

CHAPTER 22

Nero in Jewish and Christian Tradition from the First Century to the Reformation

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Modern readers who come to accounts of Nero in Jewish and Christian tradition are likely to leave bemused if not somewhat bewildered. Those who read the ancient Jewish and Christian beliefs about a Nero who will return from death and damnation as Antichrist will share Augustine's incredulity about such apocalyptic prognostications: "For myself I am astonished at the great presumption of those who venture such guesses" (*City of God* 20.10). Christian legends portraying Nero as the disciple of the arch heretic Simon Magus, an eternal fisherman in Hell angling with golden nets; or Jewish legends of a Nero penitent for unleashing the war that destroyed the Temple in Jerusalem but also the forefather of one of Judaism's most heralded rabbis, "master of the miracle" Rabbi Meir, are colorful tales from a lost world, barely recognizable to the modern secular west. Still, the Nero of Jewish and Christian tradition deserves a closer examination, for the ancient legends and myths associated with the emperor are valuable cultural currency, a way of engaging with and analyzing the world. Traditions about Nero furnished a basis, amongst other things, for reflecting upon and formulating ideals of government free from tyranny and lawlessness: Nero's violent end even furnished warrant for armed revolt against secular and religious tyrants. The Nero of Christian and Jewish tradition may even, disguised in our familiarities, live with us today.

Nero in Jewish Tradition: Destroyer of the Holy Nation, Father of Rabbis, *Redivivus*

Nero enjoyed a lively career in Jewish tradition that established the terms of his survival in the cultural imagination for a millennium. Notorious of course as the emperor who ruled at the commencement of the Jewish War, which led in turn to the destruction of

the Jewish Temple, in Jewish polemic he is both pagan opponent of Judaism, destined for defeat, and a mythic figure in apocalyptic literature who will return from hiding in the east at the end of days to wage war against Jerusalem – only to be vanquished by a divine savior figure. This latter portrait, the kernel of the myth of a resurrected Nero – *Nero redivivus* – is rooted in popular beliefs recorded by Roman and Greek historians that Nero did not commit suicide somewhere in the suburbs of Rome after escaping a palace coup, but rather fled to Parthia where he was preparing an army to march on Rome to punish his adversaries. Roman authors recount several would-be emperors claiming to be Nero arising in the east (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.8.1; Dio 63.29.2, 64.9.3, 66.19.3; Suetonius, *Nero* 49, 57.2): Dio Chrysostom, writing half a century after Nero's demise, recounts that "a great majority" believed that Nero was still alive (*Orations* 21). It was above all the Jewish apocalyptic version of Nero's return that was to exert a great influence on the Christian imagination, beginning with the New Testament canon, and continuing into early Christian apocalyptic prediction, and thence into the medieval period.

Given such apocalyptic pronouncements from an early date, it is noteworthy that Josephus' representations of Nero – one of the earliest Jewish accounts of the emperor – are conspicuously restrained. A Jewish prisoner of war in Vespasian's military camp, Josephus prophesied that Vespasian was destined to become emperor and enjoy a glorious worldwide rule (*Jewish War* 3.392–408): a prediction that brought him Flavian patronage and residence in Rome. His restraint, then, in recounting the political abuses of Nero may reflect an apologetic agenda, offering a pro-Flavian portrait of Judaism (Rajak (2002) 203–17), for he obviously knows well the accounts of Nero "the madman" concerning whom "there are writers enough upon those subjects everywhere" (*Jewish War* 2.13.1). His Nero emerges rather as foil to Vespasian and Titus: when the slothful emperor fails to check abuses against Jews in the provinces (6.6.2), Josephus invites us to imagine a Nero who is terrified at the news of impending war, but simulates courage as he dispatches Vespasian to quell the uprising (3.3.1). Josephus conspicuously passes over rumors of Nero's escape and planned vengeful return, instead leaving him safely assassinated in the Roman suburbs: he thus avoids giving a voice to any remaining pro-Neronian sentiments amongst the populace such rumors might have intimidated (Malitz (2005) 46–52).

Josephus' Jewish literary contemporaries were less circumspect in their evaluations of Nero. They creatively adapted rumors of Nero's flight and planned attack on Rome, and added vilification of his extravagances and character, to express nationalistic hopes and prophetic eschatological expectations. The *Sibylline Oracles* comprise a variety of vatic poems delivered by the Greco-Roman Sibyl, an ever-aging but deathless prophetess "possessed" by Apollo. Adapting the genre, Jewish and Christian Sibyllines issue a series of political pronouncements that predict the punishment and destruction of Rome (Collins (1983) 223–316; Lightfoot (2007)).

Sibylline Oracle 4 and 8 represent the more straightforward historical redeployments of the Nero legend and assert Roman responsibility for the Jewish War. *Sibylline Oracle* 4.119–24 and 137–9 emphasize the corruption of Nero the matricide, and predict Nero's return as conqueror of Rome as punishment for its destruction of "the blameless tribe of the pious" (4.136). *Sibylline Oracle* 8.139–50 predicts that Nero will return to ravage, amongst others, "the nation of the Hebrews" after which he will destroy the Roman empire. More dramatically *Sibylline Oracle* 3.63–74 and 5.25–35, 93–110,

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214–27, 361–85 transpose this use of the legend into apocalyptic mythology and in doing so turn Nero into a supernatural figure of evil that will find its way into the New Testament and contemporary Christian apocalyptic. In *Sibylline Oracle* 3, the seer identifies the rule of Nero with the Jewish figure of the evil angel Beliar. Here Nero is not so much *redivivus* as *incarnatus* (reborn): “Beliar will come from the *Sebastenoi*” (63) (i.e. the descendants of Augustus) and “perform many signs” (66) including raising the dead, geological and astronomical wonders, and “lead[ing] astray many faithful, chosen Hebrews” (69: on the Nero myth’s presence in *Sibylline* 3, see Collins (1974) 86–7).

Sibylline Oracle 5 offers a similar mythologizing and cosmic account of Nero, placing emphasis on his historic infamy: “[A]thlete, charioteer, murderer, one who dares ten thousand evil things” (32), he “play[s] at theatricals with honey-sweet songs rendered with melodious voice” (41–2). He flees “Babylon” (= Rome) after seizing the Temple and burning its citizens (143; 150). Upon his return he “declares himself equal to God. But he will prove that he is not” (34). He will wreak havoc by waging war on all the earth’s inhabitants and, most importantly, he will attempt to destroy Jerusalem (105), which will result in God sending a savior figure to oppose him and bring about a final judgment (110).

