



Written by [James Heiser](#) on September 30, 2009

Nero's Banquet Hall Unearthed in Rome

In a style worthy of the name of the man who "fiddled while Rome burned," archaeologists believe they have now found the legendary banquet hall of emperor Nero.

[According to the Associated Press,](#)

"Archaeologists on Tuesday unveiled what they think are the remains of Roman emperor Nero's extravagant banquet hall, a circular space that rotated day and night to imitate the Earth's movement and impress his guests."

The AP account continued:

The room, part of Nero's Golden Palace, a sprawling residence built in the first century A.D., is thought to have been built to entertain government officials and VIPs, said lead archaeologist Francoise Villedieu.



The emperor, known for his lavish and depraved lifestyle, ruled from 37 A.D. to 68 A.D. The dig so far has turned up the foundations of the room, the rotating mechanism underneath and part of an attached space believed to be the kitchens, she said.

"This cannot be compared to anything that we know of in ancient Roman architecture," Villedieu told reporters during a tour of the cordoned-off dig.

In the popular memory, the nearly-fourteen year reign of Nero is arguably both the most memorable, and infamous, among the Caesars after Julius and Augustus. (Contrary to the AP story, Nero lived from 37 to 68 A.D. — his reign began October 13, 54 A.D. and ended with his suicide on June 9, 68 A.D.) Nero's reign was marked by a decadence which would come to typify popular portrayals of the lingering death-by-dissipation of the Roman Empire. Nero's reign was also the beginning of the Roman persecutions of the Church and, according to tradition, the martyrdoms of Ss. Peter and Paul at Rome occurred under Nero. Such persecutions continued sporadically until they reached their violent crescendo under Diocletian two and half centuries later.

The opulence of Nero's dining hall symbolizes the other side of what the poet Juvenal identified as the "bread and circuses" mentality of the Roman emperors: government handouts to the populace accompanied the self-deification of the emperors and a lifestyle which matched their bloated egos.

The AP reports concerning Nero's dining hall:

The partially excavated site is part of the sumptuous residence, also known by its Latin name Domus Aurea, which rose over the ruins of a fire that destroyed much of Rome in A.D. 64. The purported main dining room, with a diameter of over 50 feet (16 meters), rested upon a 13-foot (4-meter) wide pillar and four spherical mechanisms that, likely powered by a constant flow



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of water, rotated the structure.

The discovery was made during routine maintenance of the fragile Palatine area, officials said. Latin biographer and historian Suetonius, who chronicled his times and wrote the biographies of 12 Roman rulers, refers to a main dining room that revolved "day and night, in time with the sky."

Angelo Bottini, the state's top official for archaeology in Rome, said the ceiling of the rotating room might have been the one mentioned by Suetonius, who wrote of ivory panels sliding back and forth to shower flowers and perfumes on the guests below.

"The heart of every activity in ancient Rome was the banquet, together with some form of entertainment," Bottini said at the dig. "Nero was like the sun, and people were revolving around the emperor."

There is no word, as of this writing, whether White House architects will be traveling to Rome to study the site as a model for improvements to the president's residence.

Photo: AP Images



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