SOME OBSERVATIONS ON NERO AND THE CITY OF ROME

By

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“NÉRON: N’avois-je pas ma maison dorée, qui devoit être plus grande que les plus grandes villes? Oui-dà, je m’entendois en magnificence.

CALIGULA: Si on l’eût achevée, cette maison, il auroit fallu que les Romains fussent allés loger hors de Rome. Cette maison étoit proportionnée au colosse qui te représentoit, et non pas à toi, qui n’étois pas plus grand qu’un autre homme.

NÉR.: C’est que je visois au grand.

CAL.: Non; tu visois au gigantesque et au monstrueux. ...”

(F. Fénelon, *Dialogues des Morts* [Paris 1712], no. XLIX ‘Caligula et Néron’)

Several emperors put their mark on the city of Rome and a few of them have been honoured with specific studies on their connection with the *urbs*. So we have Paul Zanker’s seminal work on Augustus, Robin H. Darwall-Smith’s efficient study on the Flavians and Mary Boatright’s excellent work on Hadrian.¹ Nero has not yet had this honour and will probably never be dealt with extensively in this way, as his interventions were rather few in comparison to the emperors mentioned. Miriam Griffin, Jaś Elsner and Andrea Scheithauer have written some useful contributions on the topic.²

Few specific monuments can be singled out apart from his grand enterprises of the villa-like complexes of the Domus Transitoria and the Domus Aurea. These two big projects changed, be it for a short time, the centre of the large city that Rome had become from the late Republic onwards, and which had not yet seen such a display of luxury. People were stunned at

¹ P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (Munich 1987); R.H. Darwall-Smith, *Emperors and Architecture: A Study of Flavian Rome* (Bruxelles 1996); M. Boatright, *Hadrian and the City of Rome* (Princeton 1987). On the emperors and their public works in the city of Rome see P. Zanker, *Der Kaiser baut fürs Volk* (Opladen 1997). I thank Penelope Allison (Sidney) for the correction of my English text.

² M.T. Griffin, *Nero, the End of a Dynasty* (London 2000, 2nd ed.), 119-141; J. Elsner, ‘Constructing decadence: the representation of Nero as imperial builder’, in: J. Elsner & J. Masters, eds., *Reflections of Nero* (Chapel Hill/London 1994), 112-127; A. Scheithauer, *Kaiserliche Bautätigkeit in Rom. Das Echo in der Literatur* (Stuttgart 2000), 112-126. See also J.-M. Croisille & Y. Perrin, eds., *Neroniana VI. Rome à l’époque néronienne*, Bruxelles 2002, 11-140.

Nero's *domus*, more for their large scale and their use of precious materials than for the scandal (or not) of occupying the prime location in town.

In this contribution I propose to look briefly at building activities in the public domain. Two topics regarding the Domus Transitoria and the Domus Aurea will be discussed at some greater length.

Public and Sacral buildings

Most Neronian interventions concerning the layout of the city have been made after the Great Fire of A.D. 64. Two of the few previous important interventions were the new arrangement of the via Recta and the construction of the pons Neronianus, giving access to the area with the new baths Nero built near those of Marcus Agrippa.³

After the Great Fire Nero worked hard to prevent similar calamities in the future by propagating all sorts of practical rules for planning public open space and open space in the house blocks, and for construction materials and techniques, in order to diminish the risk of fire.⁴ Among various details, Tacitus lists a law for wall construction with old-fashioned tufa blocks. An explanation for this rule might be that the still young brick industry now had to work uniquely for the construction of the Golden House, in which there was a great demand of building material.

It is not clear whether these regulations were applied immediately. No Neronian house block is known from archaeological contexts. The fact that Tacitus writes positively about these rules might strengthen the impression of 'good deeds' for the public interest.

Public Works

If we look at the list of public monuments connected with Nero, we find a preference for accommodation for cultural activities and sports.

The Circus Maximus is mentioned a couple of times in the sources. Nero made seats for the *equites*, equal to those of the senators. This extension required the demolition of the *euripus* which might have caused some tumult from the senatorial ranks. The Great Fire started in one of the *tabernae* of the Circus, but the latter was in use again as early as 66 and

³ T.P. Wiseman, *LTUR I* (Rome 1993), 220-224 s.v. Campus Martius., esp. 223. P. Liverani (*LTUR IV* [Rome 1999], 111 s.v. Pons Neronianus) argues that it probably was constructed under Caligula and got its name in the Middle Ages. M. Tomei (*LTUR Suburbium I* [Rome 2001], 38 s.v. Agrippinae horti) maintains the traditional attribution and dating.