The importance of these texts for later apocalyptic appropriations of Nero and his role in end-time scenarios cannot be overemphasized, for taken together *Sibylline Oracles* 3 and 5 furnish the basic elements of what will emerge as the Christian Antichrist legend of the New Testament: a legend which does not just furnish a political portrait but also an apocalyptic role of the emperor for centuries to come. One of the more remarkable features of Nero’s actions and vices in these texts is the way they take place in a tangled apocalyptic narrative timeframe, a feature that recurs in New Testament and thence in Christian tradition. Nero destroys Jerusalem only to return to try to destroy it again; Nero disappears only to appear again as embodiment of evil. These Sibyllines transform an historical figure into a blueprint for evil opponents of God who live in an apocalyptic frame, out of joint with regular time. Throughout, Nero’s historical association with the destruction of the Temple is combined with the legend of Nero’s return to anticipate a final cataclysm when Rome will be destroyed and Jewish faith will be vindicated.

Nero appears again in the Babylonian Talmud, a collection of rabbinic traditions dating from the second century AD and compiled from the fourth to eighth centuries. Here we encounter a Nero tradition strikingly at odds with apocalyptic tradition as the emperor becomes a Jewish “convert” or proselyte in order to stave off divine wrath for his destruction of the Temple. Babylonian Tractate *Gittin* 55b–57 (Rubenstein (2002) 37–54, esp. 41–2) presents Nero as agent of “the emperor” (sic!) who is manipulated into sending the Jews a blemished animal for sacrifice in the Temple (56a). Upon meeting a Jewish boy who prophesies God’s punishment for the one who will destroy the Temple, Nero becomes a convert to stave off God’s wrath and becomes in the tale one of the rabbinic tradition’s most important figures, the second-century Rabbi Meir. Talmudic scholars have advanced a variety of theories to account for this tradition. Cohen (1972) argues, improbably, that Rabbi Meir’s Anatolian origins have come to be linked with popular rumors of Nero’s hiding in the east. Bastomsky (1969: 322–3) links the story with material that directly follows (*Gittin* 57b), showing how celebrated teachers have descended from wicked enemies of the Jews (for critique, Barrett (1976)). The classic study of Tannaitic literature by W. Bacher (1903: 2.5) interprets the legend

as a celebration of Judaism's power to convert even its greatest enemies. Alternatively it affirms divine providence by polemicizing against Roman overlords who are nevertheless used in divine service.

The Number of the Beast: Nero as Persecutor, Heretic, Antichrist in Earliest Christianity

Nero and his reputation exerted great influence on early Christian imagination. The Book of Revelation and contemporary extra-canonical Christian apocalyptic literature represent a thorough cosmological development of the myth of Nero's return, and history and legend again combine to envisage Nero as viceroy or incarnation of cosmic evil. The tradition of the martyrdom of Peter and Paul in the emperor's persecution of Christians circa AD 64, and Paul's descriptions of himself as prisoner for Christ gave rise to early apocryphal legends, some contemporary with second-century New Testament writings, which filled in the gap in the New Testament concerning their fate. These traditions joined to set the stage for early Christian representations of Nero especially as apocalyptic figure, the backdrop for further medieval developments.

First, a note on terminology. In what follows the terms "apocalyptic" or "apocalyptic eschatology" refer to a Jewish and Christian representation of time associated with divine intervention and judgment, usually at the end of time. The term "apocalypse" refers formally to a genre that consists of a number of literary elements often associated with but not confined to apocalyptic eschatology. "Apocalyptic literature" is a more general term that describes texts that are apocalypses or contain apocalyptic eschatology. The Apocalypse refers precisely to the final book of the Christian Bible.

It is no accident that a fully developed Jewish version of the Nero legend should appear in the Apocalypse of John. Its author is a Jew who straddles intertwining emerging Jewish and Christian traditions and who draws upon a shared repertoire of apocalyptic beliefs and images to condemn the imperial cult and the Roman political order. John, writing perhaps as early as during or shortly after the conclusion of the Jewish War in AD 70 (hence, *Revelation* 11:1–3; Marshall (2001) 88–97), combines reports of Nero's death with legends of his flight from Rome and transforms the emperor into a leading character in a reworked apocalyptic myth. *Revelation* 13 offers a thinly veiled account of the emperor as regent of the dragon, Satan, and of the imperial cult as symbol of an idolatrous political order (13.4, 11–15). *Revelation* 13.3 presents a beast with a mortally wounded head that has been healed and so outlines in full form the *Nero redivivus* myth. In 13.18 the number of the beast, 666 (in some other Latin witness manuscripts 616) manifests *gematria* (assigning and adding numerical values to Hebrew letters based according to their position in the alphabet), based on the transliteration of the name Nero Caesar from Hebrew (*qsr nrwn*, "Neron Caesar") into Greek, or from Hebrew into Latin (*nrw qsr*, "Nero Caesar"; Yarbrow Collins (1976) 174–5; Aune (1998) 770–73). In 17.8 *Revelation* echoes the Beliar ascription of *Sibylline Oracle* 3.63 in assigning the beast's origin to "the bottomless pit." Similarly reminiscent of the Sibyllines is the beast's return, this time in allegiance with 10 horns (= kings), to destroy Babylon (= Rome; 17.16–17). Thus we have a full version of the Nero legend that will exert an enormous influence on the western imagination for centuries to come: a

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revived Nero whose origin is the Underworld and who returns from death to wage war and destroy Rome.

The appearance of the Nero legend in the early-second-century *Ascension of Isaiah*, a text that developed independently of the Apocalypse (Hall (1990); Liettaert Peerbolte (1996) 194–205), attests to its importance in shaping the early Christian eschatological imagination. A Christian fragment (3.13–4.22) interpolated into a pre-existing Jewish text uses Nero's biography to describe the coming of Beliar (4.1–22), who descends "from his firmament" to become "a lawless king, slayer of his mother" and murderer of "one of the twelve" (i.e. Peter; 4.2,3). Echoing the Beliar description of *Sibylline Oracle* 3.63–66 as well as the descriptions of the beast of *Revelation* 13:11–14, he counterfeits God's power by signs and wonders and deceives the world, especially Christians, into worshipping his image, which he sets up in every city (4.11).

Outside of the Book of Revelation the New Testament contains no immediate reference to Nero. But as the canon developed and coalesced to include a number of descriptions of coming judgments and wicked figures, its other apocalyptic texts were wedded to the Apocalypse's descriptions; and even though they contained no reference to Nero, the result was further development of the emperor's mythic career. Jesus warns his disciples in the Gospels, "False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect" (*Mark* 13.22). In a description that was to become highly influential for later interpretations and eschatological portraits of Nero, 1 *John* 2:18 predicts "this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come" and then continues, "the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world" (1 *John* 2:22). Elsewhere the apocalyptic portrait of 2 *Thessalonians* 2.3–12 predicts a "man of lawlessness . . . the son of perdition" who "takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God" (vv. 3–4).

