

Book Review: Nero

Reviewed by Patch Blakey

What is unique about Nero Caesar that anyone would want to write a book about him? By all accounts, Nero was a monster. He was the sixth Roman Caesar, ruling half of the known world. He led a self-absorbed life of dissipation and immorality. He died young, but only after having done extensive damage to the empire and earning the opprobrium of all.

To provide some background for the rise of Nero, the author, Jacob Abbott, began with a brief sketch of Caligula and his assassination followed by the almost comedic succession of the fearful Claudius. As a youth, Claudius was held in such contempt by the people of the court that even his own mother considered him the standard for stupidity. After Caligula's death, Claudius, who was Caligula's uncle, tried to hide himself fearing for his own life, but was discovered because his toes showed underneath a curtain behind which he was trying to conceal himself. Claudius thought his time was up and dropped to his knees to plead for his life only to be surprised to find that he was being made the new emperor.

Claudius lived by fear more than reason. When his unfaithful wife was put to death by one of his courtiers, he never questioned it. He subsequently married his niece, Agrippina, Nero's mother. Nero was then adopted by Claudius and through the deceitful manipulation and intriguing of his mother, attained the throne over the rightful heir after Claudius was poisoned. But Nero's mother fully intended to use her son as a figurehead to allow herself free

reign in the rule of the empire.

As Nero grew older, his degenerate friends helped him realize that he was being used as a pawn by his mother, and he began to take measures to subdue his mother's ambitions while simultaneously achieving

Like Mary Shelly's Frankenstein monster, Nero's existence was one of complete tragedy from beginning to end. Unlike that monster, his life was real, not imaginary. It was, nevertheless, under such a tyrant as Nero Caesar that the

Apostle Paul told Governor Festus, "I appeal to Caesar." And, it was under such a tyrant as Nero that Paul was put to death for his faithful testimony to Jesus Christ.

Jacob Abbott's book, *Nero: Makers*

Nero: Makers of History

by Jacob Abbott

Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2009, 202 pages, \$12.00.

his own. In the course of events that followed, he had his half-brother, the rightful heir to the throne, poisoned. He had his mother murdered and his first wife killed, and he kicked his mistress to death. These were only the beginnings of his wretched actions. He soon grew completely callous and none were safe from his wicked temper and vain paranoia.

The one object for which he was willing to make any personal sacrifice was his desire to sing and perform publicly. He went to great lengths to train his voice, and he went to great distances to perform, often paying the judges to make a skewed decision in selecting him as the winner in any competition despite his blatant public failure to comply with the rules of the competition. But such contemptuous conduct only further degraded his regard in the eyes of the people. Ultimately, the Roman people lost all respect for his authority. When a seventy-three-year-old general rallied the army to oppose Nero, he felt compelled to flee, ultimately dying at the hand of one of his servants.

of History, was first printed in 1853. It is an exciting and engaging account, excellently written, but modified in places by the current publisher to bring the vocabulary up to date. It is a paperback book, but the cover looks like an aged, handsome, cloth-bound edition. It is the first in a series of similar books written by Jacob Abbott and being republished by Canon Press that will include accounts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Hannibal and others. I highly commend the book to your reading enjoyment and personal edification.