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The Power of the Sun God: Apollo throughout the Ages

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## ABSTRACT

Apollo has appeared as a symbol of propaganda in various rulers' reigns throughout history. Three of the most famous uses of his image belong to Emperor Augustus, Emperor Nero, and King Louis XIV of France. The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the use of the god Apollo and his persona in the reigns of Nero and Louis XIV, and how they are more similar to one another than they are to Augustus. For emperors of Rome, associating and even portraying oneself as a god was a common practice, and Nero used Apollo to justify his own crimes and decisions during his time as emperor. Similarly, Louis XIV used Apollo in his imagery as King of France. Reigning in the Classical Age, the mythology and history of antiquity became popular once again, and it is no surprise that Apollo was used as a symbol of Louis XIV's power. While many declare that Louis XIV was Augustan in nature, both during his reign and after, the ways in which he used Apollo during his reign and the reactions of the people prove that in reality Louis XIV is more Neronian. Evidence of these similarities can be seen throughout the art and architecture, public performances, literature, and politics of both Nero and Louis XIV.

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## Introduction

The sun has been a symbol of power for thousands of years, and Apollo is one of many gods who embodies it. Coming into prominence as part of the Greek pantheon and then subsequently worshipped by the Romans, Apollo became a powerful symbol with whom rulers identified. Three of the most famous rulers to connect the propaganda of their reigns to Apollo are Augustus, Nero, and Louis XIV. While Augustus and Nero both ruled during the Julio-Claudian period of the Roman Empire, Louis XIV of France ruled in the 17th century, illustrating the reach and longevity of the influence and power of the god of the sun. Each of these rulers utilized Apollo in various and differing ways to meet their own respective needs as emperor or monarch, showcasing the wide array of domains over which Apollo has jurisdiction. The approach to analyzing the utilization of Apollo will be thematic in nature, as I evaluate and directly compare each ruler's propaganda in various aspects, instead of a chronological approach to their reigns. I argue in this thesis that, while Louis XIV claimed to imitate the actions of Augustus during his reign of monarch as France, his utilization of propaganda related to Apollo illustrates a stronger connection to the actions and behaviors of Emperor Nero.

Although Apollo is most well-known as being the god of archery and the sun, his control goes far beyond these two aspects. Born on the island of Delos with his twin sister Artemis, also known as Diana, he became one of the main twelve Olympian gods in Greek religion as his father is Zeus. While one of his main duties is driving his sun chariot across the sky every day, he also has power over a variety of other domains, such as music, healing, prophecy, plague, and order, and he is always presented as young and beautiful. Common symbols that represent him include the lyre, the laurel tree and its branches, the bow and arrow, and the omphalos, which represents the center of the world. Because of the number of different associations that he has,

there were a variety of ways for Augustus, Nero, and Louis XIV to use him in their propaganda. Since my thesis's main focus lies on Nero and Louis XIV and the comparison of their use of Apollo, I will in this introduction concentrate primarily on Augustus, whom both of the later rulers sought to emulate.

Augustus rose to power after the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, as Caesar had adopted him as his son. Known as Octavian at this point in time, he originally joined with Mark Antony in order to avenge his adopted father's death and formed the Second Triumvirate with a third man named Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, but they quickly became enemies as they vied for control over Rome. People in positions of political power during the Late Republic of Rome had for a long time been connecting themselves and their lineage to the gods, as both Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great claimed to be descended from Venus. Mark Antony chose Bacchus as his patron deity. Bacchus was a god of revelry and liberation and was typically associated with the East. As Mark Antony turned to Cleopatra and Egypt for help in defeating Octavian, this connection to Bacchus made sense, but caused Octavian to name him a traitor of Rome.<sup>1</sup> Octavian defeated Mark Antony at the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, as "the Octavianic patron Apollo as a god of ordered calm and civilized restraint in opposition to Bacchus the deity of drunkenness and oriental excess would be all of a piece with Octavian's self-representation as the champion of Italy and the West pitted against Antony and Cleopatra's degenerate East."<sup>2</sup> Octavian was using Apollo as a symbol of the healing of the Roman state, and this date is considered to be one of the dates that marks the end of the Roman Republic and Octavian's true rise to power.

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<sup>1</sup> John Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets*, 27.

Upon Octavian's return to Rome, he undertook various measures in order to ensure his political power, and engaged in political manoeuvring to make this possible. He publicly closed the doors to the Temple of Janus, which was how peace was signalled in Ancient Rome, and this would not happen again until the reign of Nero. He also held his first and only triumphs in 29 BCE, holding a triple triumph for his accomplishments, and then refusing any other triumphal honors the senate tried to bestow upon him for the rest of his life.<sup>3</sup> In 27 BCE, the First Settlement with the Senate occurred and Octavian received the name Augustus, among other political honors. This year marks the beginning of the Roman Principate, the first period of the Roman Empire, which lasted from 27 BCE to 284 CE. What marks his reign was his unprecedented ability for political theater, as while he had the absolute power in Rome, he acted in such a way that the Senate and the people still thought they had some semblance of power and control. Augustus was named *princeps* and *primus inter pares*, first among equals, as in his political manoeuvring he declared he was giving back power to the Senate, but they demanded he remain in power as they needed him. He became consul for a number of years in order to hold his power, and he also had control of a multitude of Roman legions stationed at the frontiers. He may have seemed to hold power just like any other magistrate, but behind the scenes he held far more control than anyone else, controlling the military outside of Rome. And while Augustus had "neither the instincts of a soldier nor the ambition of a conqueror, his Principate is a long record of military operations on almost every frontier..." and Augustus had the military expertise and glory of his closest advisor and friend Marcus Agrippa.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Frances Hickson, "Augustus "Triumphator": Manipulation of the Triumphal Theme in the Political Program of Augustus," *Latomus* 50 (1991): 126.

<sup>4</sup> "The Northern Frontiers under Augustus" *The Cambridge Ancient History*, ed. S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock, and M.P. Charlesworth, vol. 10 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 10:341.



In 23 BCE was the Second Settlement with the Senate, and Augustus gave up his consulship so as not to appear as a tyrant. Yet he took the power of *maius imperium*, which meant “greater power,” and became the most powerful man in Rome, allowing him more control than the consuls. He also received the perpetual power of the tribune of the plebs, which meant that he could veto bills in the Senate at his own will. It also made him sacrosanct, protecting him from prosecution. His ultimate authority and cunning ability for political theater in making the Senate think they had power lasted his entire reign, which ended at his death in 14 CE. During the reign of Augustus Rome projected an image of an unprecedented level of peace, order, and prestige across the Mediterranean and beyond.<sup>5</sup>

It was Augustus who started to remake the architecture of the city of Rome in order to convey the power of Rome and the Empire. But, in order to keep his pretense of not being more powerful than the Senate, he did not build an extravagant palace on the Palatine Hill, which became known later on as the hill in which emperors built their homes.<sup>6</sup> This is the exact opposite of the actions of both Nero and Louis XIV, who built grand and luxurious palaces as a demonstration of their power. Instead, he focused on building and reconstructing monuments. In chapters 19 to 21 of Augustus’ *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, or *The Deeds of Divine Augustus*, he lists many major monuments built during his reign, such as the Temple of Quirinus, the Temple of Diana, and the Temple of Peace, called the Ara Pacis, and he also claims to have restored 82 temples that had been ruined during the civil wars of the Republic.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Werner Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, trans. Deborah Schneider (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Eck, *The Age of Augustus*, 106.

<sup>7</sup> Augustus, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 19-21.

The connection to Apollo through his architecture is the creation of the Temple of Apollo Palatinus, which sat on top of the Palatine Hill in Rome. This temple was even connected to Augustus' own house, showing his devotion to the god.<sup>8</sup> Augustus vowed that he would build this temple after the defeat of Sextus Pompey in 36 BCE at the Battle of Naulochus, and the site of the temple was struck by lightning, which was taken by the haruspices to mean that Apollo favored this spot. At the top of the pediment of the temple was a large golden statue of Apollo riding on his sun chariot. The artwork on the temple used mythological artwork and decorations to allude to various foreign victories of Rome, including the Danaids and their defeat of Egypt, referencing Octavian's battle against Marc Antony and Cleopatra, and also the story of Niobe and Apollo and Artemis killing her sons and daughters. The temple was made from white marble and gold accents, and featured a cult statue inside of Apollo Citharoedus. It also housed the Sibylline books, which were books of prophecies, as Apollo is the god of prophecy. All of these aspects are linked in some way to the divine attributes of Apollo, and showcased Augustus' connection to the god and his victory over his enemies for the protection of Rome. Augustus' message was clear: he had brought about an era of peace for Rome.<sup>9</sup>

Peace did not last long in the Roman Empire, however, and the Julio-Claudian dynasty would end with Emperor Nero, the great-great grandson of Augustus. He came to the throne in 54 CE, after the rumored assassination of his stepfather Claudius. It is thought that Nero's mother Agrippina murdered her husband Claudius in order for Nero to ascend the throne. Nero would later kill his half-brother Britannicus, the legitimate son of Claudius, with poison in order to get rid of any competition. Since Nero was just a teenager when he became emperor,

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<sup>8</sup> Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Miller, *Apollo, Augustus, and the Poets*, 30.

Agrippina acted as his regent for some years, and he also had two advisors, the Stoic philosopher Seneca, and his praetorian prefect Burrus. Nero would go on to murder his mother in 59 CE, and this is when his real obsession with the arts was able to develop, and his connection to the god Apollo began in earnest. His actions, many of them analyzed in this thesis, led to his forced suicide in 68 CE.

Louis XIV reigned as monarch of France from 1643-1715, and ruled as a divine right monarch, meaning he claimed his power to rule was given to him by God. He came to power even earlier in his life than Augustus and Nero, taking the throne when he was only four years old. His mother, Anne of Austria, became regent for him until he was of a suitable age to rule himself. Louis XIV holds the title of being the longest reigning European monarch, and because he reigned for 72 years, there are a multitude of important events that occurred during his lifetime. He chose the sun as his personal emblem, and references to the sun and Apollo decorated his art, palaces, and inscriptions. Like Augustus, he died of sickness in old age. He left behind his great-grandson Louis XV to rule France.