These writings, gathered in the same canon, came in due course to bear a common-sense relation to *Revelation* 13:11–14. By aligning and associating them with the reign of Nero, Christians won for the emperor an historical role in either directly embodying or foreshadowing a figure to come in a divinely appointed arrangement of the end of days (Hughes (2005). Jerome (*Epistles* 121.11, 56; Hilberg (1996) *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (CSEL) 56, 66) and Ambrosiaster (*Commentary on 2 Thessalonians*; Vogels (1968) CSEL 81, 2.7), for example, commenting on 1 *Thessalonians* 2:7, "For the mystery of iniquity is already at work", interpreted "the mystery" as the reign of the Antichrist, inaugurated by Nero, and at work in the Roman empire: a view that was to exercise considerable influence for centuries to come. In this early period, Ambrosiaster offered the most thorough interpretation, one that would later exert considerable influence. Here Nero is the "son of the devil" and his advent has initiated the reign of the mystery of iniquity, a dominion that can be detected in the later anti-Christian emperors Diocletian (284–305) and Julian (355–63). In making these links, both writers display a common contemporary use of biblical apocalyptic literature in general, and of the apocalyptically mythologized figure of Nero in particular: to point directly to contemporary rulers and events as overt or identifiable manifestations either of Nero or the lead-in to the Second Coming. Augustine, famously impatient with this type of direct identification, dismissed such inter-canonical historical assignments as vain prognostication and was skeptical of those who discovered versions of "Nero *redivivus*"

concealed in biblical texts (*City of God* 20.19). Yet his dismissal betrayed their popular appeal. The fourth-century *Martyrdom of Peter*, a popular devotional hagiography, refers to "the Antichrist Nero" without commentary (2; Lipsius and Bonnet (1959) 1.2).

An apocalyptic Nero was one product of the New Testament and its interpreters. Another was the apocryphal emperor. Nero is in Christian tradition the emperor who tried and condemned Paul (*Acts* 27:14; 2 *Timothy* 4:16–18) and executed Peter (*John* 21:18–19); a tradition that was sealed by linking their deaths with descriptions of Christian martyrdom in 1 Clement 5.2–7, as well as the account of Nero's persecution and burning of Christians by Tacitus (*Annals* 15.44). The representation of Paul's last days in the pseudonymous 2 *Timothy* 4:16–18 (perhaps as late as AD 150) is witness to the growth of legendary material to furnish descriptions of the apostles' fate where historical evidence was otherwise lacking. Here Paul, abandoned in a Roman prison, writes for his delegates what is effectively his last will and testament. Having been tried once and having escaped "the lion's mouth," he nevertheless represents himself ready for martyrdom (4.8). In *Acts* 27:14 he is under house arrest and meets with Roman Jews for daily debate as he awaits his trial.

These canonical accounts proved irresistible for further legendary treatments. The second-century apocryphal *Acts of Paul* and *Acts of Peter* offer tales of the apostles' engagements with Nero in their final days. *Acts of Paul* (3–6) makes the emperor Nero jealous of the "true king, Jesus Christ" when Paul steals soldiers from the emperor's army to make them soldiers for God. An inflamed Nero arrests Paul, burns a number of the converted soldiers and then beheads Paul, only to be haunted by Paul "the soldier of God" who appears before the emperor as a ghost and promises God will punish him for his evil deeds. In the *Acts of Peter* the Roman Prefect Agrippa crucifies Peter upside down for converting his concubines and teaching them sexual abstinence, but Nero, not to be outdone, condemns his Prefect for dispatching the apostle before he could torture him himself (4; 9; 12). Then follows a vision that teaches Nero that he is no match for Christ's servants, and the emperor, fearing an untimely end, stops persecuting the church. These accounts, especially in their treatments of the continence of new converts, bear the literary marks of contemporary Greco-Roman novels, but with a Christian polemical twist. Their proliferation under various titles reflects their popularity and shows how the figure of Nero lingered in the western imagination for centuries.

As these accounts developed they projected Nero onto an increasingly fantastic stage with improbably dramatic results. In the fourth- or fifth-century *Acts of Peter and Paul* and *Martyrdom of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul*, the early legends are transformed into a lively story of the apostles' confrontation of Simon Magus (Ferreiro (2005)). According to *Acts* 8:9–24, Simon was a magician from Samaria who was condemned by the apostle Peter for attempting to buy the power of the Holy Spirit upon his conversion to Christianity. In these later traditions Peter and Paul meet with Simon before Nero, who has now become Simon's disciple after hearing Simon vilify the apostles and proclaiming himself the incarnate son of God (adding heresy to the early Christian list of the emperor's wickednesses). Notwithstanding the apostles' rebuttals of Simon's claims and their ability to outperform his miracles, Nero remains Simon's dupe. After the apostles bring about Simon's death the emperor beheads Paul and crucifies Peter, again upside down. Nero thus proves himself doubly wicked: both disciple of Simon and murderer of the apostles. The *Acts* and *Martyrdom* made their way from Greek

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into the Latin west as the *Passio Sanctorum Apostolorum Petri et Pauli* ("The Passion of the Apostle Saints Peter and Paul": Hennecke and Schneemelcher (1964) 575; Lipsius (1959)): a text that exerted an enormous influence on the medieval imagination and won a place for Nero and Simon Magus alongside Peter and Paul in medieval iconography (Callegari (1892); Jakob-Sonnabend (1990) 183–4) and mystery plays (e.g. Arnoul Greban's *Le Mystère des Actes des Apostres*, in Walter (1957)). Another legend from the Suda (a tenth-century Byzantine lexicon: see Adler (1928–38) 3.455–66) but drawn from earlier sources (Zecchini (1999)), has Nero as a man who having "spare time for philosophers and . . . examining closely the things concerning Christ" becomes irritated when he learns that Pilate, Caiaphas, and Annas have crucified Jesus. He summons them to Rome for interrogation, imprisons Pilate, and releases Caiaphas and Annas who defend themselves by appeal to Jewish Law. An interrogation with Simon and Peter similar to the ones found in the *Acts* and *Martyrdom* then follows.