⁴ Tacitus, *Annales* 15.43. See E.J. Philips, 'Nero's new city', *Rivista di filologia e d'istruzione classica* 106 (1978), 300-307.

formed the central meeting point in 68, at Nero's return from Greece. A sort of yellowish copper dust, *chrysocolla* was strewn in the arena before the emperor would circle in his chariot.⁵ So, restoration work must either have been carried out immediately or the damage was less serious than the ancient texts suggest.

A.D. 57-58 Nero constructed a wooden amphitheatre on the Campus Martius, lavishly decorated according to the sources, and similar to that of Statilius Taurus. Its precise location is unknown.⁶

The construction of the *Thermae Neronis* and the adjacent gymnasium in the Campus Martius would have involved a more substantial enterprise.⁷ For public baths, the Romans still had no complex other than those of Agrippa, now too small for the population of Rome. Nero's baths were used until late antiquity, being incorporated into those built by Severus Alexander. The gymnasium, a Greek element, was only short-lived. It had been constructed in 62, together with the Baths, burnt down in the same year and was not rebuilt: we may speculate on the reason for this. There is no criticism in the written sources of the Greekness of this building.⁸

Utilitarian complexes are twice mentioned. The grand *horrea* of Vespasian on the Velia probably made use of a porticus built under Nero. If so, it would have stood next to the entrance of the Golden House, not far from the Arch of Titus.⁹

Coins with the legend *Mac Aug* are traditionally interpreted as representations of the *Macellum Augusti*, a huge market opened in 56-57. Its location is unknown but mostly surmised on the Caelius, following a reference in Dio's *Roman History* (61.18). It was also called *Macellum Magnum*. The foundation of the big market place corresponded with Nero's concern about

⁵ Plinius Maior, *Naturalis Historia* 33.87. Cf. P. Ciancio Rossetto, LTUR I (Rome 1993), 272-277 s.v. Circus Maximus, esp. 274; Idem, LTUR II (Rome 1995), 239 s.v. Euripus in Circo Maximo. On *chrysocolla* R. König & G. Winkler, *C. Plinius Secundus der Ältere, Naturkunde Lateinisch-Deutsch*, XXXIII. Tusculum edition (München/Zürich 1984), 155.

⁶ G. Ghini, *Le terme Alessandrine nel Campo Marzio*. Monumenti Antichi, serie miscellanea III.4 (Rome 1988), 125-129; D. Palombi, LTUR I (Rome 1993), 36 s.v. Amphitheatrum Neronis: The main source is the eulogy by Calpurnius Siculus, *Ecloga* 7.23-72. The nearby stables, located under Palazzo Farnese and Museo Barracco were restored after the fire of 64: F. Coarelli, LTUR IV (Rome 1999), 339-340 s.v. Stabula IIII factionum.

⁷ G. Ghini 1988, op.cit. (n. 6), 124-125; Eadem, LTUR V (Rome 1999), 60-62 s.v. *Thermae Neronianae/Alexandrinae*; Eadem, LTUR II (Rome 1995), 374 s.v. *Gymnasium Neronis*.

⁸ Such criticism would arise when Domitian built the *odium* and the *agon* on the spot of the later Palazzo Massimo alle colonne and Piazza Navona. Cf. Darwall-Smith 1996, op.cit. (n. 1), 221-226.

⁹ M. Piranomonte, LTUR III (Rome 1996), 45-46 s.v. *Horrea Piperataria*.

the public corn supply, the *ammon*.¹⁰ The representation – a sort of *tholos* in two tiers and a portico – provided grounds for a different interpretation by Laura Fabbrini, the scholar who has extensively researched the wing of the Domus Aurea on the Oppius Hill in the 1980s. She saw this image as the façade of the rotunda of this pavilion and her idea was supported by the numismatist Giovanna Arciprete. However, I think that the old interpretation of the Macellum remains the most valuable.¹¹ The main reason is that this part of the Golden House was private and therefore not a suitable motif for a coin. A second argument is the depiction itself: the round building stands clearly in front of the portico and does not jut out from the colonnade.

