

10 exhibition highlights  
in plain English



# Nero

the man  
behind  
the myth

# About this book

This book takes you on a tour of the exhibition.  
It looks at 10 different objects.

A map of the exhibition shows you where to find  
the objects.

There is an introduction to each part of the  
exhibition. There are eight sections.

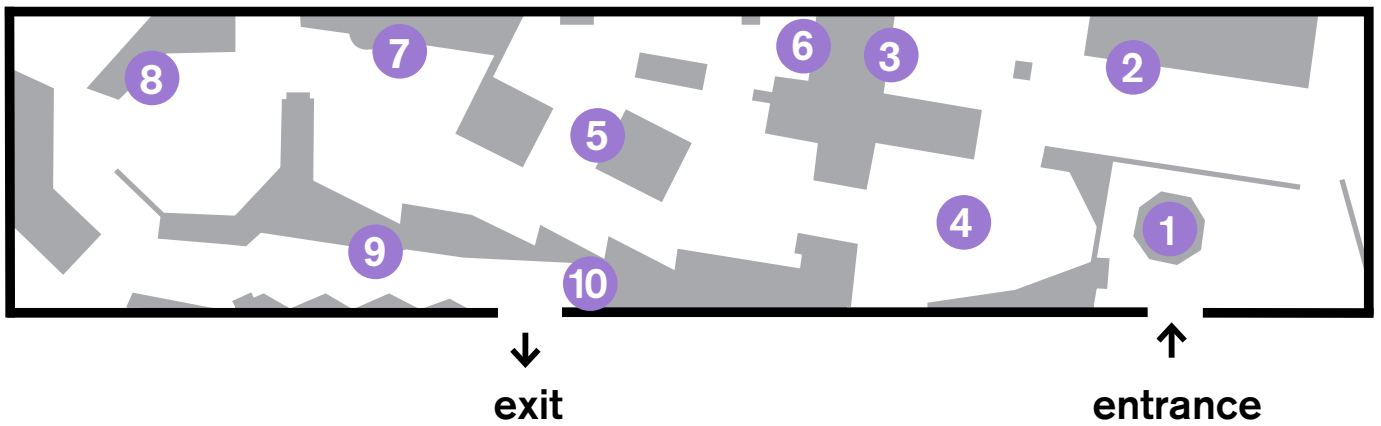
Please let us know what you think about this book.  
Tell a member of staff or email  
[access@britishmuseum.org](mailto:access@britishmuseum.org)

# Objects

Each object has a number. These numbers are on the exhibition map on the next page. The map shows you where each object is in the exhibition.

- 1 Statue of Nero as a boy**
- 2 Gold bracelet in the shape of a snake**
- 3 Carving showing soldiers**
- 4 Slave chains**
- 5 Model of a horse and chariot**
- 6 Statue of Nero's mum**
- 7 Burned iron from a window**
- 8 Painting of a Roman house**
- 9 Gold coin**
- 10 Marble head of Vespasian**

# Exhibition map



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10

Introduction

# Introduction to Nero

## the man behind the myth

Romans were people who lived in Italy a long time ago. They controlled lands far and wide.

Nero was a Roman emperor (ruler).

Some people loved him. Some did not.

After Nero died, people wrote bad things about him.

This is often how he is remembered.

But is it true?

## Introduction



### ● Statue of Nero as a boy

Nero's dad died when he was three.

Nero's mum, whose name was Agrippina, married the emperor. He was called Claudius.

This statue shows Nero aged about 13.

He became emperor when he was only 16.

Image: © RMN-Grand Palais  
(Musée du Louvre) / Hervé  
Lewandowski



From republic to empire

# Introduction to From republic to empire

Nero belonged to a powerful family.

His great-great granddad was called Augustus.  
He was the first Roman emperor.

Other rich and powerful men did not like the  
power of emperors.

This made being ruler a difficult job.

## From republic to empire



### ② Gold bracelet in the shape of a snake

Some jealous people tried to kill Nero when he was a boy.

They were scared away by snakes in Nero's bedroom.

Afterwards, Nero wore a gold bracelet with a snakeskin inside.

It was like a good luck charm.

Image:: © The Trustees of the British Museum





Power and succession

# Introduction to Power and succession

When his stepdad Claudius died, Nero became emperor.

His mum Agrippina helped him.

His teacher, named Seneca, gave him advice.

His soldiers protected him.