In these legends Nero was not the only pagan to take an interest in Jesus. More measured but no less fanciful was Paul's appearance in the court of Nero in epistolary form. A legend composed between the fourth and seventh centuries offers an apocryphal correspondence between Seneca and Paul (Elliott (1993) 547–53; Fürst et al. (2006) 3–107). The letters are an apology for Christian faith. In Letter 11, Seneca describes recent fires that have destroyed Rome and decries "that ruffian . . . whose pleasure is murdering" for blaming Christians and Jews and putting them to death. An intriguingly similar application recurs in *The Epistle of Annaeus Seneca concerning Pride and Idols*, an apocryphal correspondence from the second half of the fifth century AD, formerly thought to be Jewish but now generally accepted to be of Christian provenance (see Fürst (2006) 176–97). Here the author adopts the pseudonym of the High Priest Annas to write a letter to Seneca unmasking the errors of Greco-Roman polytheism as idolatry and urging him to worship the one true God (3–5). Nero lurks in the background as "Annas" describes Seneca as long-suffering victim of the emperor's megalomania (2). Both apocryphal letters exploit the biography of Nero's most celebrated victim as a means to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity and monotheism.

The Great Presumption of Interpretation: Nero in Early Christianity

The apocryphal *Acts* and their successors alert us to the vibrancy and elasticity of Nero's career and the legends that accompanied it in the first centuries of the Christian era. Early Christians drew on available Greco-Roman historical accounts of Nero's career, emphasizing the historical records of his immoderation (Jakob-Sonnabend (1990: 104–32). Orosius (late fourth century) shows his dependence on Suetonius (*Nero* 6.30) and so does Eutropius (*Breviarum ab Urbe Condita* 7.14) in his colorful representation of an emperor whose wickedness included a fondness for "fishing with nets of gold, . . . drawn up with cords of purple" (*Historia Adversus Paganos* 7.7): the image that, along with that of incestuous matricide, was to follow him through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. But early Christian historians remembered Nero primarily as the initiator of the first – in some accounts empire-wide – persecution of Christians, and especially for his responsibility for the martyrdom of Peter and Paul (Lactantius, *De Mortibus*

Persecutorum 2; Orosius, *Historia Adversus Paganos* 7.7; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.25.1–8). In a flight of imagination, Lactantius even has Nero attack the Jewish Temple on account of Peter's success in converting people to Christianity! Sulpicius Severus in *Chronicon* 2.29 presents the flight of Nero from Rome as historical fact, and includes the belief that "even if he had put an end to himself with the sword, his wound was cured, and his life preserved, according to that which was written regarding him, 'And his mortal wound was healed [*Revelation* 13:3],' in order that he may practice the mystery of iniquity [*2 Thessalonians* 2:7]." The account blurs the lines between history, legend, and New Testament apocalyptic, and reveals how productive Nero was for the early Christian imagination.

As we have already seen, allegedly historical material combines with the obviously legendary to offer colorful portraits of Nero's dealings with Christians. The homilies of John Chrysostom on Paul's letters are scattered with passing references drawn from apocryphal accounts to the apostle's last days in Rome (Rougé (1968) 79–87), and attest to how well known these accounts were to his hearers, and how they could be used for exhortation and instruction. In *Homily* 10 on *2 Timothy* 4:16, extolling the virtues of Christian endurance and devotion, he recalls a scene from the apocryphal acts where Nero beheads Paul on account of the apostle's conversion of the emperor's cup-bearer.

A developing tradition of apocalypse interpretation in commentaries on New Testament apocalyptic texts created a transhistorical role for Nero. Early Christian commentary reveals the enduring power of stories associated with Nero, especially the legend of *Nero redivivus*, and their ability to generate multiple apocalyptic narratives. Nero's popularity is revealed in Jerome's *Commentary on Daniel*, which states that many contemporaries share his viewpoint that "Nero was the Antichrist because of his outstanding savagery and depravity" (11.30). Amongst these was Victorinus of Pettau (writing around 270) who offers the earliest direct extra-canonical reference to the *Nero redivivus* myth in his *Commentary on Revelation* (17.16): God resurrects the suicide Nero from Hell as king of the Jews to deceive both Christians – whom he convinces to circumcise themselves – and Jews to confirm him as Christ. Nero as Jewish Messiah arises from the melding together of *Revelation* 13:3, 11–18, and 17:11 with *2 Thessalonians* 2:4, where the "man of lawlessness" takes his place in the Temple. A resurrected Nero also finds a central role in commentary on the Apocalypse found in the poetry of Victorinus' contemporary, Commodian (Poinsette (1999) 201–13). He deploys motifs seen above in the Jewish Sibyllines, especially in references to Nero's return from exile to destroy Rome and then attack Jerusalem: Nero, raised from the dead, will first burn "the whore Babylon" and then march on Rome acclaiming himself as Christ and deceiving the Jews to acclaim him as God's servant (*Instructions* 41.13–20; Dombart (1887) *CSEL* 15, 26–7). Still more elaborate is his *Carmen Apologeticum*, a poem loosely based on the Apocalypse. It predicts the coming of two Antichrists (891–954; 172–96), a *Nero redivivus* who will appear "from hidden places at the very end of the earth" to persecute Christians and a second figure who will persecute Jews and destroy the earth. "A man from Persia will call himself immortal – as Nero is Antichrist for us, so shall this one be for the Jews" (*Carmen Apologeticum* 926; 175).

Sulpicius Severus' records of alleged conversation with Martin of Tours (316–397) have Martin similarly predict the coming of a *Nero redivivus* alongside a second apocalyptic figure (*Dialogues* 14): an interpretation that echoes in Sulpicius' *Chronicon*

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(Vaesen (1988 49–70). Here, Nero is distinguished from the Antichrist. First Nero rules the western portion of the world persecuting Christians and inducing gentiles to worship him as God. Then the Antichrist rises in the east, conquers Nero, establishes his throne in Jerusalem and makes people worship him. Here apocalyptic expectation is high: Martin believes that the Antichrist has already been born and lives somewhere in the empire as a young boy. A recension of the anonymous *Book of Genealogy* (615–16), a fifth-century Donatist chronicle, uses *gematria* to decode the number of the beast of *Revelation* 13:18 (here 616) as Nero (Gumerlock (2008) 347–60). The Antichrist comes as Nero, or a Jewish antichrist will come in the spirit of Nero. Quodvultdeus (died around 450) interprets the eighth head of beast described in *Revelation* 17:11 as a reference to the coming Antichrist, as *Nero redivivus*, pondering whether he will appear in the same form as Nero, or under a different aspect but retaining his “luxury, foulness, cruelty, and habit of life” (*Dimidium Temporis* 8.15, 20–30; Braun (1976) *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina* (CC SL) 60, 201). Later in his interpretation of the two lamp stands of *Revelation* 11:4–13 Quodvultdeus draws on the legend of Peter, Paul, and Simon in Nero’s court by reading Peter and Paul as figures for Elijah and Enoch who will come and oppose Antichrist and the false prophets arising from his reign (13.22, 20–24; 60, 207). Taken together these formulations reflect the surplus of meaning of a developing Antichrist legend formulated from pre-existing traditions and popular beliefs, and as such, they anticipate the dramatic developments to come.