The water supply had been expanded considerably during the reign of Claudius. Nero might have continued this work, but we know of only one aqueduct, the Arcus Neroniani, probably a branch of the Aqua Claudia, that had to feed among others, the Stagnum Neronis and probably also the *nymphaeum* of the podium of the Temple of Claudius, to which I will return later.¹² This is a clear example of a construction built for private profit.¹³

Temples were not a hot item in the Neronian building policy, if we can speak about a real policy at all. Nero honoured Juppiter Optimus Maximus in his Capitoline shrine but no more is known about it.¹⁴ He did not carry out construction works here. The first great enterprise would have been the restoration by Domitian, after the fire of A.D. 80.

The Temple of Pax is shown on coins, as is the effigy of the goddess herself. No specific bonds with her are known. In all probability, Nero made use of its representation, proffering his claim as the bringer of the peace following the victory over the Parthians. Ianus' doors were shut after the Parthian Wars, when Tiridates visited Rome A.D. 66. We know for sure that the visit of this Eastern king to Rome in 66 was celebrated with enormous

¹⁰ G. Pisani Sartorio, *LTUR* III (Rome 1996), 204-206 s.v. Macellum Magnum. Cf. C.H.V. Sutherland, *The Roman Imperial Coinage* I. *From 31 BC to AD 69* (London 1984, 2nd ed.); Scheithauer 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 120.

¹¹ L. Fabbrini, 'Domus Aurea. Il Piano Superiore del Quartiere Orientale', *Memorie della Pontificia Accademia* 14 (1982), 5-24; G. Arciprete, 'Machina o Macellum Augusti? Considerazioni sul dupondio neroniano', *Bollettino di Archeologia* 16-18 (1992), 279-285. Contra i.a. Pisani Sartorio (see above, note 10) 204; E.M. Moormann, *Bollettino di Archeologia* 19-21 (1993 [=1996]), 281-282.

¹² Z. Mari, *LTUR* I (Rome 1993), 100-101 s.v. Arcus Neroniani. Cf. G. de Kleijn, *The Water Supply of Ancient Rome* (Amsterdam 2001), 25 (it also had the significant name of Arcus Caelimontani).

¹³ De Kleijn 2001, op.cit. (n. 12), 225-243 clearly demonstrates how the elite profited most from the aqueducts. Cf. her p. 256-257 on *horti*. As to criticism on Nero see Frontinus, *De aquaeductibus Romae* 77.1; cf. Scheithauer 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 121.

¹⁴ S. De Angeli, *LTUR* III (Rome 1996), 148-153 s.v. Iuppiter Optimus Maximus Capitolinus, aedes (fasi tardo-repubblicane e di età imperiale), esp. 152.

pomp. The theatre of Pompey was, as we read in the sources, clad with gold and covered with a starred veil.¹⁵ The temple of Ianus was used as an exhibition room for precious works of art like the famous dedicatory groups of the Gauls, after Nero's death.¹⁶ The same victory, though not very splendid, made him depict the doors of the Temple of Ianus Geminus on other coins as shut.¹⁷ As to the Temple of Vesta it is reported to have been restored by Nero after the fire of 64.¹⁸

Nero built a new type of triumphal arch, monumentalising the old scheme of the single *foris* by the addition of columns at the corners of both façades. The sides acquired deep niches in which statues were erected. In one of them, the coins show a figure of Mars. Its counterpart remains unknown. Was it his traditional companion Venus? No suggestions have been offered by the specialist on arches, Sandro De Maria, or by Fred Kleiner, author of a thorough monograph on the monument. Nero formulated the votation A.D. 58, but the arch was only built in 62, on the Capitol as a proof of the victory over the Parthians. The representation of enemies may have remained rather low-key as has been argued by Kleiner and De Maria: the results had not been very good for the Romans at all!¹⁹ Probably adjacent to the Arch were Nero's Trophies, unknown to us apart from on a coin.²⁰

Images of Roman buildings on coins of the Neronian era are not copious; most of them are present on bronze coins struck after the Great Fire of 64.²¹ The few monuments constructed by him are the already-mentioned Macellum and the Arch of Nero. Most coins stress the notion of Peace, like those with the Ara Pacis Augustae and those referred to, with the Temple of Ianus and of Pax. The two *domus* projects are absent altogether from the coinage.

¹⁵ P. Gros, LTUR V (Rome 1999), 35-38 s.v. *Theatrum Pompei*, esp. 37. Cf. E.M. Moormann, 'Das goldene Haus in Rom: Eine orientalische Erfindung?', in: R. Rolle, K. Schmidt & R.F. Docter, eds., *Archäologische Studien in Kontaktzonen der antiken Welt* (= Festschrift für H.G. Niemeyer) (Göttingen 1998), 689-701. The coins with the Temple of Ianus, however, predate this event and express the general concern for peace.