Ancien Régime France, the period of time between the 15th century and the French Revolution in 1789, was a time when interest in antiquity was renewed, and Louis XIV was an excellent example of this phenomenon. Ancient Greek and Roman culture returned to prominence during the Renaissance, and the reign of Louis XIV followed soon after. Imperial imagery and symbolism abounded, and Louis XIV often wore the armor of a Roman emperor in portraits. He was depicting himself as an emperor, making himself the ruler of his own empire, France, and demonstrating his absolute authority over his country. Because of various contenders vying for power in Europe during this time, Louis XIV needed to portray his power and command. This especially was important in terms of religion, as he deemed himself given

the ability to rule by God himself, and this would have diminished the power of the Pope concerning his authority. His connection to Apollo was also another mark of a return to certain aspects of antiquity, as it was not uncommon for Roman emperors to devote themselves to a god for their own purposes, as had been the case for Augustus and Nero. French artists were aware of the art and architecture of Ancient Rome, and many artists attempted to eclipse Rome in terms of the splendor of their art and architecture.<sup>10</sup> The supporters of Louis XIV even claimed that he was a new Augustus. Literature also was heavily influenced by antiquity, with many of the French plays produced at this time revolving around themes of classical mythology and ancient history, and forms of poetry and prose imitating the style of ancient Roman and Greek authors.

I have used a variety of sources, both primary and secondary, to dig into the different forms of propaganda these rulers used concerning Apollo. In everything from art and sculpture from their respective time periods, to journals, prose, poetry, coins, and memoirs, Apollo has been an integral part of them all. All of the primary sources and sources published in a foreign language, such as Latin, Ancient Greek, and French, I have made the translations myself to get the fullest possible meaning from the original text.

The primary sources concerning Emperor Nero posed the greatest challenge to my research, as the majority of the sources that record his reign have been lost, and those that remain were written after his death. Nero did not have a positive reputation after his death among the elite classes of Rome because of his want to perform in public, and as the upper class found this disgraceful, this bias can be seen in the descriptions of his reign and his character. I have kept this context in mind. The ancient authors that I have used to research Nero include Tacitus, Suetonius, Cassius Dio, Pliny the Elder, Martial, Seneca, and Lucan. With the exception of

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 194.

Cassius Dio, who wrote in Ancient Greek, all of these sources are in Latin, and I have translated them all myself in the citations listed in this thesis. While there is bias in them, as the only ancient sources that remain they were extremely useful in giving me details of the events of Nero's reign. Looking past their bias toward Nero, there is still a wealth of information of both the positive and negative aspects of Nero's reign.

The primary sources for Louis XIV's reign are much more plentiful to find since he held power more recently, around 300 years ago. The sources I have used the most throughout my research are André Félibien's *Description Sommaire de Versailles*, the writings of Charles Perrault, the history of coins and medals by Claude Ménéstrier, Racine and his tragedies and writings, and the memoirs written by Louis XIV himself. These aided me in getting an overview of Louis XIV's long reign, but I did focus specifically on references to Apollo when reading these sources in order to stay as specific as possible to my research question. Otherwise, the amount of information written during the time of Louis XIV would be overwhelming to analyze. These sources were, for the most part, written in French, and I have attempted to stay as literal as possible to the original language's meaning in my citations.

There are an abundant number of secondary sources to supplement the original texts and materials from their respective reigns. There are so many aspects of Apollo used in propaganda a large amount of sources were needed in order to cover as much as possible. I have picked four sources that I have used the most throughout all of my research, two books on Nero and two books on Louis XIV. The books on Nero are *Nero* by Edward Champlin and *Domus Aurea* by Elisabetta Segala and Ida Sciortino. Champlin's work is one of the fundamental works on my analysis of Nero, as his approach to writing the book was not as a biography, but he analyzed Nero's reign through the lens of mythology and his representation. This angle was crucial to my

understanding of Apollo's role in his affairs. The book on the Domus Aurea was also critical in that the Domus Aurea is one of the only remaining materials of Nero's reign, and since parts of it are still standing and are preserved, it gives an abundance of insight into Nero's reign and propaganda.

For Louis XIV, I have picked *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* by Peter Burke and *Versailles* by Colin Jones. *The Fabrication of Louis XIV* is very similar to Champlin's work on Nero, in that it focuses on the fabrication of the image of Louis XIV and its reception. This was extremely useful in finding examples of the use of Apollo in a variety of textual sources and art, and how people reacted to said imagery. Jones' work is also similar to the importance of the Domus Aurea in that Versailles still exists, and though it has changed since the reign of Louis XIV, the book allows a picture of the palace at its creation to be painted. Jones is also able to give a look into the politics and culture at the time through describing Versailles, making this work critical to understanding the original palace created by Louis XIV.

In this thesis, the three most important aspects concerning the use of Apollo in propaganda are architecture, art and literature, and politics. These topics will comprise the chapters of this work, focusing on the most important examples of representation for these leaders. My aim throughout this thesis is to show that while Louis XIV is usually associated with Augustus because of his use of Apollo in these aspects, in reality his actions line up more with Nero, no matter what Louis XIV's opinion of this was. Because themes from antiquity became popular once again during Ancien Régime France, Louis XIV would have been aware of who both Augustus and Nero were, and the reputation they both gained. He would have known that both of these emperors used Apollo as their own patron deity, and while he claimed to follow Augustus, many of his actions were more Neronian in character.

## Chapter 1

### Apollo & Architecture

The royal residences of both Emperor Nero and King Louis XIV have become a focal point of their respective reigns because of their grandeur. The building projects of both rulers are considered to be notable throughout history because of their design and the works found inside. The Domus Aurea, also known as “The Golden House” of Nero immediately became one of the most notorious buildings from Roman history. And Versailles, the grand sun palace of Louis XIV, became a model of design for palaces all over Europe and beyond. The use of Apollo is prevalent in both palaces, as aspects of their architecture and landscapes both allude to Apollo in various ways, making them worthy of a ruler connecting himself to the Sun. Therefore, Emperor Nero and King Louis XIV both created palaces during their reigns for similar reasons, namely, to demonstrate their power and connection to Apollo through their imperial architecture and control over nature.

While both Nero and Louis XIV were attempting to follow in the footsteps of Augustus with their building projects and his use of Apollo, Augustus never built anything on the scale that these two rulers did, even if he did construct decadent buildings like the Temple of Apollo Palatinus. Although Apollo is a common theme between all three of them, Louis XIV’s use of architecture and Apollo to build his monumental chateau is more similar to the imperial building projects that mark Nero’s reign, not Augustus’s. In this chapter Nero’s Domus Aurea will first be analyzed, including how Apollo and the sun fit into his iconography. Then, the architecture and imagery within Louis XIV’s Versailles will be interpreted, comparing aspects of it to Nero’s palace in order to make connections between their propaganda to illustrate how they are more similar to one another than Augustus.

The Domus Aurea was not the first palace that Nero built in Rome. The Domus Transitoria was a complex that spanned the Palatine Hill and the urban villas of the Esquiline Hill, with other lands surrounding this area passed down by previous emperors.<sup>11</sup> The inside was inlaid polychrome marble, and the vaults were covered in frescoes of epic scenes and friezes.<sup>12</sup> While some pieces were discovered, much of the palace has not survived. Unfortunately, this palace did not last because in 64 CE it burned down during the Great Fire, which would have a drastic impact on Nero's reign.

The Great Fire of Rome, which occurred in 64 CE, allowed Nero access to over 80 hectares of land that was destroyed by the flames. Much of this land was taken from upper class families who had houses on the Palatine and the surrounding areas, as this was one of the areas hit hardest by the fire that started in the Circus Maximus nearby. This is where the infamous story of Nero fiddling while Rome burned comes from, connecting his obsession for the arts and Apollo with the destruction of the city. While Nero was in Antium at the time of the fire, and immediately came back to start giving aid, the rumor stuck with him for the rest of history.<sup>13</sup> But, Nero gained an opportunity after the fire to rebuild the city in marble, and his first project was the Domus Aurea.

Imperial building projects were important for emperors, as they allowed them to distinguish themselves from the rulers before them. While Nero's reign was generally condemned by future emperors, his skill in building was actually praised, with a 4th century author stating "Trajan with justice declared that all other emperors fell far behind Nero's five

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<sup>11</sup> Elisabetta Segala and Ida Sciortino, *Domus Aurea* (Milan: Electa, 1999), 5. There are seven famous hills of Rome, and the Palatine and Esquiline are two of the most well-known.

<sup>12</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.39.1-4.



years.”<sup>14</sup> Nero used the Domus Aurea as an extension of his public image, making the iconography of the Sun obvious in his architecture, so that when viewed the symbolism was obvious - he was equating himself to Apollo.<sup>15</sup> Nero constructed many more buildings than just the Domus Aurea in Rome, and Suetonius claims “nevertheless he was not in any other thing more prodigal than in building his house” (*Non in alia re tamen damnosior quam in aedificando domum*, Suet. *Ner.* 31.1). Nero was expected to surpass the building projects of his predecessors, and so the Domus Aurea, while being condemned for its grandeur after his death, was actually in line with what was expected of him. He was only continuing the tradition of the previous Julio-Claudians in building more and more extravagant creations, like Augustus’ Temple of Apollo Palatinus, Ara Pacis, and Temple of Mars Ultor.<sup>16</sup> Through this tradition his innovation shines.

All of the knowledge of the Domus Aurea is what has been found through the incomplete remains of the palace and what ancient sources recorded. While it is still possible to see how extravagant the palace would have been back in Nero’s time, much of the palace has been lost or degraded through time and its purposeful destruction. Suetonius claims that on the completion of the palace Nero stated “when he completed his house, he praised it to the extent that at last he could begin to live like a human being” (*domum cum absolutam dedicaret, hactenus comprobavit, ut se diceret quasi hominem tandem habitare coepisse*, Suet. *Ner.* 31.2). Parts of the palace lasted around thirty-five years after Nero’s reign, and it was also briefly inhabited by

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<sup>14</sup> Jaś Elsner, “Constructing Decadence: the Representation of Nero as Imperial Builder,” In *Reflections of Nero: culture, history, & representation*, edited by Jaś Elsner and Jamie Masters (London: Duckworth & Co., 1994), 114.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Champlin, “God and Man in the Golden House,” *Horti Romani*. Rome: *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*, Supplementi 6 (1998): 335.

<sup>16</sup> Elsner, “Constructing Decadence: the Representation of Nero as Imperial Builder,” 121.

Emperor Otho, who supposedly even gave 50 million sesterces to complete it, as it was not entirely finished when Nero committed suicide in 68 CE.<sup>17</sup>

Severus and Celer are named as the architects of the Domus Aurea, though nothing else is known about them.<sup>18</sup> The names of Imperial architects are rarely preserved or known in the historical record, so it is interesting that their names have survived antiquity, especially considering the terrible reputation Nero and his projects received after his death. Controlling nature was an important aspect of both Nero and Louis XIV's propaganda, linking them to Apollo as the god of order and the civilized arts. Tacitus describes these two architects as "they had the talent and daring to attempt through human skill even that which nature had refused and to squander the resources of the emperor" (*quibus ingenium et audacia erat etiam, quae natura denegavisset, per artem temptare et viribus principis includere*, Tac. Ann. 15.42.1).