To locate Nero as either an ancient or coming figure represented in New Testament apocalyptic texts was by no means universal and sometimes received vigorous opposition. Augustine was “astonished at the great presumption of those who venture such guesses” concerning *Nero redivivus* and the historical identity of Antichrist (*City of God* 22.19). Lactantius (c. 240 – c. 320) no doubt has Victorinus and Commodian in mind when he refers disparagingly to the enduring power of the Nero legend in apocalyptic expectation. The “sudden disappearance” of the emperor Nero has led “some persons of extravagant imagination” to apply to him Sibylline verses that describe the matricide as returning from “the uttermost boundaries of earth,” and so turn him into the “forerunner of Antichrist” (*De Mortibus Persecutorum* 2). Similarly, the North African Donatist commentator on the Apocalypse, Tyconius, expressed amazement at those who conflated the legend of *Nero redivivus* with the beast of *Revelation* and particular historical figures (Beatus of Lieban, *Commentary on the Apocalypse* 6.7.28–31; Sanders (1930) 508). Instead he pioneered an alternative model of apocalypse exegesis that was to exert a great influence on Augustine and subsequent apocalyptic roles for Nero.

Augustine later distinguishes between those who assign historical characters or powers, like Nero or the Roman empire, to specific biblical apocalyptic texts, and those who read those texts more figuratively as descriptions of hidden things awaiting full revelation (*City of God* 22.19). Augustine thus stands in opposition to the exegesis of apocalyptic literature in the early church as represented above. Instead he follows the exegetical methods of interpretation of apocalyptic texts outlined by Tyconius in his *Book of Rules* (Babcock (1989)). Here, and in his now lost *Commentary on the Apocalypse* (Bonner (1966) 21–9), Tyconius outlined a typological, anti-apocalyptic method of interpreting the Book of Revelation that had a profound influence in shaping the interpretations of Augustine and his successors (Markus (1970) 117; Christe (1979) 111). Tyconius accepts the belief in a literal Antichrist coming in the future, but interprets him as a

symbol of unbelief and wickedness, constituting a hidden *corpus Antichristi* in the world. Augustine promotes Tyconius' spiritual and transhistorical understanding of figures of wickedness like Nero, and their associations with the Antichrist.

In an illuminating study of the interpretation of apocalyptic language of 2 *Thessalonians* 2:4f. in early and medieval Christianity, Hughes (2005: 23–4) distinguishes two types of apocalyptic exegetes in this period: realists and spiritualists. Apocalyptic realists are those who read New Testament apocalyptic texts as predictions of historical events still to come or which are believed to unfold with Christ's coming. This is the kind of interpretation that linked Nero as inaugurator of apocalyptic events (as in the interpretations of Jerome and Ambrosiaster above), or as a figure who returns to fulfill biblical prophecies (as in the Sibylline prophecies and their adaptations amongst the authors just discussed). By contrast, "Latin spiritual interpretation" – the kind championed by Tyconius and Augustine – is skeptical of such historical identification and favors interpretation of an Antichrist who is "*immanent, internal, and deceptive*." Any relation between texts and events is a mystery until all is revealed at the world's end.

When applying this interpretation to Nero, the emperor functions as an illustration of moral and spiritual wickedness: not so much the forerunner of Antichrist, as the embodiment of him. Hence texts that refer to Nero in passing do not do so to chart his role in a forthcoming drama, but to illustrate the moral and spiritual drama unfolding in their readers' midst. This Latin spiritual tradition of apocalyptic exegesis provided an important foil to the realist tradition as it unfolded in the medieval period. However, even where the more spiritual interpretation prevailed, commentators listed amongst varying opinions attributions of apocalyptic texts to Nero past or future. In the medieval realist tradition and beyond, Nero continued to enjoy a posthumous career, a career made possible in large part by the colorful and sinister biographical details that accompanied his memory. The memory of Nero from legend and myth, as we will see, became a potent means of contemporary political critique in periods of turmoil and social dislocation (Lobrichon (1988) 221–41; Goetz (1988) 306–32; Rauh (1988) 333–58).

Nero's Long Shadow: The Life and Times of a Tyrant in Medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation Tradition

Earlier medieval authors followed writers like Lactantius in directing their attention to Nero's part in the first imperial persecution of the church and in chronicling Nero's vices through classical sources and ancient ecclesiastical historians, especially Suetonius and Orosius (see, e.g., Gregory of Tours (AD 538–594), *Historia* 1.25; Bede (AD 672/73–735) *Ecclesiastical History* 1.6.). Others recorded without judgment apocalyptic beliefs formed in earlier centuries about the return of Nero at the end of the age (e.g., Otto von Freising (1114–1158) *Chronikon* 3.16). But from the twelfth century onward such sources were highly embellished and became increasingly, often exotically, anecdotal, in rehearsing Nero's reputation for limitless wickedness. Gwyn (1991: 424–25) shows how Renaissance treatments of Nero take up the typical vocabulary and motifs of Roman political invective in the late Republic, in addition to summarizing treatments of the earlier "reception of Nero": namely cruelty, insolence

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and arrogance, capriciousness and lust, impiety, greed, and violence. We may see these categories at work in classical and late antique historical accounts of Nero, especially in the report by Orosius that was to prove so influential in medieval treatments. To cite but one example, the *Speculum Regum*, an epic poem by Gottfried von Vitrbo (c. 1125–1191/92) chronicling the rise and fall of rulers from earliest antiquity on, draws widely from these categories in an extraordinarily colorful narrative of the vices that accompanied Nero from his rise to his last days. Alongside the by now traditional account of Simon Magus' influence over Nero, the death of Nero, his persecution of Peter and Paul, his multiple marriages, murders, and incestuous relations with his mother, Vitrbo includes a gruesome description of his dissection of his mother's womb after her death to observe the place of his conception (9.909–11).