¹⁶ F. Coarelli, LTUR IV (Rome 1999), 67-70 s.v. *Pax, templum*, esp. 67.

¹⁷ E. Tortorici, LTUR III (Rome 1996), 92-93 s.v. *Ianus Geminus, aedes*.

¹⁸ R.T. Scott, LTUR IV (Rome 1999), 125-128 s.v. *Vesta, aedes*, esp. 126.

¹⁹ F.S. Kleiner, *The Arch of Nero in Rome* (Rome 1985), 67-95; S. De Maria, *Gli archi onorari dei Romani* (Rome 1988), 74-75 [revolutionary forms], 113-115 [reconstruction decoration], 283-284 no. 70 [description; bibliography]; F.S. Kleiner, LTUR I (Rome 1993), 101 s.v. *Arcus Neronis*; Scheithauer 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 125-126 ('Voraussetzung des *saeculum aureum*').

²⁰ E. Papi, LTUR V (Rome 1999), 91-92 s.v. *Tropaea Neronis*.

²¹ Sutherland 1984, op.cit. (n. 10), 13-187 (Nero). See for a purely numismatic analysis of the coins D.W. MacDowall, *The Western Coinages of Nero* (New York 1979).

We may conclude that the wooden amphitheatre, the circus and the Baths with the adjacent Gymnasium were projects that heightened the popularity of the emperor among the inhabitants of Rome. I do not think, however, that Nero differed much from his predecessors or his successors in erecting these categories of buildings.²² They fitted well into the urban texture and there was simply a need for these sorts of facilities. Moreover, these projects provided an important source of employment for the crowded city population.

Works of art

We know that Nero collected a great deal of antique statuary, among which a masterwork like the Alexander signed by Lysippos²³ and the group of the Dying Gaul. His avid lust for art is comparable to that of Caligula and forms a sort of 'conspicuous consumption'.²⁴ The places where these sculptures were exhibited are unknown. Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 34.84) states that the Gauls stood *in sellariis Domus Aureae* like Boethos' Child Strangling a Goose. We have already seen that Vespasian exhibited them in the Temple of Pax. Filippo Coarelli recently argued that the Gauls were erected in the octagonal room 128 of the Oppius pavilion, but I think that this is highly improbable, if we consider the suite of rooms around it as banqueting facilities, and that the central rotunda itself served for dances and other forms of entertainment for the emperor and his guests. The theme seems inappropriate in such a setting.²⁵

Another work of art associated with the Golden House is the Laocoon Group. When this masterpiece was found in 1506, it was not standing in one of the Golden House rooms, but near the Sette Sale. Nevertheless, one still reads that it was discovered in room 131. Apart from the information on the real find spot, we must keep in mind that the pavilion on the Oppius hill was backfilled with debris, when Trajan's constructors started to erect the Trajanic Baths. The few pieces of sculpture found hitherto are broken pieces, no longer considered of great value. Hence, it is highly improbable that a

²² Cf. the positive tenor of the sources: Scheithauer 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 113-115. See also Griffin 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 64, 109-113.

²³ E.M. Moormann, 'Domus Aurea; Domus Tiberiana', in: *Lisippo. L'arte e la fortuna* (Milano 1995), 308.

²⁴ A. Winterling, *Aula Caesaris. Studien zur Institutionalisierung des römischen Kaiserhofes in der Zeit von Augustus bis Commodus (31 v.Chr.-192 n.Chr.)* (Munich 1999), 79 points at this well-known term of Th. Veblen from 1899.

²⁵ F. Coarelli, *Da Pergamo a Roma. I Galati nella città degli Attalidi* (Romae 1995), 14-15, 37. Cf. E.M. Moormann in: M. Cima & E. La Rocca (eds.), *Horti Romani: Atti del convegno internazionale, Roma 4-6 maggio 1995* (Rome 1998), 357.

work of art like the Laocoon Group would have remained there. This does, however, not mean that this sculpture could not have formed an element in Nero's collection. The house of Titus reportedly held this and other works of art originating from Nero's collections.²⁶

A statue of Minerva was erected in the Curia after Nero's mother was assassinated and later it should have got a place in the (for us problematic) Atrium Minervae. This building or portico, around an open space, has been identified as the Chalcidicum. As a matter of fact, the statue reportedly would be exposed in the Chalcidicum after A.D. 68 and it is not difficult to guess why it had been removed from the Curia.²⁷

Among the portraits of the emperor we know of two exceptional cases, the Colossus by Zenodorus²⁸ and a painted effigy, equally of huge dimensions, viz. some 120 feet high, displayed in the Horti Maiani and damaged in the fire of 64.²⁹ Its shape is unknown and the form of the bronze giant erected in the vestibulum of the Golden House also remains speculative.