The people liked him.

Everyone expected great things from Nero.

## Power and succession



### ● Carving showing soldiers

Nero had special bodyguards. They kept him safe.

They were strong.

They were good at fighting.

They are shown here in their armour.

Image: © RMN-Grand Palais  
(Musée du Louvre) / Hervé  
Lewandowski



War and diplomacy

# Introduction to War and diplomacy

Nero ruled over many lands and peoples.

There were often conflicts.

The people in Britain started a war.

They killed many Romans.

Sometimes Nero killed his enemies.

Sometimes he tried to find ways to make peace by talking.

## War and diplomacy



### ● Slave chains

These chains were found in a lake in Wales.

They were put on people who were made into slaves so that they could not run away.

When the Romans invaded Britain they also made some people slaves.

Image: © Amgueddfa Cymru  
– National Museum Wales



Spectacle and splendour

# Introduction to Spectacle and splendour

Nero looked after his people.

He built houses and markets.

He provided food.

He entertained them.

Nero even performed on stage.

Some people loved this.

Others thought an emperor should not  
behave this way.

## Spectacle and splendour



### ● Model of a horse and chariot

The model shows a horse pulling a chariot.

The chariot is where the rider stood.

Nero loved chariot racing.

As a boy Nero played with toy chariots.

As an adult he raced real ones.

He won many races.

Image: © The Trustees  
of the British Museum



Passion and discord

# Introduction to Passion and discord

Nero argued with his mum.

He said she tried to kill him.

He ordered her death.

This made him unpopular.

Nero married three times.

Two of Nero's wives and his daughter died.

## Passion and discord



### ● Statue of Nero's mum

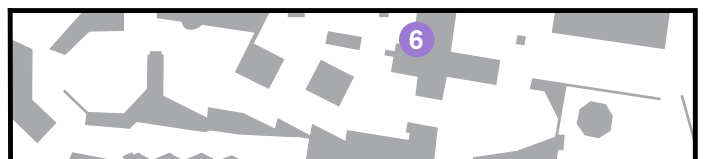
Agrippina was a powerful woman.

This made her unpopular.

Rich and powerful Roman men told lies about her.

This statue of Agrippina looks like metal but is made of stone.

Image: © Roma, Musei Capitolini





Fire

# Introduction to Fire

Rome caught fire.

The fire lasted for nine days.

People blamed Nero for starting it.

He blamed others. He had them killed.

Today, some people still think Nero did it.

# Fire



## ● Burned iron from a window

The fire destroyed Rome.

Houses collapsed. Buildings fell down.

People became homeless.

The flames were so hot they even melted strong metal.

Image: © Prof. Clementina Panella -  
Sapienza University of Rome



The new Apollo

# Introduction to The new Apollo

After the fire, Nero rebuilt Rome.

He also built himself an amazing new palace.

It was called the Golden House.

Nero had parties at his palace.

He welcomed important people.

He hoped to show that he was a great emperor.

## The new Apollo



### ● Painting of a Roman house

Rich Romans had villas (holiday homes) by the sea.

Some were nearly as grand as Nero's palace.

Paintings like this one show their size and decoration.

Image: © Su concessione del  
Ministero della Cultura - Museo  
Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli



Crisis and death

# Introduction to Crisis and death

Some people became unhappy with Nero.

They plotted against him.

Eventually, Nero killed himself.

Afterwards, powerful men fought to take control.

Their battles caused many deaths.

After his death Nero remained popular with the ordinary people of Rome.

They remembered him as a good emperor.

## Crisis and death



### ● Gold coin

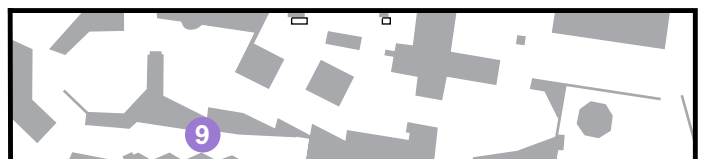
This coin shows the Roman goddess of safety.

Nero believed she protected him from harm.

Nero killed people who plotted against him.

He even killed his old friends.

Image: © The Trustees  
of the British Museum



## Crisis and death



### ● Marble head of Vespasian

A man called Vespasian worked for Nero in the Roman army. He was an important man.

He became emperor after Nero died.

An old statue of Nero was carved to look like the new emperor, Vespasian.

Image: © The Trustees of the British Museum