The thirteenth-century German epic poem, *Die Kaiserchronik* ("Chronicle of Emperors"), offers a similarly detailed account (4083–306, esp. 4108–13). It develops a bizarre tale of Nero's pregnancy and birth of a frog! Nero's earliest detractors had included amongst his many vices his playing the part of a bride in mock weddings. This became the source of legends of the emperor's pregnancy (Zecchini (1999: 112–21). The *Chronicle* of John, Bishop of Nikiu (seventh century; 70.206; Charles (2007) 53) embellishes the tale: after anal sex Nero's belly swells as though he were pregnant. Nero in great pain calls upon his doctors to relieve him; thinking that he is about to bear a child they cut open his stomach and so kill him. The *Kaiserchronik* (4128–64) expands the legend of Nero's pregnancy with the help of etymology and the Apocalypse. Nero now commands his doctors to make it possible for him to give birth. Although they object that this is contrary to nature, they concoct a potion to impregnate him. A worm gestates in Nero's belly and becomes a great frog that springs forth from his mouth. Thence, explain the authors of the chronicle, comes the name of Nero's palace, later the Pope's parish church, the Lateran, from *lata rana* ("born frog"). The account also reflects the influence of the Nero Antichrist legend: *Revelation* 16:13 has "foul spirits like frogs" spring forth from "the mouth of the dragon, the mouth of the beast and the mouth of the false prophet."

In Italy and in France authors offered similarly embellished accounts. Boccaccio (1313–1375) included in the seventh book of his *Fates of Illustrious Men* a biography of Nero drawn largely from classical sources and Orosius which portrayed Nero as "the monster of the universe" and offered detailed accounts of his gluttony, promiscuity, and extravagance. The *Roman de la Rose* works with Boethius's biography of Nero to offer a lengthy description (6175–488) of Nero's excesses as it chronicles the emperor's rise and swift descent into vice in a reign orchestrated by Fortuna. The illuminated manuscripts that preserve these tales included magnificent images of the by now stock features of an immoderate ruler: Seneca's suicide, the execution of Poppaea, the murder of his mother, her dissection, and the emperor's suicide (Dahlberg (1995): illuminations with critical text can be found at the *Roman de la Rose Digital Library* of John Hopkins University and the Bibliothèque nationale de France).

The French medieval *Chansons de Geste* offered similar accounts (see Langlois (1974) 488; John (1953) 90–5). These reports exercised an enormous influence on the English literary imagination. Chaucer's account of Nero in *The Monkes Tale* (575–662) represents Nero as a wicked tyrant and borrows from both the *Roman de la Rose* and Suetonius in narrating Nero's fondness for fishing with golden nets (587–9) and the dissection

of his mother's womb (595–7). Nero's immoderation finds its way into Shakespeare's *Rise and Fall of King John* where "the Bastard" calls the invading French usurpers "ingrate revoltes," "bloudy Nero's, ripping up the Wombe / Of your deere Mother-Englande" (*King John* 5.ii.152–3; see too, e.g., *Henry the Sixth, Part 1*: 1.iv.95–6; *Part 3*, 3.i.39–40).

These vices were part of the larger profile of the emperor as political tyrant. As we will see, apocalyptic labeling of political rulers as Nero, even *Nero redivivus*, was ready to hand in medieval battles between church and state. Alongside that lively tradition – perhaps as a consequence of it – non-apocalyptic political deployments of Nero were widespread from the later Middle Ages through the Reformation. John of Salisbury's (1120–80) *Policraticus* (8.18) foreshadows later political uses of Nero as a study in vice and tyranny. Alongside a description of Nero's tyranny John offers a lively account of the emperor's death and reports his lament "I live foully, I die shamefully" as he flees those who seek to bludgeon him to death.

Such medieval treatments were the sources for a renewed Humanist interest in Nero. Machiavelli's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy* (c. 1513) holds up Nero, Caligula and Vitellius as examples of poorly governing princes who depend on armed forces to prop up vicious tyrannical rule, and compares them with good emperors like Marcus Aurelius who enjoyed the security of stable rule by virtue and self-control (1.10). Erasmus in his *Institutio Principis Christiani* (1516) cites Nero, together with Caligula and Heliogabalus, as exemplary of the "evil plague of a prince [who] combines great power with the greatest malevolence" and as devoting "whatever resources he has to the destruction of the human race" (Cheshire and Heath (1986) 220). In similar vein, Luther holds up Nero together with Caligula as a negative foil to the Christian prince who shows that right governance weds power with justice.

Not surprisingly, these motifs found frequent application in Reformation critique of the papacy. Luther is fond of comparing the power of the Pope to the tyrannical power of Nero. The fusion of civil and ecclesiastical rule in the papacy, according to Luther, violates the theology of the Two Kingdoms and corrupts the spiritual rule of Christ by mixing it up with the political rule of Caesar (see *Luther's Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 50: 290–1; vol. 51: 239: for might without right, vol. 53: 453). Radical reformers such as Thomas Münzter in his *Prague Protest* offered similar comparisons between the papacy and Nero (Baylor (2000) 8), but also went much further. The anonymous *To the Assembly of the Peasantry*, sometimes attributed to Andreas Karstadt but in tone much closer to Münzter, turns the tables on Luther by calling for the abolishment of the hereditary rule of German princes and for a violent uprising to overthrow their oppressive government: "to knock Moab, Agag, Ahab and Nero from their thrones is God's highest pleasure" (Baylor (2000) 118). John Calvin imagines the just church–state relation following the model of a just theocracy. In his *Institutes* (4.2.3) he contrasts the just Republic and "the tyranny of Caligula, Nero, Heliogabalus, and the like" in order to distinguish the governance of the true church with the tyranny of Rome. We have seen Shakespeare invoke Nero as a corrupt tyrant in his historical plays, in creative redeployment of the biographical tradition; in doing so he also reflects contemporary political use for this medieval heritage. The most astonishing political use of Nero in this period, however, comes from Jerome Cardano's *Encomium Neronis*, written shortly after 1561/62 (Eberl (1994)). The *Encomium* is a celebratory biography of Nero that praises the emperor

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for his rule as a benevolent despot who put limits on the power of the Senate in favor of Rome's non-aristocratic citizens, and who used his power to pursue a foreign policy with Parthia directed at peace, the abolishment of indirect taxes throughout the Roman empire, and the limiting of the oppressive practices of *publicani* (public contractors). In Cardano's reading, Nero also pursued new initiatives in science and engineering and sought to limit public executions and gladiatorial shows. Cardano assesses the reports of Nero's earliest biographers, especially Suetonius and Tacitus, as propagandistic and based on ideologically freighted historical sources. His Nero is rather a hero of the people, a champion of justice, and equitable in his exercise of despotic power. The account has given rise to enormous debate concerning whether it is an ironical or intentionally paradoxical biography. Eberl (1999: 227–38) suggests Cardano used his *Encomium* to offer a veiled critique of the tyrannical rule of Milan's political overlords, the Spanish nobility, and its aristocratic rulers (which had left the city in financial ruin and executed his son). In this light it reads as a dramatic example of the uses of Nero to assert political ideals and values and to outline a theory of just rule and government.