The Domus Transitoria and the Domus Aurea

As to the two most famous projects of Nero in Rome, the Domus Transitoria and the Domus Aurea, I want to argue that (1) the Temple of Claudius probably has not been constructed at all during Nero's reign, and (2) the large areas occupied by the two *domus* complexes had already been in imperial possession or were gradually acquired, giving Nero the possibility to realise his Golden House.

The Domus Transitoria is mentioned by Suetonius as a predecessor of the Domus Aurea.³⁰ The term *transitoria* alludes at the connection between properties on the Palatine and the Esquiline. The very nature of the complex, and its chronology, remain unknown. Apparently Nero wanted to establish a unity consisting of the traditional residence on the main hill of Rome and the series of *horti* in the then outskirts of the town, near the old burial grounds. Some *horti* on the Esquiline are known to have been the

²⁶ Plinius Maior, *Naturalis Historia* 36.37; E. Papi, LTUR II (Rome 1995), 199 s.v. Domus Titi Imperatoris.

²⁷ F. Zevi, LTUR I (Rome 1993), 135-136 s.v. Atrium Minervae.

²⁸ C. Lega, LTUR I (Rome 1993), 295 s.v. Colossus: Nero. Now fundamental: M. Bergmann, *Der Koloß Neros, die Domus Aurea und die Mentalitätswandel im Rom der frühen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz 1994); Eadem, *Die Strahlen der Herrscher. Theomorphes Herrscherbild und politische Symbolik im Hellenismus und in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz 1998), 190.

²⁹ Plinius Maior, *Naturalis Historia* 35.51. The Horti Maiani formed part of the Horti Lamiani.

³⁰ M. de Vos, LTUR II (Rome 1995), 199-202 s.v. Domus Transitoria.

property of the imperial family, from Augustus onwards. Maecenas, for example, left his 'gardens' to his friend, when he died in 8 BC.³¹

The construction of the Golden House over an area that occupied most of the centre of Rome caused the abolition of a series of older monuments. The Temple of the Fortuna Virgo was included in the grounds, as was the *Turris Maecenatis*.³² Pliny tells that Nero robbed precious materials from the Temple of the Fortuna Seiani, an old building, reportedly erected by Servius Tullius.³³ The most conspicuous monument mentioned in connection with the Golden House is the Temple of Divus Claudius at the Caelius.³⁴

The Temple of Divus Claudius

It is generally assumed that Nero interrupted the construction of the Temple of Divus Claudius in 64 and integrated the area into the *horti* of his Golden House. Nero's predecessor had been made *divus* by the Senate at the instigation of his widow Agrippina on October 13, A.D. 54, in contrast with Tiberius, whom was simply refused this honour, and Caligula, who was struck by a *damnatio memoriae*. In this way, Claudius acquired a touch of the divine Augustus, and so did his adoptive son Nero, who could be called *Divi filius*.³⁵ Agrippina had also taken the initiative of erecting a temple for her last husband on the Caelius, opposite the Palatine hill, probably on private property.³⁶

Almost nothing has been preserved of this huge project and the known elements date to the Flavian era. Some arches of the platform are still visible near and in the basilica of SS. Giovanni e Paolo. The podium measured 200 x 160 metres. From the start of the construction of the Golden House, the Caelius was included into its park and the northern slope of the hill was changed into a large *nymphaeum*, a sort of Trevi fountain that could

³¹ C. Häuber, *LTUR* III (Rome 1996), 70-74 s.v. *Horti Maecenatis*; M. de Vos, *LTUR* III (Rome 1996), 74-75 s.v. *Horti Maecenatis*. "Auditorium". The *Turris Maecenatis* either formed part of some building or was a separate construction, *ibidem* p. 73. Contra: Y. Perrin, 'La Domus Aurea et l'idéologie néronienne', in: *Le système palatial en orient, en Grèce et à Rome* (Leiden 1987), 359-391, esp. 375-377; Idem, '*Turris Maecenatiana*: une note d'histoire et de topographie', *Latomus* 55 (1996), 399-410.