The Domus Aurea became the palace of the Sun, glittering with gold and precious gems. One of the main elements of the palace was the use of light, representing Apollo, and unfortunately because Emperor Trajan used the Domus Aurea as the foundations for his bath complex, how exactly this would have worked or what it looked like is lost.<sup>19</sup> There was also a widespread use of gold leaf on the art inside the building, covering the frescoes and wall art.<sup>20</sup> The palace was situated on the hills in such a way that the sun would constantly be shining on it, from sunrise to sunset. It infiltrated the rooms at the front, reached the rooms connected to the peristyles and atriums, and also came in through the multiple corridors and windows lining the walls, and through this illuminated the walls and reflected off the many pools and fountains of

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<sup>17</sup> Suet. *Otho*, 7.1.

<sup>18</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 19.

<sup>19</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 22.

<sup>20</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 14.

water inside.<sup>21</sup> Because Nero covered the Domus Aurea with gold and gems, and the inside rooms with marble, the sun shining on the building all day long would have been blinding, and the palace would be easily seen from far away. This use of the sun was fundamental to his connection with Apollo. Having the sunlight brightly reflect off of his palace all day long made the palace into a palace of the sun, and therefore Apollo.

Ancient sources even mention that Nero brought in specific materials to aid in symbolizing Apollo. While the gold leaf, gems, ivory ceilings, and polychrome marble no longer remain, ancient authors have made mentions of their specific uses throughout the palace.<sup>22</sup> Marble was brought in from Asia Minor, Greece, and Africa, and was used on the walls, floors, and baths. When the light hit them, they would have lit up, especially when combined with water.<sup>23</sup> There is also a specific type of stone mentioned, called phengites, which has gold-yellow veins running through it, so that “therefore, even with the doors closed during the day, there was a brightness there like the day in another manner than the transparent stone, as if a glow had been enclosed within...” (*quare etiam foribus opertis interdiu claritas ibi diurna erat alio quam specularium modo tamquam inclusa luce...* Plin. *HN*. 36.163). With the decor and architecture designed in this way, the palace appeared to shine like sparkling gold.

The innovative architecture was planned so that at certain times of the day and year the light would hit certain parts of the building in just the right way. An example of this is the famous Octagonal Room, which is considered to be a masterpiece of Roman architecture due to

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<sup>21</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 29.

<sup>23</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 29.

its unprecedented and innovative use of Roman concrete.<sup>24</sup> It was an octagon-shaped room with a vaulted dome and an oculus in the center, and the design was one of the first concrete vaults. This makes it a precursor to the Pantheon's dome, which was added on during Hadrian's reign to the structure originally built by Marcus Agrippa under Augustus.<sup>25</sup> The construction of the Esquiline wing where this room is located illustrates that the Octagonal Room was intended to be the center of the palace, and this could be to physically show Nero's connection with the sun through the architectural design.<sup>26</sup> The blue, green, and white glass tesserae and mosaics which covered the ceiling also aided in reflecting the light around the room.<sup>27</sup> The tapered struts keep the openings of the vaults as wide as possible, so that more sunlight would be able to penetrate into the palace. The aesthetics of this design were important because they were a crucial element of the use of light.<sup>28</sup>

A hierophany, meaning a manifestation of something sacred, occurs on the equinoxes inside the room, because at noon on those days the sunlight coming through the oculus hits the jamb of the entrance exactly right, and encompasses the entire entrance in light.<sup>29</sup> This event was not accidental, and the illumination of the sun in parts of the room corresponds to dates of importance to Nero's reign, a design that further linked him to the sun and equated him with Apollo. For example, the sun shines on the person standing in the doorway of the entrance

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<sup>24</sup> Larry Ball, *The Domus Aurea and the Roman Architectural Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 207. Unfortunately, the recipe of Roman concrete has been lost to time.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Hannah, Guilio Magli, and Antonella Palmieri, "Nero's 'Solar' Kingship and the Architecture of the Domus Aurea," *Numen* 63.5% (2016): 514.

<sup>26</sup> Hannah, Magli, and Palmieri, "Nero's 'Solar' Kingship and the Architecture of the Domus Aurea," 516.

<sup>27</sup> Ball, *The Domus Aurea and the Roman Architectural Revolution*, 218.

<sup>28</sup> Ball, *The Domus Aurea and the Roman Architectural Revolution*, 215.

<sup>29</sup> Hannah, Magli, and Palmieri, "Nero's 'Solar' Kingship and the Architecture of the Domus Aurea," 516-517.

around the first week of March, which lines up with when Nero became pontifex.<sup>30</sup> This also occurs around mid-October, when Nero ascended the throne in 54 CE.<sup>31</sup> While the Octagonal Room was only one of many rooms that manipulated light in their design, it is the only room with an oculus that uses light to this extent.

There are also some scholars who believe that the Octagonal Room on the Esquiline Hill could have been the location of the *machinatio* of Nero.<sup>32</sup> According to Suetonius, the *machinatio* was a room within the Domus Aurea which circled day and night, mimicking the movements of the sky.<sup>33</sup> Since the Octagonal Room is one of the most architecturally advanced rooms in the complex, it would be a proper setting for adding a mechanism like this. Nero had a vested interest in the sun and astrology, and so some believe this would have been a sort of planetarium which revolved on wooden tracks moved by hydraulics. Because of this, the room could have also “contained the throne on which Nero, assimilated to the sun god, would have been worshipped, revolving every twenty four hours like an astral body.”<sup>34</sup> The exact location of Nero’s throne room is unknown, as some believe it could have also been in another room called the Golden Vault, but the Octagonal Room would have been an apt choice for Nero, equating himself to Apollo, to choose to conduct business.

The Domus Aurea was not just a singular palace, but more like a suburban villa that Nero built in the heart of Rome. There were three-mile-long porticoes, the Stagnum Neronis, an artificial lake he built in the middle of his palatial complex big enough to have ship battles in,

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<sup>30</sup> Pontifex refers to the office of Pontifex Maximus, which was the highest religious office in Rome and was typically given to emperors.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah, Magli, and Palmieri, “Nero’s ‘Solar’ Kingship and the Architecture of the Domus Aurea,” 521.

<sup>32</sup> Irene Iacopi, *Domus Aurea* (Milan: Electa, 2001), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 31.

<sup>34</sup> Iacopi, *Domus Aurea*, 15.

and the main structure which was surrounded by buildings made to look like cities. He imported animals from all over, both domestic and wild, and added vineyards, villas, and forests to his landscape.<sup>35</sup> The size of his creation was slowly taking over Rome, and Martial claimed “The odious halls of the cruel emperor were gleaming / and now in the entire city was standing one house” (*Invidiosa feri radiabant atria regis / Unaque iam tota stabat in urbe domus*, Mart. *Epigrams*, 2.3-4).<sup>36</sup> He essentially created his own little world within the city, with himself as the god. This microcosm looked over Rome with its size and grandeur, shining like the sun. Overlooking both the palace and the city of Rome was the Colossus, a statue of Nero with the features of the sun god, holding the world in his hand.<sup>37</sup> Apollo is also sometimes connected to the founding of civilizations, and here Nero in this way is creating his own world.

The painter responsible for working on the Domus Aurea was a man named Fabullus, who is also called Famulus or Aumulus in Pliny’s works.<sup>38</sup> Pliny states that “The Domus Aurea was the prison of his art, and for that reason his other works of art do not particularly survive” (*carcer eius artis domus aurea fuit, et ideo non extant exempla alia magnopere*, Plin. *HN*. 35.120). His painting style was considered to be florid, meaning he used colors such as cinnabar red, azur, dark red, green, indigo, and purple.<sup>39</sup> He was a master in the use of color, known for his contrasting red and blue works of art, and he created new and magnificent pieces of decor to go with the innovative architecture and light schemes. He followed Nero’s wishes to have grandeur and luxury within the palace, and this went well with the new Golden Age of art that

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<sup>35</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 7-10.

<sup>36</sup> See also Suet. *Ner.* 39.2: “Rome is now a single house, move to Veii, citizens, if this house does not also occupy Veii (*Roma domus fiet: Veios migrate, Quirites, si non et Veios occupat ista domus*).

<sup>37</sup> Champlin, “God and Man in the Golden House,” 340.

<sup>38</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 30.

<sup>39</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 31-32.

was coming about at this time.<sup>40</sup> A new artistic style was created through the Domus Aurea, something that moved away from the restraint shown in the artwork of Augustus's reign, which distinguishes them.<sup>41</sup> This new art form was called "grotesque," named after the caves in the ground which dropped down into the palace's buried rooms and were responsible for the initial discovery of the Domus Aurea in the 15th century.<sup>42</sup> Nero's palace would have a profound impact on the art of the Renaissance and even the artistic design of the Vatican.<sup>43</sup>

Examples of Nero's distinct art style cover the surfaces of the Domus Aurea. His grotesque art has "figurative elements tapering into vegetation or ornament to produce chimeric creatures that hover between the real and the imaginary, the physical and the insubstantial, the symbolic and the inane."<sup>44</sup> This art form was used in tandem with the play on light to create dazzling works of art across the palace. The Golden Vault is another example of his art style, and this room is considered by some to be a possible throne room, as it was one of the most lavishly decorated rooms within the complex.<sup>45</sup> Because it is named the "Golden" Vault, the presence of gold would have been one of its main characteristics, and gold is a color that is associated with Apollo and the sun.

Another room was the nymphaeum of Ulysses and Polyphemus, which also relied on light to create shining displays for the viewer. Light would have reflected off of the water and onto the walls and surrounding areas. The sunlight would have come in from the peristyle

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<sup>40</sup> Iacopi, *Domus Aurea*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Iacopi, *Domus Aurea*, 49.

<sup>42</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 47. The latin word for cave is *grotto*, hence grotesque.

<sup>43</sup> This is ironic because of Nero's reputation as being the Antichrist in the Medieval period.

<sup>44</sup> Caroline Vout, "Art and the Decadent City," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Nero*, ed. Shadi Bartsch, Kirk Freudenburg, and Cedric Littlewood (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 186.

<sup>45</sup> Iacopi, *Domus Aurea*, 14.

outside and flooded the corridor, which perhaps remained unroofed to let in as much light as possible.<sup>46</sup> This nymphaeum illustrates that it was not just artwork that could help symbolize Apollo and the sun, but also water displays and fountains.