If Nero the Prince practiced a wickedness that was legendary, Christian tradition imagined a divine punishment no less epic. As early as the first century, Plutarch in his treatise "On the Delays of Divine Vengeance" imagined Nero tormented in the afterlife for his life of vice, and satirized Nero's singing abilities by imagining him reincarnated as a frog (*Moralia* 567f: see Fantham in this volume). Medieval portraits relished in identification of Nero with the devil. In one of the *Chansons de Geste*, the fictional Renaut de Montauban identifies Nero as the devil himself alongside Pilate and Judas (Michelant (1862) 220, 251), and the *Chanson d'Antioche* sees him as a devil from Hell, "diable d'enfer" (Paris et al. (1848) 37, 300). The *Kaiserchronik* records how upon his death the devil came as a black bird to spirit away Nero's soul whilst leaving his body for wolves to devour (4292–306). Medieval mystery plays show the devil inspiring Nero's dissection of his mother, and Nero invokes the devil to come and take him to Hell upon his suicide. Satan then dispatches a chorus of demons to take the emperor's soul to the Abyss while they chronicle the details of his evils and predict, "Nero, without dying, thou shalt perish; From this blow thou shalt know the meaning of hell, / never shalt thou have relief." (Greban, *Le Mystère des Actes des Apostres* in Walter (1957) 319). In Rabelais' (1494–1553) *Pantagruel*, Epistemon during his fantastic tour through Hell sees Nero, "a blind fiddler" (2.30). In *King Lear* (3.vi.7) Shakespeare has Nero in Hell, not fiddling, but fishing; Edgar reports that "Nero is an angler in the Lake of Darkness."

Given such a wide repertoire of associations it is no surprise that Nero continued to occupy an important place in the medieval apocalyptic imagination. Often Nero appears in exegetically steered apocalyptic commentary, influenced largely by Ambrosiaster's figuration of Nero as Antichrist. Thus the Carolingian Haimo of Auxerre (died c. 875) interprets "the mystery of iniquity already at work" as the devil working "secretly through his own members, Nero and his princes" (*Expositio in Epistolam II ad Thessalonicenses* 2.7; Cartwright and Hughes (2001) 27). Similarly, Adso of Montier-en-Der (died 992) in his tract, *Concerning Antichrist* lines 11–12 (Verhelst (1976) 22) develops Haimo's thinking further to include Nero with Antiochus Epiphanes IV and Domitian amongst the many wicked ministers Antichrist has sent into the world (Verhelst (1973) 52–103). The later *Glossa Ordinaria* (Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 121, 535) reflects medieval

consensus when it interprets Nero as the shadow of the coming Antichrist in the same way in which David and Abel prefigured Christ. In addition commentators like Haimo also dutifully passed on by way of citation the more literalist belief that Nero was to return before the end of time, even if they did not personally endorse it. Peter Lombard's *Magna Glossatura*, the standard medieval commentary on Paul's letters, reported that some believed that Nero had been "snatched away" (*potius subtractum*) "in the vigor of his life" (*in vigore ipsius etatis*) to return as Antichrist (*Collectanea in epistolas Sancti Pauli*, *Patrologia Latina* 192, 319).

Apocalyptic conceptions of Nero were deployed as potent tool for political engagement and analysis of contemporary events. A tradition in which both Nero and even Simon Magus were types and shadows for a coming Antichrist and false prophet allowed for a pointed analysis of the contemporary affairs of state and church, especially in the monastic circles where the learned observed conflicts between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope. Such typological exegesis became an especially potent resource for critique in 1080 during the Investiture Controversy, when in order to promote his political agenda the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV deposed Pope Gregory VII and installed in his place Guibert of Ravenna, the anti-Pope Clement III. To legitimate Gregory's deposition, Henry, claiming a pedigree that could be traced back to Augustus, had a letter forged purporting to be the last will and testament of Nero. Here the last Julio-Claudian leaves responsibility for the security and peace of his empire to his successors in perpetuity and gives them authority to expel anyone who disturbs the peace and well-being of his dominion (Konrad (1966) 13).

In response, a long tradition of eschatological belief and legend surrounding Nero became a powerful means of political resistance and criticism. A series of twelfth-century theologians, known as German Symbolists, redeployed the realist apocalyptic tradition of earlier centuries (without the eschatological timetables that often accompanied it) to assess contemporary events through the lens of Christian apocalyptic typology (Rauh (1988) 333–58). Thus Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075–1139), a Benedictine theologian, deploys the legend of *Nero redivivus* as a means of political resistance but without any expectation of the end of the world: Nero and Simon Magus, he writes, "now have come back to life [*nunc revixerunt*]": "the dragon made mighty / here now rules (*draco factus ingens / hic modo regnat*," *The Calamities of the Church of Liège* 3.30,35: Böhmer (1897) 627)). A contemporary of Rupert, Gerhoh of Regensburg (1093–1169), inspired by 1 John 2.17–19 ("antichrist is coming, so now many antichrist have come"), lists Nero amongst a series of antichrists (Herod, Decius, Julian the Apostate) who collectively formed the spirit of Antichrist in the world. In his *On the Four Watches of the Night* (Sackur (1897) 503–25) Gerhoh, obeying Christ's command to his disciples to keep watch through the night (*Matthew* 16.40), deployed an elegant and sophisticated typology to investigate the coming of antichrists through the four watches that comprise church history. Three have passed and now with the accession of Henry IV and his successors and their persecution of reformist popes the final and climactic watch has been inaugurated. As "impious and impure" Nero – "the first and principal Antichrist" – persecuted the "two most notable witnesses, the two burning lamps, the two olive trees, the two lamp stands radiant with the light of truth," i.e. Peter and Paul (14, 514–15), so now the Antichrist of the fourth watch, Henry, persecutes and sends into exile "the two witnesses, two lamps, two lamp stands," Gregory VII and Urban II (18, 521).