³² J. Aronen, *LTUR* II (Rome 1995), 279-280 s.v. *Fortuna Virgo*. For the tower see bibliography cited in note 31.

³³ Plinius Maior, *Naturalis Historia* 36.163. Cf. L. Anselmino & M.J. Strazzulla, *LTUR* II (Rome 1995), 278 s.v. *Fortuna Seiani*, aedes; D. Palombi, *Tra Palatino ed Esquilino: Velia, Carinae, Fagutal. Storia urbana di tre quartieri di Roma antica* (Rome 1997), 137; Scheithauer 2000, *op.cit.* (n. 2), 118 (no criticism in Pliny).

³⁴ C. Buzzetti, *LTUR* I (Rome 1993), 277-278 s.v. *Claudius, Divus, Templum* (Reg. III); Darwall-Smith 1996, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 48-55.

³⁵ Griffin 2000, *op.cit.* (n. 2), 96-99: title mainly used between 55 and 60.

³⁶ Suetonius, *Vespasianus* 9. On the dedication by Agrippina see D. Fishwick, 'Seneca and the Temple of Divus Claudius', *Britannia* 22 (1991), 137-142; Darwall-Smith 1996, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 40.

be seen from the pavilion on the Oppius Hill. Apart from the Oppius wing, it forms the only substantial construction of the Golden House complex not entirely demolished after Nero's death. The water for the *nymphaeum* came from the already-mentioned Arcus Neroniani.

The general view is that Nero was responsible for the interruption of the construction of the temple and extended his private grounds in a selfish way. However, the ancient sources do not accuse him openly of any sort of impiety.³⁷ But we may ask, as a consequence of the dramatic end to the previously warm affection between mother and son, whether the work on the temple had started at all or had been stopped in the first stage of the preparation of the surface. We know that their relationship was troubled as early as 55 and that, shortly after, Agrippina was sent into some kind of exile from public life.³⁸ She had to retire to Baiae, where she would be murdered in A.D. 59. These vicissitudes were dramatically described by Tacitus and retold by Werner Eck and A.A. Barrett in their monographs on Agrippina.³⁹ From these works one gets an image of the gloomy circumstances that caused her to retire from active political life.⁴⁰

I would like to argue that the grand project of the temple for the Divus Claudius had barely begun at all. Agrippina had no possibility to build it in or after 55 and probably lacked the power and money to have it carried out by others. Moreover, Nero fostered no warm feelings for his uncle, whom he used merely as an instrument in the succession.⁴¹ As a matter of fact, Miriam Griffin and Andrea Scheithauer see the interruption of the construction as a result of 'Diffamierung' of Claudius.⁴² An additional argument for my thesis is that the temple has not been depicted on Neronian coins. In my view, the works for the rearrangement of the hill's slopes to

³⁷ Scheithauer 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 116.

³⁸ Tacitus, *Annales* 13.18 tells how she had to move out from the palace into the former house of Antonia on the Palatine as early as 55. During the workshop, in the discussion following my paper, Werner Eck suggested that Agrippina was ruled out at last at 11 February, 55, when Britannicus was murdered.

³⁹ A.A. Barrett, *Agrippina. Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire* (New Haven/London 1996); Idem, *Agrippina. Mother of Nero* (New Haven/London 1996). Both editions have the same impagination. The information can be found in chapter 7, 'Mother', pp. 143-180, and chapter 8, 'The End', pp. 181-195. See also W. Eck, *Agrippina die Stadtgründerin Kölns. Eine Frau in der frühkaiserlichen politik* (Cologne 1993), 67-76, where the same image is sketched.

⁴⁰ In this context, it is not important whether Burrus and/or Seneca were involved in this alienation, as has been stipulated several times.

⁴¹ Barrett 1996, op.cit. (n. 39), 160 thinks that Agrippina asked for too much attention for Claudius. S.H. Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions. Prosecutors and Informants from Tiberius to Domitian* (London/New York 2001), 150-152 also stresses her instable position.

⁴² Griffin 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 98; Scheithauer 2000, op.cit. (n. 2), 121. The latter also suggests that Agrippina's dedication instead of the emperor's one showed the same lack of reverence.

produce the walls of the podium of the temple were indeed started at an early point. The *nymphaeum* was installed at the moment Nero could construct the Golden House.

