

Nero, Roman Emperor from 54-68 CE, is easily one of the most infamous characters in history. To this day, many people know the phrase “Nero fiddled while Rome burned.” That phrase alone suggests the kind of reputation that Nero earned for himself during his reign. Nero was the last of the Julio Claudian Emperors. It is safe to say that he did not end this line of rulers on a high note.

This coin from the St. Olaf collection features, on the obverse, the face of Nero, facing left, wearing the laurel wreath, a symbol of rule, and contains the letters “*NERO CLAUD CAESAR AUG GER P M TR P IMP PP.*” This is simply a list of names and titles that belonged to Nero, written in the abbreviated form of Roman inscriptions.

Specifically he holds the titles of “Caesar Augustus, Germanicus, Pontifex Maximus, Tribunitia Potestate, Imperator, and Pater Patriae¹.”

On the reverse, there is a nice water scene. Specifically, it is the port of Ostia, which was the port for Rome itself. The scene on the St. Olaf coin features 8 ships in the middle, as well as a statue of Neptune at the top, and a personification of the river Tiber at the bottom, holding a steering oar, with a dolphin behind him. On the left, there is a representation of arcades and warehouses which surrounded the actual port. On the right, we see breakwaters. On the bottom, the letters “S POR OST C,” are written. This identifies this place as the port of Ostia, flanked by the letters SC, proving that the senate agreed to mint these coins. On the top is written “*AUGUSTI*,” simply proving whose harbor it is. Nero seems to have featured Ostia for the specific reason that he

¹ Rawlings, G.B, *Ancient Medieval Modern Coins and How to Know Them*. Ammon Press, Chicago, 1966. 156-163.

was responsible for finishing its construction,² and thus including it on his coin adds to his own prestige.

² Breglia, L, *Roman Imperial Coins: Their Art and Technique*. Frederick A. Praeger, inc, New York, New York, 1968. 76.