

BOOK REVIEW

A Companion to the Neronian Age. By EMMA BUCKLEY and MARTIN T. DINTER (eds). Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2013. Pp. xvi + 486. \$195.00. ISBN 978-1-4443-3272-8.

Few figures have captured the imagination of later ages quite like Nero who—*ut fama est*—was initially a decent young king who in time became a matricidal, lyre-playing, chariot-driving, wife-killing, fire-starting, over-sexed, self-indulgent, tyrannical and paranoid maniac. What's not to love (unless of course you were his wife, or his mom, or his lyre, or ...)?

This excellent book takes us on a fascinating journey deep into the life of this incredible figure and the amazing world he inhabited and helped to shape. As nearly all the authors in this volume acknowledge, one of the main difficulties in coming to grips with Nero and the era marked by his reign is assessing the contours (and often the validity) of the brief outline of the man offered above. Luckily for us, the contributors to this book are up to the challenge, taking it as their mission to investigate and deconstruct the various kinds of source-material at our disposal in order to reconstruct, as it were, the life and times of Nero as fully and accurately as possible. The results are impressive.

There are many things to praise about this volume, but for me a key one is the book's balance. There is a very good balance of topics covered (history, politics, military affairs, literature, philosophy, architecture, art, religion, and the reception of the age in later culture); a careful balance between new and original contributions and surveys of established views; and a balanced mixture of well-known scholars and newer voices (all of them experts in their fields nonetheless).

The editors, Emma Buckley and Martin Dinter, have done an impressive job assembling a real 'A-Team' of critics to investigate the Neronian Age from every conceivable angle and have done an equally impressive job of tying the various contributions together by extensive cross-referencing. This, together with the fact that several themes recur time and again in various contexts—the penchant of the age for hyperbole and grandiosity, the period's seemingly boundless desire for spectacle, theatricality, and ostentatious display, a keen self-awareness regard-

ing the physicality of the body (and its vulnerabilities), the rhetoricization of many aspects of life—imparts to the book a sense of unity that is difficult to achieve in a companion volume such as this.

The layout of the book is sensible and very user-friendly. An introduction by Dinter kicks things off and sets the stage for what follows. After that, the volume is divided into four main parts: 1) Nero; 2) The Empire; 3) Literature, Art, and Architecture; and 4) Reception. An Epilogue by Miriam Griffin closes the volume. Across these divisions, the book contains twenty-six chapters with the largest number of contributions appearing in Part 3, not surprisingly. There are thirty illustrations, three maps, and four plates: the quality of each of these is high. As is typical of the series, each contribution contains its own list of works cited, as well as (most helpfully) a brief section on “Further Reading” regarding the main issues addressed in the chapter. Thus the book supplies its audience with bibliographies arranged by topic, which greatly increases its value as a reference guide. An index of topics discussed rounds things out. The text is very clean and the typographic errors I did manage to notice are very minor and easy enough to deal with.

This book is a must-have for anyone working on the Neronian Age, but it will also be a valuable asset to those interested in Roman culture more broadly (the price is high, but well worth the investment). All ancient sources are translated, so the work is certainly accessible to a non-specialist audience as well. It will be a great reference for teaching both graduate seminars and advanced undergraduate courses. It is a worthy addition to this excellent companion series and a fitting tribute to John Henderson, to whom the volume is dedicated.

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