Nero stole art from around the Mediterranean to decorate his palace, including from Delphi, one of the main sanctuaries of Apollo. He reportedly stole over 500 statues from Delphi, taking them from Apollo's sanctuary and bringing the god back with him to Rome. Greece was a popular location for his theft, and even though he was a philhellene, it did not stop him from stealing a variety of art from Greece without remorse.<sup>47</sup> Discussing famous works of art, Pliny claims that "All the most brilliant works now are in the city...having been brought together to Rome by the violence of Nero and arranged in the drawing room of the Domus Aurea" (*clarissima quaeque in urbe iam sunt...violentia Neronis in urbem convecta et in sellariis domus aureae disposita*, *HN*. 34.84) illustrating that while Nero may have felt justified in taking any art he wanted, others did not hold the same opinion on his theft. He had a variety of famous statues inside the Domus Aurea, including the Laocoön group and the Dying Galatian. Once Nero even commissioned a portrait of himself that was 120 feet tall on canvas, and this was something unheard of during this period. The portrait hung in the Maiani gardens, but burned up when it was struck by lightning.<sup>48</sup> But, this portrait and its subsequent destruction was only a precursor to the greatest piece of art that Nero would commission, the Colossus.

While nothing but the base survives of the Colossus today, there are various ancient sources that attest to its existence.<sup>49</sup> The statue fits in well with the existing solar imagery

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<sup>46</sup> Segala and Sciortino, *Domus Aurea*, 59.

<sup>47</sup> Paus. 10.27.3-5.

<sup>48</sup> Plin. *HN*. 35.51.

<sup>49</sup> Fred Albertson, "Zenodorus's 'Colossus of Nero,'" *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 46 (2001): 95.



surrounding Nero, as the Colossus was an immense statue of Nero with the features of Helios, the god of the sun.<sup>50</sup> A statue around 120 feet in height including the base, it was made entirely of bronze, and featured Nero, with a radiate crown, holding a rudder in one hand and a globe in the other, which were common solar attributes.<sup>51</sup> While there is debate over whether it was a statue of Nero with the attributes of Helios or vice versa, having Nero take on the attributes of a god fits the best with his propaganda. He equates himself with being a new Apollo, so it would make sense for him to give himself the features of the god. Since the statue would have taken a long time to make because of the difficulty in making bronze statues of that size, the original could have been representative of Nero but when Pliny wrote about it, it could have been re-dedicated to Sol after Nero's death.<sup>52</sup> Pliny describes the statue as being "he constructed a colossus, designed as a likeness of that emperor, 106.5 feet high, which having been dedicated to the veneration of the Sun after the condemnation of the wicked deeds of that emperor, we were awed in his office not only by the impressive model made out of clay but the remarkable likeness..." (*destinatum illius principis simulacro colossus fecit cuius pedum in longitudinem, qui dicatus Soli venerationi est damnatis sceleribus illius principis. mirabamur in officina non modo ex argilla similitudinem insignem...* Plin. HN. 34.45-46). Emperor Titus changed the features on the statue to be just of Sol during his reign, but Nero's legacy lived on through the statue, since as it stood next to the Flavian Amphitheatre, the building became known as the Colosseum.

The size of the statue is also important in that statues this large were reserved for the gods. There were other "colossoi" in Rome at the time of previous Julio-Claudians, but they were typically around two or three times bigger than real life and were usually marble, not 100

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<sup>50</sup> Albertson, "Zenodorus's 'Colossus of Nero,'" 96-97.

<sup>51</sup> Albertson, "Zenodorus's 'Colossus of Nero,'" 111.

<sup>52</sup> Albertson, "Zenodorus's 'Colossus of Nero,'" 98.

feet tall and bronze.<sup>53</sup> This is another way that Nero was equating himself with the gods, and more specifically the god of the sun. Regarding the use of the equinox and the manipulation of light, this was also a characteristic of the Colossus. On days close to the equinoxes, when one looked at the Colossus from the Esquiline Wing of the Domus Aurea, the head of the statue would have been illuminated by the rising sun.<sup>54</sup> Overall there was an abundance of different solar imagery used with the Colossus, and all of it served as propaganda to help equate Nero with Apollo and the sun.

Thus, through the architecture and artwork of the Domus Aurea, Nero was able to connect himself with the god Apollo. The widespread use of gold, precious metals and gemstones, and marble not only made the palace luxurious, but it allowed the sunlight to reflect off of the buildings and shine from sunrise to sunset. Seeing the Domus Aurea from anywhere within Rome, there would be no doubt that this was the palace of the sun. While Augustus also channelled Apollo in some of his imperial building projects and art, like the Temple to Apollo Palatinus, it was never on the scale of the revolutionary architecture Nero would produce during his reign. The architectural innovations were designed to illustrate Nero's control over nature itself, which is something that Louis XIV also took on when constructing Versailles. Nero's use of Roman concrete to build immense structures that reflected sunlight across the Roman landscape and his innovation in having the Octagonal Room built inside the palace to illuminate specific areas at certain parts of the day demonstrate how Nero was able to control the use of the sun.

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<sup>53</sup> Albertson, "Zenodorus's 'Colossus of Nero,'" 109.

<sup>54</sup> Iacopi, *Domus Aurea*, 15.

The Château de Versailles was not always the grand palace that it is today. It originally started off as a small hunting lodge belonging to Louis XIII. From this humble beginning the palace would soon change during the reign of Louis XIV to become a sprawling palace and garden complex that would become a model for royal palaces across the world. Louis XIV considered himself to be like a Roman emperor, and he was going to make France, especially Versailles, his new Rome.<sup>55</sup> This dream seemed to have come true for him, as the Bishop de Fréjus in a visit to Versailles said it was “even greater and more beautiful than Rome.”<sup>56</sup> Louis XIV’s dominance over nature in creating the site and his iconography of the sun all over the palace illustrate that this was the chateau of the *Roi Soleil*.

Apollo was the god that Louis XIV chose to associate himself with, a god representing order and harmony, rationalization, civilization, and culture within Versailles.<sup>57</sup> In 1662 Louis XIV chose “the sun as his personal emblem, giver of life and center of the universe,” and this focus on being the center of the universe would come into play concerning the design of the interior of the chateau.<sup>58</sup> Not only did images of the sun appear at Versailles once he moved his court there, but these symbols also showed up at his royal palaces across France, including the Louvre in Paris which was the main palace at the beginning of his reign.<sup>59</sup> At one point early on in his reign the Louvre was even compared to the Domus Aurea because of its extravagance.<sup>60</sup> But, once Louis XIV permanently resided at Versailles, André Félibien, a court historian of Louis XIV, described it by saying “there is nothing in this divine residence which does not

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<sup>55</sup> Ian Thompson, *The Sun King’s Garden: Louis XIV, Andre Le Notre and the Creation of the Gardens of Versailles* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2006), 121.

<sup>56</sup> Colin Jones, *Versailles* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 31.

<sup>57</sup> Thompson, *The Sun King’s Garden*, 51.

<sup>58</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 144.

revolve around this divinity,” showing that while the Louvre compares to the Domus Aurea because of its grandeur, it was Versailles which was similar to Nero’s palace because of its strong connection to Apollo.<sup>61</sup>

Versailles became a “gilded cage” for the nobility once Louis XIV transferred the entire government there on May 5, 1682.<sup>62</sup> Living within the palace complex with him, they were constantly surrounded by propaganda displaying the glory of the king and his power, and this included a multitude of references to Apollo and the sun. Here he was able to keep his eye on them and make sure he kept absolute power, to prevent something like the Fronde from happening again. The Fronde was an event which occurred very early on in Louis’s reign, and was a rebellion of the upper classes and Parlement in Paris against the monarchy, mainly because of financial issues. Moving the court to Versailles he made sure he could keep the nobility in one place, and show his dominance at the same time. In fact, the entire site of Versailles displayed his dominance over nature, as the site was situated on top of a marsh and had to be meticulously designed in order for the palace to function and for his magnificent water displays to work. The Duc de Saint Simon, a noble who stayed in the court of Louis XIV, even complained about it in his memoirs.<sup>63</sup>

The palace itself kept the original “cour de marbre” building of Louis XIII at the center and only extended outward from there.<sup>64</sup> Using the cour de marbre as the center of the entire palatial complex is similar to Nero incorporating some of the remains of the Domus Transitoria into the Domus Aurea. The primary creators of the chateau and the gardens were Charles Le

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<sup>61</sup> André Félibien, *Description Sommaire du Château de Versailles* (Paris: Chez Guillaume Desprez, 1674), 11-12.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 33.

<sup>63</sup> Duc de Saint-Simon, *Mémoires*, ed. Yves Coirault, vol. V (Paris, 1983-1938), V:532.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 34-35.

Brun, François Mansart, Louis Le Vau, and André Le Notre, with some supervision by Jean-Baptiste Colbert who was the First Minister of State under Louis XIV. The patronage displayed through them is comparable to that of Augustus and Maecenas, but like the Domus Aurea their creations at Versailles went above and beyond anything Augustus built during his reign, and their innovation and grandeur more matched Nero. They provided skilled French artists a place to showcase their works, and together with Louis XIV created different Academies for the arts to further the patronage of these skill sets.<sup>65</sup>

Apollo featured heavily in a majority of the works of art and decorations covering the palace, including the floors, walls, and ceilings to the gates, fences, and doors covering the property.<sup>66</sup> One of the main rooms within the chateau is called the Apollo Drawing Room, and the rooms surrounding it are named after the other planets in the solar system, since “the sun is the king’s device and since the poets conflate the sun with Apollo.”<sup>67</sup> It was considered to be one of the most luxurious rooms within the chateau, along with the Mercury Drawing Room. The Apollo Drawing Room was where the throne was located, made from silver and around eight feet tall, but it was melted down in 1689 and later replaced by Louis XV.<sup>68</sup> A comparison can be made here with the Octagonal Room of the Domus Aurea, where Nero’s throne may have been located and which also had a solar theme surrounded by other planets with his rotating sky. At Versailles, this room was used for formal audiences with the king, and on the ceiling Charles

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<sup>65</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 84.

<sup>66</sup> Thompson, *The Sun King’s Garden*, 51.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 27.

<sup>68</sup> Béatrix Saule and Mathieu da Vinha, *Versailles: the Château, the Gardens, the Trianons* (Paris: Éditions Artlys, 2013), 25-26.

de la Fosse created a large painting of Apollo, titled *Apollon on his chariot drawn by four horses and accompanied by the Seasons*.<sup>69</sup>

Another important aspect of Versailles that utilized Apollo was the Escalier des Ambassadeurs, constructed from 1674-1679 by François d'Orbay and decorated by Charles le Brun, the First Painter of the King. It featured zenithal lighting, and polychrome marble and gold as the main materials, very similar to what Nero used within the Domus Aurea. On the vault above the staircase was a representation of Apollo and the Nine Muses, and the artwork was directly overtop the bust of Louis XIV which was in the middle landing of the staircases.<sup>70</sup> After its completion it was described in *Le Mercure Galante* by Claude Nivelon as the most beautiful place on earth.<sup>71</sup> There was reportedly an identical staircase in the opposite wing of the palace, where there was a dome in the ceiling that looked like an open sky. While these staircases no longer exist, this dome could be similar to the oculus found in the Esquiline Wing of the Domus Aurea. In 1675 an official print of the decoration of the staircase, including the painting of Apollo with his Muses, was published and circulated, ensuring that people would be aware of this piece of propaganda and their *tour de force*.<sup>72</sup>

One of the most important pieces of propaganda in the interior of the palace was the Grande Galerie, or the Hall of Mirrors. In 1683 Pierre Michon Bourdelot described Versailles and the Hall of Mirrors as “nothing can be more beautiful in the world, more magnificent or more surprising...imagine the brilliance of 100,000 candles...I thought that everything was

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<sup>69</sup> Saule and Vinha, *Versailles*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Alexandre Maral, “Versailles,” in *Versailles Disparu de Louis XIV*, ed. Alexandre Maral, Sophie Mouquin, Matthieu Lett, Mathieu de Vinha, Vivien Richard, Mathilde Béjanin, and Hubert Naudeix (Verona: Éditions Honoré Clair, 2019), 22.

