

Nero in Greece: The Underlying Economic Motives of a Notorious Emperor

The notorious emperor, Nero of the Roman Empire, is the focus of many scholarly articles. Nero's tour of Greece was advertised to the empire as one mainly focused on theater and music due to tensions that would surface if his true motive was known; moreover, this paper covers the reality of Nero's motives for Greece, which include his overpowering desire for a more robust economy in the region through the analyzation of his actions in cities. Utilizing detailed analysis of Epigraphics, Numismatics, and Archaeology, this argument is revealed.

Numismatics, the study of coins, provides historians insight into Nero's tour of Greece. Thousands of coins under Nero's reign were found in three main cities: Cappadocia, Thrace, and Achaë.¹ The messages and figures crafted onto coins are often particular as they demonstrate how the emperor wished to be seen by his subjects.² Furthermore, even in Italian regions, Nero's biological father has never been found on any local coinage.³ As Nero wished to gain respect or even perhaps likeability in the Greek region of his empire, his boasting of political and familial connections that are linked to a significant history of tyranny would not aid him; instead, Nero seems to tiptoe over it, demonstrating his desire for a stabilized image in Greek cities.

This paper emphasizes the significance of Corinth within the Roman Empire's economy. An interesting aspect of Corinth's economic value to the Empire is highlighted when an earthquake strikes in A.D 77.⁴ While Nero's reign had ended by then, the intended economic

¹ Manders, Erika, and Daniëlle Slootjes. "Linking Inscriptions to Provincial Coins: A Reappraisal of Nero's Visit to Greece." *Latomus* 74, no. 4 (2015): 989–1005. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48574595>.

² Hekster, Olivier, Erika Manders, and Daniëlle Slootjes. "Making History with Coins: Nero from a Numismatic Perspective."

³ Hekster, Olivier, Erika Manders, and Daniëlle Slootjes. "Making History with Coins: Nero from a Numismatic Perspective."

⁴ Engels, Donald W.. *Roman Corinth: an Alternative Model for the Classical City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990.

growth of Corinth accomplished throughout Nero's tour of Greece seems to have been quite successful, based on the material used to rebuild structures following their destruction. According to the scholar Donald W. Engels, "Many of the buildings constructed from the Augustan era to Nero's reign were of Corinthian sandstone, often called 'poros' which was easily available from local quarries and the ruins of old Greek structures."⁵ However, following the earthquake, buildings' materials were no longer the local source of sandstone but marble.⁶ Marble is quite significant when thinking of Corinth's general economy as the material alludes to the city's prosperity in terms of wealth and trade. The material change further signifies the cities' uptick in wealth during and subsequently after Nero's reign, thus demonstrating that Nero's tour was not merely for theatrical fun but also to reestablish Greek cities, like Corinth, into commercial trade and general wealth 'powerhouses' of the Empire.

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⁵ Engels, Donald W.. *Roman Corinth : an alternative model for the classical city*. Chicago:

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Johnson, Coleman-Norton & Bourne, *Ancient Roman Statutes*, Austin, 1961, p. 147, n. 180 Suet.

Ner. 20. Captus autem modulatis Alexandrinorum laudationibus, qui de novo commeatu
Neapolim confluerant, plures Alexandria evocavit.