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The brilliant interpreter of biblical apocalyptic, Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202) ushered in a whole new world of Nero speculation with his reading of the Old and New Testaments as prefiguring the history of the church, with the Book of Revelation furnishing the key to history's conclusion. As with earlier commentators, the Antichrist/antichrists of 1 John 2.17–19 become a means of reading a history of evil (Lerner (1985) 553–70). In his *Exposition on the Apocalypse* 8 (1964, fol. 10ra–va), Joachim interpreted the seven heads of Revelation 17:3 as representations of a series of antichrists who have come into the world, in which Nero was the second of five, with two soon to appear. These were anticipations of the one Antichrist of 1 John 2.18, represented by the seventh head, whose coming Joachim predicted would be in 1256/7, a date that was to become especially important as we shall see presently. Joachim echoes earlier apocalyptic exegetical tradition when he makes Nero and Simon Magus types for the Beasts of Land and Sea (*Exposition* 168r; cf. Revelation 13:1–10 and 11–18). In the *Book of Figures*, where Nero again appears as the second head of the seven-headed beast, Joachim treats him together with Simon typologically: “He [Antichrist] will perform great signs before him and his army, just as Simon Magus did in the sight of Nero” (Tondelli, Reeves, and Hirsch-Reich (1953) Table 14, 9–55; trans. McGinn (1979) 137).

These ideas gave rise to intricate apocalyptic scenarios amongst successive followers of Joachim (Reeves (1969)) such as John of Rupescissa (c. 1310–66), a Franciscan who – despite the fact that he spent most of his life in prison – was one of the Middle Ages' most prolific authors of apocalyptic prophecies and commentaries. John's *Vade Mecum in Tribulatione*, which takes the form of 20 “Instructions” and offers detailed descriptions of the imminent advent of Antichrist and the end of the world, furnishes a compendium of his apocalyptic and prophetic views. These were formed in a period of social and economic turmoil that led to the peasant uprising of 1358 (DeVun (2009) 32–51), and reflect his belief that a luxuriating papal curia was about to swept away in a tide of apocalyptic violence (*Instruction* 7: Brown (1690) 500) and turned over to a pure and poor mendicant Franciscan, the Angelic Pope (*Instruction* 19: Brown (1690) 506–7). John predicted from a set of calculations based on Daniel 12:11 the arrival of two antichrists between 1365 and 1370 (Reeves (1969) 323). An eastern one (*Instructions* 9 and 10: Brown (1690) 500–2) will come to persuade the Jews to worship him as Messiah. The western Antichrist will be *Nero redivivus* (*Instruction* 8: Brown (1690) 500) who will return as Holy Roman Emperor to rule for three and a half years of tribulation, lay waste to the world, and destroy all its cities. No doubt reflecting the stirrings of revolt around him, John was unique in his belief that in the coming apocalypse the peasants would rise up to overthrow the oppressive French nobility and that the Angelic Pope would conquer Nero Antichrist.

Perhaps the most versatile application of Nero traditions belongs to the Joachimites, those who were disappointed by Joachim's prophesies and reconfigured the Nero legends as a means of political resistance to the Hohenstaufen emperor Frederick II (1194–1250). Joachim had predicted the Antichrist would come in 1256/7, a date that at the time was seen to coincide with the emperor's reign. Charging him with heresy and sacrilege, Pope Innocent III deposed Frederick at the ecumenical council of Lyons in 1245. Like Henry IV before him, Frederick pursued an aggressive policy against antagonistic popes and as he made his way with his army to discuss his excommunication with Pope Innocent, Joachimite observers saw the emperor as a Nero Antichrist who would depose

Pope Innocent and install his own Simon to rule alongside him: an apocalypse-inspired mode of historical critique common amongst the Symbolists from the previous century. But Frederick's sudden death from dysentery in 1250 (seven years in advance of the Great Tribulation predicted by Joachim) resulted in a dramatically new application of the *Nero redivivus* myth: a rumor arose amongst some Joachites that Frederick was to return from the dead to complete his rule as the Antichrist; others placed the Antichrist/Nero mantle on successors to the throne, even a third Frederick yet to come (Lerner (1988) 370–2). This represents perhaps the most thorough and creative reworking of the *Nero redivivus* legend outside the New Testament.

Whether tyrant, immoral, persecutor, damned, mold for the coming Antichrist, or the returned Antichrist himself, the medieval, Renaissance, and Reformation treatments of Nero offered their audiences inexhaustible resources for reflection on the world around them, and speculation on events to come. From the early church onward, as well as in Jewish tradition, Nero came back to life not once, but again and again in a culturally productive posthumous career. In doing so Nero – historical, legendary, and mythical – became a key figure in articulating the expectations, fears, and ideals of generations.

FURTHER READING

There is no comprehensive study of the reception of Nero in Jewish and Christian tradition for the period this essay considers. Warmington (1969) is the only English consideration of Nero's *Nachleben*, but only by way of passing in considering classical sources, and without reference to Reformation traditions. His bibliography is an excellent resource and has been foundational to this study. A number of essays and monographs focus respectively on Nero in Jewish tradition, the New Testament era, the early church, and especially the medieval period. No dedicated study exists on Nero in Renaissance and Reformation writers. Barrett (1976) and Bastomsky (1969) offer excellent accounts in English of Nero in Jewish tradition and Rubenstein (2002) offers translations of the Talmudic legends. The specialist will refer in addition to Bacher (1903) and Bodinger (1989). Collins (1974, 1983) offers detailed discussion of the Jewish as well as Christian Sibylliana. Yarbrow Collins (1976) remains the definitive account of the Nero and the *redivivus* traditions in the Book of Revelation. Bousset (1999, a republication of the nineteenth-century study) remains a classic discussion though not dedicated exclusively to Nero. Jenks (1991) and McGinn (2000) demonstrate the uses of Jewish tradition in the Christian formulations of Nero Antichrist. Elliott (1993) and Hennecke and Schneemelcher (1965) gather and translate many Christian apocryphal Nero legends; Lipsius (1959) remains the critical edition and contains legends awaiting translation. Furst, Fuhrer, Folder, and Walter (2006) furnish a critical text and discussion of the Seneca–Paul correspondence. Hughes (2005) considers Nero in early Christian and medieval Pauline commentary. A number of foreign-language studies devote themselves exclusively to early Christian Nero traditions, of which Jakob-Sonnabend (1990) is now the definitive account that also offers a brief chapter on medieval treatments. Rougé (1968) is an indispensable complement. Since Simon Magus is so regularly associated with Nero in early traditions, Ferreiro (2005) is critical. Many primary texts appear in the public domain in antiquated nineteenth-century English translation (Coxe (1978); Schaff et al. (1978); <http://www.ccel.org/fathers.html/>). Surveys of medieval uses of Nero appeared in the nineteenth century (pre-eminently Graf (1833) and Geffcken (1899)). The Italian study of Pascal (1923) supersedes them and offers what remains the most thorough overview to date; Walter (1957) offers a survey based almost entirely on Pascal and has the benefit of an English translation. There is no modern study. The massive *Monumenta*

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