



The Emperor Nero, who was thought by many to have started the Great Fire of Rome

The Emperor Nero (AD54-68) was viciously cruel, and had his wife and mother murdered, as well as anyone who dared to oppose him. He also loved art, music and poetry, and shocked his people by playing the lyre and singing in public. (Musicians weren't considered respectable.) Nero's performances could be very long, and the audience was forbidden to leave before the end. Sometimes, people pretended to be dead so that they could be carried out.

THE YEAR OF THE FOUR EMPERORS

After Nero's death came a period of incredible turmoil. In AD69, Rome was ruled by no fewer than four emperors within a single year. The last of these emperors, Vespasian, was a general in the Roman army. With the support of his soldiers, he finally brought stability back to the Empire.

REASONABLE RULERS

Many emperors were sensible, fair rulers who did their best to keep an enormous empire running smoothly.

Tiberius's nephew, the Emperor Claudius (AD41-54), had been left crippled by a childhood disease, and most people thought he wasn't capable of ruling Rome. In fact, he turned out to be an excellent emperor, although he was eventually murdered. Some historians think his wife gave him poisoned mushrooms to eat.

The Emperor Claudius was a shy and nervous man, but an efficient ruler. He conquered Britain in AD43.

In AD96, Nerva became emperor, and ruled Rome and the empire wisely and fairly. After him came four capable emperors, and together these rulers are known as the five good emperors. They expanded the Empire, improved its organization, and won the support of senators by treating the Senate with respect.

PASSING ON POWER

At first, a man could only become emperor if he was related to the last ruler. But Nerva started a new tradition, when he chose and adopted the man he thought would be most suitable to rule after him. (See page 355 for a full list of Roman emperors.)

INTERNET LINK

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