<sup>71</sup> Claude Nivelon, *Mercurie Galant*, vol. 12 (September 1680, second partie), 129-142.

<sup>72</sup> Wolf Burchard, *The Sovereign Artist: Charles le Brun and the Image of Louis XIV* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2016), 204.

ablaze...furnishings of gold and silver still had their special radiance...all of the decorations there were rich and sumptuous.”<sup>73</sup> The use of lighting seems to be a main part of his amazement, as thousands of candles would glow on the gold decorations covering the room, so much so that it looked as if it was on fire. Louis XIV was following in Nero’s footsteps and used lighting as a way to symbolize the sun and to connect himself to Apollo.

The art inside the Hall of Mirrors contains a collection of antique statues. Along with some statues of Apollo placed in prominent locations, this also included busts of Roman emperors sculpted from porphyry marble and gilded bronze by François Girardon. Also included in this set found in the Hall of Mirrors is a bust of Emperor Nero.<sup>74</sup> The busts of the Twelve Caesars represented glory, strength, and renewed antiquity.<sup>75</sup> Over time the statues were moved around or removed completely, but by looking at some incomplete inventory lists, three of the busts can be attested to have stayed in the Galerie, and these were Claudius, Augustus, and Titus, but Nero may be able to be added to this group as his bust’s original pedestal remained.<sup>76</sup> It is important to note that Augustus’s statue had been in the Galerie since its creation, as Louis XIV was heavily compared to Augustus and his reign. But, what is more interesting is that there was a bust of Nero, and that it remained a relatively long time in the Galerie compared to some of the other emperors’ busts which were moved to other rooms. This bust shows that Louis XIV was aware that Emperor Nero existed, and was probably also aware of the reputation he had. Louis

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<sup>73</sup> Cited in Pierre de Nolhac, *Versailles Résidence de Louis XIV* (Paris: Louis Conard, 1925), 235-236. “rien ne peut être plus beau dans le monde, plus magnifique ni plus surprenant...Figurez-vous quel est l’éclat de cent mille bougies...Je crus que tout était embrasé...Les ameublements d’or et d’argent avaient encore leur éclat particulier...Toutes les décorations y étaient riches et somptueuses”

<sup>74</sup> Alexandre Maral, “La Grande Galerie et l’Antique. La Place de la Sculpture,” *Versalia* 16 (2013): 134-135.

<sup>75</sup> Maral, “La Grande Galerie,” 140.

<sup>76</sup> Maral, “La Grande Galerie,” 136-137.

XIV and Nero are strikingly similar, such as in comparing themselves to Apollo, and so perhaps Louis XIV recognized that and kept Nero's bust in the Galerie along with Augustus's to strengthen his connection to other rulers who also claimed a relation to Apollo.

The Hall of Mirrors is also important because it provides a view of the most important pieces of propaganda in the gardens. Looking out from the Galerie, one can look down the Grande Allée to the Fountain of Latona, Apollo's mother, and also down the Grand Canal to the Fountain of Apollo.<sup>77</sup> Both of these fountains symbolize Apollo, and are some of the most famous sculptural pieces in the entire chateau. Another similarity between Nero and Louis XIV was the Grand Canal and Nero's Stagnum Neronis, the artificial lake he built in the Domus Aurea. The Grand Canal was deep enough and wide enough for a variety of different ships to be in it, including gondolas, English yachts, Dutch barges, and replica French battleships.<sup>78</sup> Nero held miniature naval battles on his artificial lake, so their sizes would have been similar for these types of ships to fit in both bodies of water.

The gardens of Versailles in some ways can be considered even more important than the chateau itself, as they hold some of Louis XIV's most crucial pieces of propaganda relating to Apollo. The gardens are also one of the first projects that Louis XIV started working on, and over the years he became obsessed with adding certain features like the multitude of fountains to the landscape. The gardens are designed overall to illustrate Louis XIV's control over nature, like the sun's control over the earth, through his innovation. Versailles did not have the most suitable land to do this, mainly being marshland, but Louis XIV and his artists like Le Notre went to great lengths to make it happen. For example, the source of water became a large

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<sup>77</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 49.

<sup>78</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 45.



problem, as Louis XIV added hundreds upon hundreds of fountains to the gardens, and his obsession with these fountains went beyond simple aesthetics. Clean water was a luxury to most of France, and for Louis XIV to use so much of it to run his fountain displays for his own pleasure shows his power as King and mastery over nature.<sup>79</sup>

The fountains mixed with sculptures, both ancient and modern, created a museum of sorts throughout the gardens, and Apollo was a prominent feature. These sculptures were often parts of the designs of the fountains themselves. The Orangerie and the Menagerie located within the gardens offer another similarity to the Domus Aurea and its sprawling landscape. Louis XIV brought plants and animals from all over the world to grow and live in his gardens.<sup>80</sup> This is similar to how Nero brought in exotic animals and plants from around the globe to populate the villa-like lands surrounding the main complex of the Domus Aurea. In 1686 the Orangerie was renovated by Mansart to replace La Vau's earlier design. There were fruits from all over the world brought to Versailles, and it became the largest collection of orange trees in Europe. The Menagerie included animals such as ostriches, elephants, camels, lions, flamingos and gazelles, and through these collections "nature seemed to genuflect to the Bourbon will."<sup>81</sup> Within the gardens there are four main statue groups that demonstrate his focus on Apollo as the main piece of his symbolism and power.

The Grotto of Tethys and *Apollo Served by the Nymphs* are considered to be a masterpiece of art and the set is one of the main pieces of propaganda featuring Apollo in the gardens. Sculpted by François Girardon, it illustrates Apollo being tended to by nymphs after pulling the sun across the sky in his chariot. He is surrounded by nymphs, Tethys not present

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<sup>79</sup> Thompson, *The Sun King's Garden*, 230.

<sup>80</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 50.

<sup>81</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 50.

among them, but instead Doris, Chloe, Lesbia, Drax, and Delia.<sup>82</sup> Apollo is shown in his greatness and his majesty in his appearance, represented like usual as young and the epitome of youth, as the sun is born again every day when it rises, and his hair reflects the light radiating from him.<sup>83</sup> There are two possible models that Girardon could have used as inspiration, one being the Apollo Belvedere from antiquity and the other being *Apollo at rest on Mount Parnassus* from the Ludovisi collection.<sup>84</sup> The Apollo statue in the Grotto of Tethys seems to have a hairstyle that is a combination of these two possible inspirations, but in all of them he has the same youthful, beautiful appearance. There is also a lyre laying at his feet in this statue group, one of his sacred symbols, and this resembles *Apollo at rest on Mount Parnassus* as Apollo is holding a lyre rather than Apollo Belvedere which features a quiver, the lyre referencing Apollo Citharoedus.

The statue group of *Apollo Served by the Nymphs* was featured inside of a cave structure built in the gardens, and also had a gate that was heavily decorated in Apollonian imagery as well. Above the central gate, a sun made from gold was featured shining light over the rest of the other gates, representing the sun radiating all over the world as there were also depictions of the continents and poles.<sup>85</sup> The sun's power is all encompassing and powerful, just like Louis XIV's. Louis XIV wanted his creations, and through this his propaganda, to be widespread, and so a newspaper from his reign, *Le Mercure Galant*, published information about the appearance of the Grotto in April 1672. It describes a large sun being tended to and crowned by nymphs, equating Apollo directly with the Sun here. It also mentions the two niches on either side of the

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<sup>82</sup> Alexandre Maral, *Apollon Servi par les Nymphes: Le Chef-d'Oeuvre des Jardins de Versailles* (Saint-Just-la-Pendue: Éditions Artlys, 2017), 29.

<sup>83</sup> Maral, *Apollon Servi par les Nymphes*, 42.

<sup>84</sup> Maral, *Apollon Servi par les Nymphes*, 44.

<sup>85</sup> Maral, *Apollon Servi par les Nymphes*, 17.

main statue group of Apollo, where Apollo's four horses of the Sun throw fire into the air and try to escape, while Tritons try to hold them back.<sup>86</sup> The inevitable escape of the horses who drive the sun chariot also display the unconstrained power of the sun, and therefore Louis XIV who equates himself with Apollo.

The first definite reference to the Grotto is from Francesco Michieli, ambassador to the Republic of Venice, in 1671. On his visit to Versailles Louis XIV gave him a tour of his gardens, and did not leave out the main attraction. Michieli described it as an under-sea grotto, and the perfection of the ten statues representing Apollo and the nymphs inside.<sup>87</sup> There are not actually ten statues within the grotto, but his statement still testifies to *Apollo Served by the Nymphs* being in the Grotto at this time. Félibien also gives a further description, saying that the environment gives an aesthetic experience and there is an infinite number of extraordinary things. The only light that comes through is from the doors, and there is a pleasant breeze, and this makes the grotto soft and pleasant, so people want to stay there.<sup>88</sup> Since most of the decorations surrounding the doors of the Grotto were made of gold, the light coming inside would have probably reflected off of this and added to the radiance of the sun. Unfortunately in 1684 the Grotto was destroyed because of construction of the Northern Wing of the chateau, but *Apollo Served by the Nymphs* was considered a masterpiece and was moved to a different part of the gardens because of its importance as propaganda to Louis XIV. It was taken to the Grove of

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<sup>86</sup> Alexandre Maral, "La Grotte de Téthys," in *Versailles Disparu de Louis XIV*, ed. Alexandre Maral, Sophie Mouquin, Matthieu Lett, Mathieu de Vinha, Vivien Richard, Mathilde Béjanin, and Hubert Naudeix (Verona: Éditions Honoré Clair, 2019), 54.

<sup>87</sup> Maral, *Apollon Servi par les Nymphes*, 33-34.

<sup>88</sup> Maral, "La Grotte de Téthys," 54.

