

# Makeover mayor fiddles with Nero's bloody image

Italy  
Richard Owen Rome

For 2,000 years Emperor Nero has been regarded as a crazed and yet ineffectual megalomaniac who murdered his mother and first and second wives, set fire to Rome and burnt Christians to death or had them thrown to wild animals.

Yesterday he was rehabilitated — at least by the citizens of Anzio, the port south of the capital where he was born and where the remains of his sprawling summer palace can be seen above a sandy cove.

Luciano Bruschini, the mayor of Anzio, a city best known as a site of the Allied landings in 1944, unveiled a bronze statue of Nero in a public garden overlooking the sea, observing that it was time that the emperor's reputation was reassessed.

Flanked by women dressed in Roman costume, Mr Bruschini said: "It is not by chance that we have erected the statue by the sea and the former Roman port. Various episodes in Nero's life are linked to his birthplace, which he made the seat of an imperial residence which assumed monumental dimensions

## Roman scandals

● Nero was born in AD37 and adopted by Emperor Claudius after Nero's mother Agrippina married the politician to advance her son's prospects

● Nero succeeded his stepfather in AD54 after Agrippina allegedly poisoned Claudius

● Her attempts to rule through her son were short-lived when Nero had her put to death after coming to power

● According to legend, Nero played the lyre as a fire tore through Rome in AD64 — explaining the phrase "fiddling while Rome burns". He blamed Christians and began



a campaign of persecution against them

● As rebellion grew across the empire, Nero's legions turned against him. He was driven from power and killed himself on learning that the Senate intended to have him executed

Source: Times database

which we can still admire." A plaque declares that Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus was born at Anzio in AD37, acclaimed emperor in AD54 and presided over "a period of peace, great splendour and important reforms".

It does not mention that he had his mother, Agrippina, put to death, and divorced and later executed his wife, Octavia, (who was also his stepsister), so that he could marry Poppaea Sabina — who, according to Suetonius, he kicked to death while she was pregnant. Nor does it record that Nero put the blame for the six-day

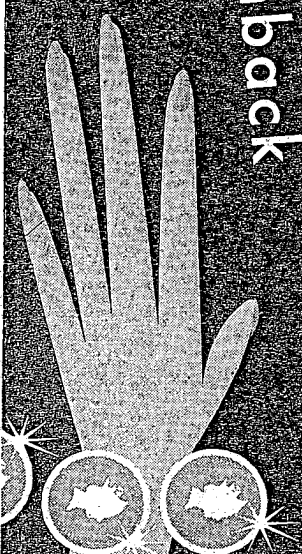
Great Fire of AD64 (which he may have started) on the Christians, sparking a campaign of persecution, then building the Domus Aurea (Golden House), a grandiose palace, on the ruins. He committed suicide shortly afterwards, at the age of 31, when the army turned against him and the Senate declared him a public enemy.

his reign. This statue is a contribution to remembering Nero as he deserves to be remembered — surmounting the ridiculous reconstructions of history books and films.

Some historians argue that under the influence of Seneca, his tutor, Nero improved public order and reformed the treasury. He is also said to have indulged in ever-wilder orgies and devoted himself to chariot racing, singing, acting, dancing, poetry, and accompanying himself on the lyre.

His reported last words were: "Qua-  
lis artifex petro" (What an artist the world loses in me).

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