Finch & Co



A MASSIVE AND MAGNIFICENT ITALIAN MARBLE BUST OF THE ROMAN EMPEROR NERO

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LATE 17TH CENTURY
SIZE: 96CM HIGH, 77CM WIDE, 38CM DEEP – 37¾ INS HIGH, 30¼ INS WIDE, 15 INS DEEP

LITERATURE

NERO WAS THE FIFTH AND FINAL ROMAN EMPEROR OF THE JULIO-CLAUDIAN DYNASTY. ADOPTED BY HIS GREAT UNCLE CLAUDIUS TO BECOME HEIR TO THE THRONE HE SUCCEEDED AS NERO CLAUDIUS CAESAR AUGUSTUS GERMANICUS ON OCTOBER 13TH 54 AD AT THE YOUNG AGE OF 16 FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF CLAUDIUS. RULING FROM 54 AD TO 68 AD HE FOCUSED HIS ATTENTION ON DIPLOMACY, TRADE AND INCREASING THE CULTURAL CAPITAL OF THE EMPIRE.
HIS RULE IS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH TYRANNY AND EXTRAVAGANCE. HE IS KNOWN AS THE EMPEROR WHO 'FIDDLED WHILE ROME BURNED', FOR EXECUTING HIS MOTHER AND HIS ADOPTIVE BROTHER AMONGST OTHERS AND AS AN EARLY PERSECUTOR OF CHRISTIANS. THIS VIEW IS BASED MAINLY ON THE SURVIVING HISTORICAL SOURCES OF TACITUS AND SUETONIS, WHICH PAINT NERO IN AN UNFAVOURABLE LIGHT. OTHER SOURCES INCLUDING CASSIUS DIO PORTRAY HIM AS AN EMPEROR WHO WAS POPULAR WITH THE ROMAN PEOPLE. OVER THE COURSE OF HIS REIGN HE WAS CRITICISED AS BEING OBSESSED WITH POPULARITY AS HE REGULARLY MADE RULINGS THAT PLEASED THE LOWER CLASSES. HE BUILT THEATRES, PROMOTED ATHLETIC GAMES, ENORMOUS GLADIATORIAL SHOWS WERE HELD AND HE ESTABLISHED A FIVE YEARLY FESTIVAL WHICH, INCLUDED POETRY, THEATRES AND GAMES. THERE WAS A GENERAL BELIEF THAT THEATRE WAS FOR THE LOWER CLASSES AND LED TO IMMORALITY AND LAZINESS AND SO SOME QUESTIONED THE LARGE PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON ENTERTAINMENT.
IN 64 AD ROME BURNED AND NERO ENACTED A PUBLIC RELIEF EFFORT AS WELL AS SIGNIFICANT RECONSTRUCTION. ANCIENT HISTORIANS HAVE WRITTEN THAT THESE PROJECTS EXACERBATED THE DRAIN ON THE STATE'S BUDGET AND THAT IT WAS BELIEVED THEY WERE OVERLY EXTRAVAGANT, THAT NERO LEFT ITALY 'THOROUGHLY EXHAUSTED BY CONTRIBUTIONS OF MONEY' WITH 'THE PROVINCES RUINED'.

DURING HIS REIGN NERO SUCCESSFULLY WENT TO WAR AND NEGOTIATED PEACE WITH THE PARTHIAN EMPIRE, IMPROVED RELATIONS WITH GREECE AND SUPPRESSED THE BRITISH REVOLT, BUT ECONOMIC UNREST CAUSED A MILITARY COUP IN 68 AD WHICH DROVE NERO FROM THE THRONE. FACING EXECUTION HE COMMITTED SUICIDE AT THE AGE OF 30.