Fame, otherwise known as the Domes, and then took on the name “Grove of the Baths of Apollo.”<sup>89</sup>

Another integral piece of Louis XIV’s propaganda is the Apollo Fountain, which depicts the opposite of *Apollo Served by the Nymphs*. Here Apollo is on his sun chariot rising out from the water, which marks the rising of the sun, different from the Grotto which depicted Apollo at rest after driving his sun chariot and the setting of the sun. *Apollon sur son Char*, or *Apollo on his Chariot*, was sculpted by Jean-Baptiste Tuby and created at the Gobelins in Paris and then transferred to Versailles in 1670.<sup>90</sup> It features Apollo rising out of the water, referencing the sea, along with his four horses and encircled by four tritons and four sea monsters, and the statues, unlike *Apollo Served by the Nymphs*, are made entirely from gold.<sup>91</sup> The effect of the sunlight shining off of this fountain would be blinding during the day, as it would shine off of both the water and the gold statues. The water spouting from it would only bring more attention to Apollo, especially as the Apollo Fountain is located straight down the Grand Allée and is at the top of the Grand Canal. This fountain and the other Apollo-related fountains would have a similar effect to the nympheums located within the Domus Aurea, as they both would have created a dazzling effect because of their exposure to sunlight. Apollo represents the sunrise, and the universe is for the glory of Louis XIV, as this sculpture group captures his triumph, and his domination over the world as he leaves on his sun chariot.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Maral, “La Grotte de Téthys,” 55.

<sup>90</sup> Mathieu da Vinha and Raphaël Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie* (Paris: Laffont, 2015), 128.

<sup>91</sup> Vinha and Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie*, 128.

<sup>92</sup> Vinha and Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie*, 128.

In creating *Apollo on his Chariot* Tuby was heavily influenced by Roman art, and was especially inspired by the Borghese in Rome.<sup>93</sup> Tuby was Italian in origin, and he blends the baroque style with the neoclassical style prominent in Louis XIV's reign. In the 1680s twelve statues were added to the base of the fountain featuring the story of Orpheus, featured prominently on high pedestals. From this came the presentation of other antique works around the fountain, making it its own sort of outdoor museum collection and showing the grandeur of Louis XIV. Modern art pieces were also added, and marble statues featuring the myths from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* were placed in the parterres around the Apollo Fountain. They represent the natural order of the world, and also became a part of the solar imagery associated with the Apollo Fountain and the gardens.<sup>94</sup> The artwork Nero chose for the gilded frescoes inside the Domus Aurea were also heavily influenced by mythical scenes in addition to his solar imagery.

The Fountain of Latona, named for the mother of Apollo and Artemis, also represents Apollo within the gardens of Versailles. Located right on the other side of the water garden that the chateau's terrace looks out on, it is directly aligned with the Apollo Fountain further down the lawn. The statue group was built in 1668, and was made to glorify the mother of the sun god, Latona, and an occurrence that happened in Apollo's youth.<sup>95</sup> It was created by two brothers, Gaspard and Balthasar Marsy, with gilded lead and marble statues. This fountain also has allusions to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* like the Apollo Fountain. The sculptures show the point in time where in her rage from being denied water from the river, Latona turns the local villagers of Lycia into frogs and lizards. At the very top of the tiered fountain are marble statues of Latona, who is looking up to the sky and cursing the villagers, holding a young Apollo and Artemis. The

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<sup>93</sup> Vinha and Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie*, 128.

<sup>94</sup> Vinha and Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie*, 129.

<sup>95</sup> Maral "Versailles," 15.

materials provide a contrast with the rest of the sculptures which are gilded lead. There are also statues of six peasants undergoing their metamorphosis into frogs, with the water from the fountain spouting out of their open mouths, along with a multitude of gold frogs encircling the different tiers which also emit water. Before it was remodelled between 1687-1689 by Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Latona was facing the palace and the Hall of Mirrors, but afterwards she was turned to face the Grand Canal.<sup>96</sup> The Latona Fountain is an example of Latona's, and through her Apollo's, victory over evil forces, which is a common theme throughout Louis XIV's propaganda because of the Fronde.

The Dragon Fountain is another example of propaganda referring to the defeat of the Fronde. Unlike the other Apollo-themed fountains within the gardens, the Dragon Fountain is located to the far-right of the other fountains on the edge of the gardens, and right in front of the Neptune Fountain. It is found on plans of the gardens dating to 1663, and was only named the Dragon Fountain in 1667.<sup>97</sup> While there is no statue of Apollo here, the entire fountain is a reference to Apollo slaying the serpent Python, and he is referenced only through the Cupids riding swans and shooting arrows.<sup>98</sup> The statues are gilded lead, and the dragon represents Python in agony, having been killed by Apollo. The pain is represented through the water of the fountain, as the jets shoot out from the dragon's open mouth toward the sky, and the water reaches a height of twenty seven meters, the highest central fountain jet in the gardens.<sup>99</sup> While the Fronde is a popular interpretation of the Dragon Fountain, there are also other theories of

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<sup>96</sup> Château de Versailles, "Latona's Fountain," The Fountains, Château de Versailles, accessed November 17, 2020, <http://en.chateauversailles.fr/discover/estate/gardens/fountains#latonas-fountain>.

<sup>97</sup> Vinha and Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie*, 132.

<sup>98</sup> Maral, *Apollon Servi par les Nymphes*, 40.

<sup>99</sup> Vinha and Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie*, 132.

what it could also represent. Some believe it could represent the defeat of Protestant heresy, since Louis XIV was a devout Catholic monarch. But either way the Dragon Fountain glorifies Apollo and his victory and power, and through Apollo glorifies Louis XIV, and is the earliest reference in the gardens to the use of the image of Apollo.<sup>100</sup> This is interesting because the Fronde was one of the earliest events of Louis XIV's reign, while his mother Anne of Austria was still his regent, and so it makes sense that this would be the first event he would want to commemorate in his gardens. As will be discussed below, Louis XIV also went on to perform in plays depicting this event, playing Apollo and slaying Python.

Overall, these four different fountains represent the importance of Apollo in Louis XIV's architecture and his control over nature. Apollo himself controls nature as the sun, and like him Louis XIV controls France and his empire. The use of these fountains is similar to how Nero decorated the Domus Aurea. While there are no fountains representing Apollo in Nero's palace, or at least none that have survived antiquity, the use of light and the orientation of Louis XIV's works of art mirror that of Nero. Like the facade of the Domus Aurea, the principal perspective that went east to west in the gardens was dedicated to Apollo, so that the sun would rise and set on these fountains.<sup>101</sup> Two of the Apollo statues in the gardens also represented the rising and setting of the sun, so for these fountains to be centered on the east-west axis adds to this solar symbolism. Louis XIV seemed to make his own little world within the gardens, as Charles Perrault comments that the rising sun was at the end of the reflecting pool, the Apollo Fountain, and so Perrault thought it would be a good idea to add the Grotto and Apollo at rest to the other end of the park, so that it would represent Louis XIV, as the sun god, coming down to rest at

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<sup>100</sup> Vinha and Masson, *Versailles: Histoire, Dictionnaire, et Anthologie*, 132.

<sup>101</sup> Maral, "Versailles," 15.

Versailles.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, the gold that gilded many of these sculptures would be blinding during the day, along with the water that would further reflect the sunlight. This could be comparable to the gems and jewels that decorated the walls of the Domus Aurea, and the use of water in the Stagnum Neronis.

The gardens at Versailles in some ways can also be comparable to the architecture of Augustus' reign, particularly the Temple of Apollo Palatinus. So, while much of Louis XIV's propaganda is similar to that of Nero, it is also similar in certain aspects to the propaganda of Augustus' architecture which Nero strived to out-build. Since Nero took influence from Augustus' architecture, and Versailles is also similar to the Domus Aurea in many of its designs, the architecture of Augustus and Louis XIV has more similarities than most other aspects concerning their reigns. Like the Grotto of Tethys and the statues atop the Fountain of Latona, white marble was used for Augustus' Temple of Apollo Palatinus. The temple also featured Apollo's sun chariot on its pediment, which is similar to the Apollo Fountain where Apollo rises out of the water with his chariot to start the day. The cult statue inside the Temple of Apollo Palatinus was Apollo Citharoedus, or Apollo the lyre player, and aspects of this can be seen in the Apollo statue in the Grotto of Tethys which has a lyre placed at Apollo's feet. Gold was also heavily used in Augustus' temple, similar to the fountains lining Louis XIV's gardens and the facade of the chateau itself.

Apollo was a heavily used symbol in the artistic propaganda of Augustus, Nero, and Louis XIV; it was in art and architecture where these three rulers had the most similarities to one another through their use of solar imagery. But, the Temple of Apollo Palatinus was the only temple constructed by Augustus relating to Apollo specifically, and none of Augustus's imperial

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<sup>102</sup> Charles Perrault, *Mémoires de ma Vie* (Paris: Macula, 1993), 208.



building projects match the scale and grandeur of the creations of Nero and Louis XIV such as the Domus Aurea and Versailles. So, while there are similarities between all three building programs, Nero and Louis XIV share the most similarities.

Overall, the Domus Aurea of Nero and Louis XIV's Chateau de Versailles share many similarities through their innovative designs. It was expected of Nero to create something superior to the architecture of previous emperors, and so his innovation came through in his use of Roman concrete and sunlight. Louis XIV also created beautiful works of art and fountains that required new designs and processes for making them work, like supplying water to thousands of pools and fountains throughout his gardens. They displayed a mastery and complete control over nature with their building projects, and this added to their solar imagery as like the sun they controlled nature itself. The Domus Aurea and the gardens at Versailles were situated in such a way that the maximum amount of sunlight would be utilized, hitting the bejeweled facade of the Domus Aurea and the Apollo fountains lining the lawn of Versailles. Everything they designed was thought out and made to add to their own solar imagery, from the decorations on the walls of their palaces or the statues lining their palatial complexes. Nobody could deny that the living embodiment of the sun god lived there.

## Chapter 2

### Apollo & the Arts

The arts are an important aspect of any ruler's propaganda, and the arts and performances during the reigns of Emperor Nero and Louis XIV were closely linked with Apollo. Apollo became especially important in this respect because of his role as the god of music, song, and poetry. Apollo was frequently pictured holding a lyre and wearing a laurel wreath, along with a radiate crown. Both rulers were easily able to adopt this imagery as part of their own propaganda, and through patronage of sporting contests, theatrical performances, poetry and literature, each led his people into a new Golden Age of art. In doing so, Emperor Nero and King Louis XIV both took on aspects of the propaganda and strategy of the Emperor Augustus to try and reproduce his success with using Apollo as his main symbol of power. But both rulers also strayed from what Augustus did in his reign, mainly in that they both participated in performances themselves, which Augustus never did. As a result, they both became subject to fierce criticism. This is especially true of Nero, yet it applies to Louis XIV as well, who in some cases was directly likened to Nero instead of who he actually wanted to be compared to, Augustus. Throughout this chapter, I will be applying a thematic approach to the two rulers' respective uses of theater and literature. I will be shifting back and forth between them, covering their similar actions, addressing how they differ from Augustus, and exploring why they were critiqued, all the while regarding them through the specific lens of their use of Apollo.