We know that Vespasian took up the old project and finished the temple. If I am right, one might even ask whether it was not this first Flavian emperor, who in fact started the building project. He may have included the temple in the entire management of the area around the former Stagnum Neronis, comprising the Palatine, the Caelius and the Oppius. An allusion to a formerly projected temple for Claudius fitted well into that strategy, according to which he abolished as completely as possible the memory of Nero. Moreover, the Flavian propaganda did not refrain from accusing Nero for stopping the construction of a temple dedicated to his honourable uncle Claudius. Nero would have offended the *pietas*, essential for a good name among Rome's elite.

The Flavians left the nymphaeum along the northern side of the hill untouched, where it could serve as a beautiful water-works not far from the Amphitheatrum Flavium and the Ludus Magnus, constructed under Domitian.⁴³

The area

An important point stressed in all considerations on the Golden House – and less on the Domus Transitoria – is the extent of its area. Some have calculated that it covered 50 hectares, C.C. van Essen even proposed that the surface area was 80 hectares, more or less double the area of the modern Vatican City.⁴⁴ It has been suggested that these grounds, covering the Palatine, the Velia, the Oppius, the Esquiline and part of the Caelius, plus the areas between these hills, were occupied more or less *ex novo* by the emperor, when he started the Golden House. The Great Fire facilitated this process, in that the emperor could incorporate the devastated areas in-between.

On the other hand, we know from Tacitus that a number of *horti* became the property of the emperor in the late Fifties and early Sixties and I would argue that it was already Nero's intention to obtain them.⁴⁵ We must date Nero's plans to extend his 'house' beyond the normal limits shortly after he came to power. Let me list the *horti* on the Esquiline in Nero's possession.⁴⁶

⁴³ Darwall-Smith 1996, op.cit. (n. 1), 218-219.

⁴⁴ See now in general: LTUR II (Rome 1995), 49-64 s.v. Domus Aurea (various authors); bibliographical addenda in LTUR V (Rome 1999), 244.

⁴⁵ De Kleijn 2001, op.cit. (n. 12), 239 stresses the extended area of the *horti*.

⁴⁶ Other gardens used by Nero are the Horti Sallustiani (see P. Innocenti & M.C. Leotta, LTUR III [Rome 1996], 79-81), imperial property on the Pincio, the Horti Serviliani (see L. Chioffi, LTUR III

- 1) Horti Lamiani, adjacent to the Horti Maecenatis; in imperial possession from Caligula (or previously?) or, at the latest, from A.D. 62 (M. Cima di Puolo, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 61-64);
- 2) Horti Lolliani, adjacent to Stazione Termini; imperial properties from Claudius onwards, probably after the exile of Lollia Paulina A.D. 49, when her possessions were confiscated (Tacitus, *Annales* 12.22; E. Papi, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 67);
- 3) Horti Maecenatis; imperial properties from 8 B.C. onwards (Cassius Dio 55.7.5) and incorporated into the Domus Aurea (Tacitus, *Annales* 15.39.40; C. Häuber, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 70-74);
- 4) Horti Pallantiani, near the so-called Temple of Minerva Medica; the proprietor, Nero's *libertus* Pallas killed 'by' Nero in A.D. 62, in order to gain possession of the grounds (Tacitus, *Annales* 14.65: *quod immensam pecuniam longa senecta detineret*; D. Manciola, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 77);
- 5) Horti Tauriani, taken over by Agrippina A.D. 53, who urged the proprietor T. Statilius Taurus to kill himself (Tacitus, *Annales* 12.59; E. Papi, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 85);
- 6) Horti Torquatiani, taken over by Nero A.D. 63, who urged the proprietor D. Iunius Torquatus Silanus to kill himself (Tacitus, *Annales* 15.35; D. Manciola, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 85-86).

As to the Palatine one sees how here the emperor gradually pushed out other proprietors, as if he were the young cuckoo in another bird's nest.⁴⁷ He followed a line started by his predecessor Claudius, who had begun the construction of the huge Domus Tiberiana.⁴⁸

I should say that the Domus Transitoria and the Domus Aurea are the result of a gradual process of annexation of properties throughout Rome. The Great Fire only facilitated the last step, viz. the connection between separate areas like the Palatine, Caelius and Oppius-Esquiline. The bought or stolen plots were mostly *horti*, i.e. big garden structures with sets of pavilions within them and various sorts of green areas.⁴⁹ The descriptions by Tacitus

[Roma 1996], 84), probably in the Ager Vaticanus, and the Nemus Caesarum in Trastevere (E. Papi, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 340; Tomei 2001, op.cit. [n.3]). Nero's powerful freedman Epaphroditus possessed gardens near the Porta Maggiore (D. Manciola, LTUR III [Roma 1996], 60).

