of Nero
Inv. PUBLIUS MEMMIUS CLEANDER BEING DUUMVIR QUINQUENNALIS AT CORINTH, THE ADVENT OF AUGUSTUS around a picture of a galley

263 Alexandrian tetradrachm series

Obv. NERO CLAUDIUS CAESAR AUGUSTUS GERMANICUS IMPERATOR
YEAR 13 around a bust

Inv. (a) Bust of Olympian Zeus OE OLYMPIAN ZEUS
(b) Bust of Zeus with aegis and parsley crown NEMEAN ZEUS
(c) Bust of Poseidon with trident ISTHMIAN POSEIDON
(d) Bust of Apollo with a quiver PYTHIAN APOLLO
(e) Bust of Apollo with a quiver ACTIAN APOLLO

266 Gold coin from Corinth

Obv. IMPERATOR NERO CAESAR AUGUSTUS around a laureate head of Nero
Inv. JUPITER THE LIBERATOR around enthroned Jupiter with thunderbolt and sceptre