Entertainment was an important aspect of the culture of both Ancient Rome and Ancien Régime France. Spectacles were expected to be put on for the people, and while both cultures had differing views on who could perform in and attend certain events, they played an important role in politics. For Louis XIV, the term "spectacle" was any genre of theater or events that had

strong visual aspects to them, and as was the case in Ancient Rome, being able to produce and fund these events was a way to signify your power in society.<sup>103</sup> Nero departed from the norms of his time in that he not only sponsored shows but also personally performed on stage, played the lyre, acted in tragedies and pantomime, and raced chariots.<sup>104</sup> In a similar fashion, Louis XIV performed on stage to audiences and took part in festivals. The two rulers' actions led to thriving literary movements, though they both also received their fair share of critiques that denounced their actions. And while Nero and Louis XIV's artistic careers started differently from one another, many aspects of the arts of Louis XIV's reign became comparable to that of Nero over time.

At the core of the criticisms leveled at Nero was the Roman upper class's assumption that actors were immoral, artificial, and disrupted society.<sup>105</sup> Their profession was supposedly unsavory, and they were thought to have loose morals which the upper-class thought would degrade Rome. Class wise actors suffered *infamia*, which means that if an emperor decided to perform, he was associating himself with the lowest classes in society. And yet, from a young age Nero dreamed of performing and racing chariots himself and would soon go to drastic measures to make it possible. The primary sources that survive from antiquity agree - Nero did not start performing in public until the death of his mother Agrippina in 59 CE. Rumors had it that she murdered the emperor Claudius so that Nero could succeed him, and once he was proclaimed emperor, she wanted the power for herself. Hearing that she was plotting against him and allegedly incited by Seneca, Nero carried out various assassination attempts until finally

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<sup>103</sup> Georgia Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure: Louis XIV & the Politics of Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), xv-xvi.

<sup>104</sup> Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 55.

<sup>105</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 64.

she took her own life.<sup>106</sup> Free from her influence, Nero started associating himself for the first time with Apollo and his attributes to take the stage himself. He called for the famous lyre-player Terpnus to perform for him, and eventually started playing on his own. He took this seriously and took precautions to make sure his voice was always ready, and performances were as the professionals did it.<sup>107</sup>

Now associating himself with Apollo, Nero focused much of his time on performances. In 59 CE he created the Juvenalia festival, to celebrate shaving his beard for the first time. Nero took the stage himself in the clothes of a citharode player, the cithara being closely associated with Apollo Citharoedus.<sup>108</sup> As Tacitus describes it, Nero justified this action by noting that “songs were sacred to Apollo, and it is in fine attire such as this that the extraordinary and foreknowing divinity stands not only in Greek cities, but also in Roman temples” (*enimvero cantus Apollini sacros, talique ornatu adstare non modo Graecis in urbibus, sed Romana apud templa numen praecipuum et praescium, Ann. 14.14*). Introduced at this event were the Augustiani, who were a group of soldiers in the audience who praised Nero, shouting ““O Glorious Caesar! Apollo, Augustus, one like the Pythian. By yourself, o Caesar, nobody prevails over you.”” (ὁ καλὸς Καῖσαρ, ὁ Απόλλων, ὁ Αὔγουστος, εἷς ὡς Πύθιος. μά σε, Καῖσαρ, οὐδεὶς σε νικᾷ, Cass. Dio 62.20.5). Assuming the role of Apollo Citharoedus thus justified Nero’s artistic aspirations by associating him with an exalted deity rather than with lowly actors. In fact, this action conferred a kind of divine status on the ruler himself. After 59 CE coins were also minted depicting Nero as Apollo. One example is a bronze as from 62-68 CE, which on the obverse

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<sup>106</sup> Cass. Dio, 62.13.5.

<sup>107</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 20.1.

<sup>108</sup> The cithara is a version of the lyre, which was a stringed musical instrument, and a sacred symbol of Apollo. Nero is often depicted as dressing like a citharode and playing the lyre in his performances.

depicts radiate Nero as Apollo, and on the reverse Apollo Citharoedus, laureate, holding a lyre.<sup>109</sup> Coins were an important part of propaganda for an emperor as they reached across the entire empire, and Nero's use of this medium would have communicated his point to much wider audiences than even his performances themselves.

One large difference between the beginning of the acting careers of Louis XIV and Nero was that it was not as frowned upon for Louis XIV to perform as it was for Nero. Nero felt that he had to escape the authority of his mother before he gathered the courage to start participating in the arts. Meanwhile, Louis XIV was performing while his mother was still his regent. In fact, French nobles were eager to participate in performances, with many of them being the composers or actors themselves. Between 1651 and 1659 Louis XIV appeared in nine ballets de cour, and it was not unusual for the king to perform, as his father Louis XIII had also done so regularly before him.<sup>110</sup>

Louis XIV did not face the same challenges toward performance as Nero did, and instead started performing publicly from a very young age. As the Fronde, a civil war between the aristocracy and the monarchy in Paris from 1648-1653, threatened the regency of Anne of Austria, a young Louis XIV, only thirteen years old, took to the stage in front of the nobility in the *Ballet des Fêtes de Bacchus*. The Fronde heavily influenced the characters and performances he acted, as this civil war in Paris at the beginning of his reign would impact the rest of his life and his propaganda relating to his absolute power and authority. Because of this event he would go on to portray divine right absolutism and his connection to Apollo in order to project his strength, glory, and his right to rule as monarch. He was considered to be a virtuoso dancer even

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<sup>109</sup> Bronze As of Nero, RIC I Nero 211, ANS 1967.153.119, AD 62-AD 68.

<sup>110</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 45.

at a young age, playing the roles of a Muse, a diviner, a bacchante, and a Titan, and while he was not the starring role of the performance, he would later in life take center stage.<sup>111</sup> The popular genre for most of his reign was the cour ballet, a style very similar to the ancient pantomime that Nero would take up later on in his reign.<sup>112</sup> This style was the most reflective of court identity as it brought both the king and the best noble dancers together, and it also served as a distraction to the nobility from the politics happening at the time, like the Fronde, their recent civil war.<sup>113</sup>

Festivals and spectacles were important for each ruler to give to their people, and neither disappointed. After creating the Juvenalia in 59 CE, Nero went on to establish the Neronia that debuted in 60 CE, which was a competition in music and athletics and was styled after the Greeks.<sup>114</sup> Here he is stated to have been awarded the prize for lyre playing and then laid the prize at the feet of a statue of Augustus, who famously associated himself with Apollo before him. Lucan, a famous writer from this time, is said to have published the first book of his *Pharsalia* at this festival, where he praises and identifies Nero with Apollo.<sup>115</sup> At the second Neronia festival in 64 CE, Nero performed to the Roman public for the first time (he had previously restricted himself to private venues) and chose the myth of Niobe. This was a powerful message for his first appearance to the Roman people as a performer. Niobe had twelve children, and boasted that she was better than Leto, who only bore the twins Apollo and Artemis. Because of this insult to their mother, Artemis and Apollo shot down all of her children with their arrows, and Niobe turned to stone from her grief. By singing the sad tale of Niobe,

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<sup>111</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 1-5.

<sup>112</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 78.

<sup>113</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 5, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 12.3.

<sup>115</sup> Jocelyn Toynbee, "Nero Artifex: the Apocolocyntosis Reconsidered," *CQ* 36.3/4 (1942): 90.

Nero was demonstrating the fearsome power of Apollo, whom he associated with himself.<sup>116</sup> In other games, Nero took to racing chariots, as he had dreamed of doing since he was a young boy. He claimed that the kings of early Rome had horse-racing as a pastime, which also honored the gods. Apollo is connected to charioteering because every day he drives his sun-chariot across the sky, and Nero used this to justify his actions.<sup>117</sup> In 67 CE he also infamously pushed back the Olympic Games so he could perform. Despite falling off his chariot during a race, he still won first place.<sup>118</sup> Nero's obsession with performing continued to grow, and this led to problems later on as the upper classes became more and more incensed at his actions.

Louis XIV also created similar spectacles for the court and nobility in Paris and at Versailles, which were positively received by his guests. The most famous example is that of 1664 and the *Plaisirs de l'Île enchantée*. It was three days of festivities at Versailles, with performances of new theater pieces and music by Jean-Baptiste Lully, the leading composer of the time, jousting in tournaments, banquets, dancing, and fireworks.<sup>119</sup> Similar to Nero and his chariot-racing, Louis XIV here participated in the tournament jousting competitions, and he won both times, showing his skill with riding horses.<sup>120</sup> There was then a Latin panegyric poem written about his great equestrian skills, and similar praise poetry soon became a popular style of writing just as it had been in antiquity.<sup>121</sup> In 1662 Louis staged another public festival, considered to be one of the major spectacles of his entire seventy two year long reign. A carousel was set up next to the Tuileries, which was a competition for horsemen that had, since

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<sup>116</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 116.

<sup>117</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 65.

<sup>118</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 24.2.

<sup>119</sup> Jones, *Versailles*, 20.

<sup>120</sup> François Bluche, *Louis XIV* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1990), 182-183.

<sup>121</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 23.

the Middle Ages, become a sort of “equestrian ballet.” Louis XIV appeared on horseback during this event as *Rex Romanorum Imperator* or “Emperor of the Romans”, and the device on his shield was the sun, linking him to the power of Apollo.<sup>122</sup> Through this spectacle Louis XIV using the imagery of Apollo was able to persuade the people that he was a “good horseman, an able jousting, an attentive host, a notable impresario, and a strikingly good producer of plays” according to Bluche.<sup>123</sup>

The roles the two rulers chose to portray had an impact on how they represented themselves to the people and their propaganda. As classical antiquity was a popular theme in Ancien Régime France, Louis XIV frequently enacted scenes from classical mythology featuring gods and heroes, which Nero also chose to perform during his reign. In addition to identifying himself with Apollo Citharoedus, Nero also loved playing the roles of Oedipus, Orestes, and Herakles Gone Mad. Accordingly, Julius Vindex, the Roman governor who started a provincial uprising against Nero at the end of his reign, criticized him by saying “Often I have heard him singing, officiating as a herald, and acting in tragedies. I have seen him enchained, being dragged along, pregnant with a child...he tells all these kinds of mythic tales...” (ἤκουσα αὐτοῦ πολλάκις ἄδοντος, ἤκουσα κηρύττοντος, ἤκουσα τραγωδοῦντος. εἶδον αὐτὸν δεδεμένον, εἶδον συρόμενον, κύοντα δὴ...πάντα ὅσα μυθολογεῖται..., Cass. Dio, 63.12.5). Nero would later on in his reign wear a mask of his own features, showing that he was Orestes, he was Oedipus, he was Herakles, and considering it was rumored that he was responsible for murdering relatives as they did, it certainly fit.<sup>124</sup> He did not hide his crimes, and instead accepted them through the roles he

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<sup>122</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 66.