⁴⁷ E. Papi, LTUR IV (Roma 1999), 28-38 s.v. Palatium (64-V sec. d.C.), esp. 28-29, 36-37 (interventions after the Fire; destruction of houses; roads); Winterling 1999, op.cit. (n. 24), 65-70, esp. 67.

⁴⁸ C. Krause, LTUR II (Roma 1995), 189-197 s.v. Domus Tiberiana, esp. 190; Idem, Domus Tiberiana I. Gli scavi, *Bollettino di Archeologia* 25-27 (1994 = 1998); Y. Perrin in this volume.

⁴⁹ See the important volumes by M. Cima & E. La Rocca (eds.), *Le tranquille dimore degli dei. La residenza imperiale degli horti Lamiani* (Roma 1986); Idem (eds.), 1998, op.cit. (n.25). On

and Suetonius of the vast park – to be imagined like the Villa Hadriana at Tivoli – can thus be explained from the fact that many elements already existed and had only to be integrated by Nero into his new concept. In my view, therefore, the Golden House was not the *ex novo* result of only four years work. The descriptions by Tacitus and Suetonius seem to exaggerate in this respect.⁵⁰ The texts possibly contain personal observations of the authors, who could have visited the parts of the Golden House that remained in use, such as *horti*, and especially those on the Esquiline. One may think, for instance, of the Horti Lamiani, originally part of Nero's Golden House where the famous statue of Commodus as Hercules was found, as testifying to the continuing use of the *horti* through the 2nd and 3rd centuries.⁵¹

Whether Nero opened the gardens to the public like some of his predecessors had done is unknown. As a matter of fact, the people struck by the Great Fire were first sheltered in Nero's Gardens (Tacitus, *Annales* 15.39.2). And a number of Christians, being regarded as the culprits of this disaster, was burnt in the gardens, which were made freely accessible for this 'spectacle' (Tacitus, *Annales* 15.44). It remains unclear, in both cases, which gardens were meant, but the execution of the Christians is generally considered to have been located in the Vatican area, in the Gardens of Agrippina, not far from the circus of Gaius. The term 'spectacle' implies a great number of visitors.⁵²

Finally, we may turn to Flavian propaganda. In the anti-Neronian vein of this period the notion of *Roma reddita sibi* fitted well. But, who, in fact, was seriously harmed, apart from the people who had been urged to commit suicide? It was only the elite who lamented the extravagance of the emperor. The mob apparently easily consented to the construction of the Golden House, as they had never before obtained access to these grand *horti* on the Esquiline.

terminology see N. Purcell, 'Dialectical gardening', *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 14 (2001), 546-556; p. 551 on the Golden House.

⁵⁰ Tacitus, *Annales* 15.42; Suetonius, *Nero* 31. Cf. W.J.Th. Peters, 'Tacitus en Suetonius over het park van Nero's domus aurea', in: *Noctes Noviomagenses J.C.F. Nuchelmans ab amicis oblatae* (Weesp 1985), 105-117; E.M. Moormann, '“Vivere come un uomo”. L'uso dello spazio nella *Domus Aurea*', in: Cima & La Rocca 1998, op.cit. (n. 25), 345-361, esp. 359-360 with bibliography.

⁵¹ Cima & La Rocca 1986, op.cit. (n. 49), 88-95; O.J. Hekster, *Commodus. An Emperor at the Crossroads* (Amsterdam 2002), 121-122.

⁵² See most recently Tomei 2001, op.cit. (n. 3) 37-39.

Conclusion

Nero does not seem to have put a typically political or public stamp on the image of the town. There is no 'Macht der Bilder' to be attributed to his personal interventions. If he did, it was a personal move, satisfying his personal needs to 'live like a man'.

Even the mode of wall decoration, called the Fourth Style, existed previously and did not change radically during this period. The remains of the Domus Aurea on the Oppius show a set of rich paintings on walls and vaults, but these are undoubtedly of secondary importance to the marble floor and wall revetments in the main rooms. Wall decoration was not the means to display luxury in an emperor's palace. A novelty is the introduction of marbling at a great scale. We see it for the first time in public buildings like the Forum Augustum at the end of the 1st century B.C., and for the first time in private context – as far as we know – in the nymphaeum and the surrounding rooms pertaining to the Domus transitoria on the Palatine. The imperial atmosphere was enhanced by the exhibition of numerous works of art.

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