

THIS CLIP DEPICTS THE LIFE OF NERO, A ROMAN EMPEROR, AND CONTAINS RE-ENACTMENTS OF REAL PEOPLE AND REAL EVENTS. THESE EVENTS MAY BE DISTURBING TO SOME PEOPLE. VIEWER DISCRETION IS ADVISED.

Roman emperors liked to think of themselves as "gods," but it became apparent to many people that Nero was losing (or had already lost) his mind. As a result, it was extremely difficult for anyone to respect him as infallible.

Among many other issues, Nero performed various theatrical works, in public. High-ranking citizens of Rome were appalled at this lack of imperial decorum. Tacitus provides some background:

A spectacle, in which the prince exposed his frivolous talents, gave them ["thinking men"] the highest disgust. (Annals of Tacitus, Volume III, Book XVI, section V - see [page 253](#).)

The massive building projects Nero had ordered, after the great fire of 64 AD, were pushing the empire further and further toward financial ruin. Then Nero came-up with a tax scheme to solve his lack-of-money problem.

Throughout the empire, the richest men would be forced to leave their entire estates to Nero when they died. Those death taxes would be used to fund the government's projects.

There was another part to that imperial directive: Once the wills were changed, the men would be required to immediately commit suicide.

In the history of the world, few rulers ever had the kind of absolute power which Nero had at this time of his life. But his quest for money, and his plan for rebuilding Rome, had drained the finances of all the provinces.

People were starving and provincial aristocrats - in France (Gaul), Spain and elsewhere - were calling for rebellion against Nero. Cassius Dio, an ancient historian writing some decades after Nero's rule, writes about those open revolts:

While Nero was in Greece, the Jews revolted openly and he sent Vespasian [then a military general] against them. The inhabitants of Britain and of Gaul [France], likewise, oppressed by the taxes, experienced an even keener distress, which added fuel to the already kindled fire of their indignation. (Dio's Annals of Rome, Volume 5, Book 63 - see [page 75](#).)

A high-ranking Roman in Gaul - [Gaius Julius Vindex](#) - was so upset about Nero's behavior that he publicly urged a rebellion against the Emperor:

Now this Vindex made an assembly of the Gauls, who had suffered much during the numerous forced levies of money, and were still suffering at Nero's hands.

And ascending a tribunal he delivered a long and detailed speech against Nero, saying that they ought to revolt from the emperor and join him in an attack [upon him], - "because," said he, "he has despoiled the whole Roman world, because he has destroyed all the flower of their senate, because he debauched and likewise killed his mother, and does not preserve even the semblance of sovereignty.

Murders, seizures and outrages have often been committed and by many other persons: but how may one find words to describe the remainder of his conduct as it deserves?

I have seen, my friends and allies, - believe me, - I have seen that man (if he is a man...) in the arena of the theatre and in the orchestra ... I have often heard him sing, I have heard him make proclamations, I have heard him perform tragedy. I have seen him in chains, I have seen him dragged about, pregnant, bearing children, going through all the situations of mythology, by speech, by being addressed, by being acted upon, by acting.

Who, then, will call such a person Caesar and emperor and Augustus? Let no one for any consideration so abuse those sacred titles ... Therefore now at length rise against him: come to the succor of yourselves and of the Romans; liberate the entire world!" (Dio's Annals of Rome, Volume 5, Book 63 - see [pages 75-6](#).)

Vindex - whose rank was equivalent to that of a Roman senator - did not want to become emperor himself. He simply wanted Nero gone - since he would not give up the throne voluntarily - to make room for a more worthy ruler.

See, also:

[Nero - Emperor of Rome](#)

[Nero - Rebuilding Rome after the Fire](#)

[Nero - Plot to Kill Nero](#)

Nero - Becoming a Madman

Nero - Commits Suicide

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The BBC first broadcast this [program about "Ancient Rome"](#) on the 21st of September, 2006. To purchase the dramatized documentary series, [click here](#).

Writer/director:

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Poppaea Sabina:

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Tigellinus:

James Wilby

Senator Piso:

Hugh Ross

Seneca:

Hugh Dickson

Narrator:

Alisdair Simpson

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