<sup>123</sup> Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 183.

<sup>124</sup> Cass. Dio, 63.9.5. Nero also wore a mask with the features of his second wife Poppaea Sabina when performing the roles of goddesses and heroines.



played, implying that he should be measured by the standards of the gods, not of mortals. Upon this reading, Agrippina's death was for the greater good, and as Edward Champlin puts it, "Nero's great sacrifice had saved Rome."<sup>125</sup>

The Roman public was accustomed to associating their rulers with mythical figures and tales and saw these performances as a modern commentary on current affairs. Theater depicted real life concerns, and Nero went above and beyond blurring the lines between theatrical performance and real-life affairs. When Nero took to the stage to perform these myths, he was knowingly associating himself with the character he was portraying.<sup>126</sup> Nero was often seen depicted as Orestes, and the myth of Orestes allowed Nero to control the discussion of his guilt. Orestes killed his mother Clytemnestra as revenge for the death of his father Agamemnon, seemingly ordered to do so by Apollo himself. Upon this reading, he was justified in enacting his revenge, and Nero applied this same justification toward the murder of his own mother Agrippina, who had murdered the previous Emperor Claudius not unlike Clytemnestra had murdered Agamemnon. The myth of Oedipus was likewise central to Nero's personal affairs, as there were rumors that Nero and Agrippina committed acts of incest together, just as Oedipus (albeit unknowingly) married his mother and blinded himself in guilt and horror. *Herakles Gone Mad* was a commentary on current affairs because not only did Nero kill his mother, but also his second wife Poppaea Sabina and their unborn child, like Herakles, who in his madness, killed his own family.

Through these myths Nero was able to reframe his own guilt by connecting himself to these mythic heroes, and he was successful in that many started debating how he was similar to

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<sup>125</sup> Edward Champlin, "Nero Reconsidered," *New England Review* 19.2 (1998): 100.

<sup>126</sup> Champlin, "Nero Reconsidered," 100.

these characters. People took to inscribing things like “Orestes, Nero, Alcmeon, all matricides,” throughout Rome, further connecting him with his theatrical portrayals (though perhaps also undercutting him by calling out his murderous tendencies).<sup>127</sup> An example of this debate over his guilt is preserved in Juvenal, who stated that Nero and Orestes were not actually the same in their actions because Orestes was enacting the will of the gods and Apollo, whereas the same did not apply to Nero. Orestes also did not continue to murder other members of his family like Nero did, or prepare poisons and—so jokes the satirist—write epics.<sup>128</sup> It was not the Roman public but Nero who made the murder of his mother more of a mythological tale, and by choosing to favor roles like Orestes, showing his torment, and wearing a mask with his own features, Nero controlled the conversation. He was not claiming innocence but was not accepting guilt either.<sup>129</sup>

Louis XIV likewise played Apollo many times, and also various other mythological figures. In 1653 Louis XIV danced in the *Ballet de la Nuit*, and he reprised this role four more times. Starring as *Le Soleil*, he danced on stage among other male members of the court, and the political symbolism contained within the play itself marked the king’s rise to power as the Fronde came to an end. With Louis XIV embodying the sun, he was the light that fought against the night, or the darkness of the Fronde.<sup>130</sup> Another performance, *le Ballet de Flore*, depicts Louis XIV as the sun, which has triumphed over the winter, which provides another symbol for the end of the Fronde.<sup>131</sup> There are also various plays in which Louis XIV plays Apollo himself,

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<sup>127</sup> Cass. Dio, 62.16.2. This was a play on Nero’s three names, Nero Claudius Caesar.

<sup>128</sup> Juv. 8.215-221.

<sup>129</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 99.

<sup>130</sup> Kirsten Dickhaut, “The King as ‘Maker’ of Theater: *Le ballet de la nuit* and Louis XIV,” in *Theater as Metaphor*, ed. Elena Penskaya and Joachim Küpper (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 119.

<sup>131</sup> Jean Marie Apostolidès, *Le Roi Machine: Spectacle et Politique au temps de Louis XIV* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1981), 115.

and he reenacts the famous battle in which he slays Python.<sup>132</sup> Louis XIV also played other roles, similar to Nero who enjoyed portraying mythological characters, and frequently performed as Alexander the Great, Cyrus of Persia, and the hero Roger.<sup>133</sup> His playing of roles such as a bacchante, a demon, various gods, and furies show his talent in performing, and that he could even handle feminine roles such as a Muse or a nymph. This “highlighted his physical grace and youthful beauty,” and again connects him to Apollo in the sense that Apollo was seen as the epitome of youthful beauty in antiquity.<sup>134</sup> He again reprises his role of Apollo in the ballet *Les Noces de Pélée et de Thétis*, where he descends Mt. Parnassus with the nine Muses, who were played by noble women of his court. The use of high-ranking noblewomen, including Louis XIV’s cousin Henriette d’Angleterre, strongly connects Apollo and Mt. Parnassus, the seat of his power, with Louis XIV’s court and Versailles.<sup>135</sup> By also utilizing Apollo and classical figures in his representation on stage, Louis XIV is similar to Nero in his actions and propaganda.

Both rulers also had a more personal connection with the arts, in that they either wrote their own pieces, or had a large influence on authors at the time and gave their own suggestions. Nero is said to have written his own poetry, and Suetonius describes him as writing eagerly and without any hardship.<sup>136</sup> His poems were praised centuries after his death, and ranged from satires to epic poems, such as the *Troica*, and a possible epic on the history of Rome.<sup>137</sup> Louis XIV, while he wrote a complete memoir for his son, did not write for artistic purposes like Nero

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<sup>132</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 41.

<sup>133</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 68.

<sup>134</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 33-34.

<sup>135</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 35.

<sup>136</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 52.1, Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 69.

<sup>137</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 82.

did, but he did make contributions to various plays and festivals. He chose the theme and was heavily involved in planning many spectacles, like the *Plaisirs de l'Île Échantée*. Molière, a famous playwright from Louis XIV's time, credits Louis XIV for adding a character to *Les fâcheux*, and also credits the king for giving him the idea and plot for *Les amants magnifiques*.<sup>138</sup> Neither had an interest in working with paint or sculpture, but both Nero and Louis XIV were interested in literature and writing their own works.<sup>139</sup> Similarly, Augustus also wrote his own memoir of his life and accomplishments, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*.

Louis XIV and Emperor Nero are more alike, then, than they may first seem. Apollo was central to their propaganda and representation concerning the arts and spectacles. Augustus, who also utilized Apollo in his propaganda, put on many different festivals and games for the Roman people during his life. But, unlike Nero and Louis XIV, he did not go as far as to perform himself, and instead watched as a spectator only. While Nero is equating himself to the new Apollo, Louis XIV does something similar in playing Apollo and the sun to show his dominance and power as King. Apollo is also sometimes said to be the god of peace and order, and this would be important for Louis XIV to project to his people after the end of a rebellion against his power. Of course, using Apollo to portray peace and order is more similar to Augustus's propaganda, but by personifying Apollo on stage Louis would still have been channeling Nero.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 69.

<sup>139</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 52.1.

<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Louis XIV is drawing on Apollo for his artistic patronage, which was important for sovereign power, as over the course of his reign he created numerous academies for the arts that have lasted over three hundred years. This patronage is typically seen as more Augustan in nature, as Louis XIV is seen as emulating Augustus, and his minister Colbert as imitating Maecenas.

The main difference between Louis XIV and Nero is that Nero let the arts consume his life. His main concerns all revolved around his performances and spectacles, and this had a negative impact on his actual performance as an emperor. Accordingly, Louis's similarity to Nero was on occasion used against him. For example, Jean Racine, a famous playwright from the reign of Louis XIV, wrote a tragedy called *Britannicus*, centering around the circumstances surrounding Nero's ascension to the throne at the expense of his half-brother, the true son of Claudius. The most pertinent lines, stemming from a dialogue concerning Nero, were "For every ambition, for singular virtue, he excels at racing a chariot at the quarry, at disputing prizes unworthy of his hands, at giving himself as a spectacle to the Romans."<sup>141</sup> What Racine is implying is that Nero, by performing publicly, was demeaning himself and his position as emperor to the Roman people by making a spectacle of himself. Louis XIV engaged in similar practices, but Voltaire tells us that Racine reformed the monarch, as Louis never performed in public again after seeing the play staged in St. Germain in 1670.<sup>142</sup>

While performing was acceptable for elites in Ancien Régime France, unlike in Ancient Rome, Louis XIV did not want to risk demeaning himself and his absolute authority by seeming too similar to Nero. Nero's infamous reputation concerning the arts followed him long after his death, and since Ancien Régime France was filled with references to Ancient Rome and classical history, Louis XIV would have been aware of what Racine was implying in this dialogue. Affronted at the thought of becoming a spectacle to his own people, a new Nero, he never again performed in public, becoming more like Augustus in this moment by choosing to only be a

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<sup>141</sup> Jean Racine, *Britannicus* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1935), 74. «*Pour toute ambition, pour vertu singulière, Il excelle à conduire un char dans la carrière, à disputer des prix indignes de ses mains, à se donner lui-même en spectacle aux romains.*»

<sup>142</sup> Voltaire, *Siècle de Louis XIV* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot Frères, 1860), 284.

patron instead of a participant like Nero. Yet reminders of his days as a performer remained throughout his reign. The famous portrait of Louis XIV painted by Hyacinthe Rigaud features the older head of the king placed on a younger body, illustrating elegant feet and placing them in a ballet pose, reminiscent of the king's own days as a dancer. By being realistic in his depiction of his face, the king is thus straying once again from the practices of Augustus, who was always depicted as a young man in art.<sup>143</sup>

Louis XIV was successful, to a certain extent, in that many works of literature did indeed portray him as a new Augustus. Yet there was a negative reception as well where Louis XIV's fears came true and some began to portray him as to a "French Nero" in some texts.<sup>144</sup> Louis XIV was aware of Emperor Nero and his reputation, as seen by his reaction to *Britannicus*, and he seemed to have disliked this associated with his reign. This is why even though most of his actions are very similar to Nero's, he continued to appeal to Augustus and his use of Apollo. Concerning literature, both Nero and Louis XIV brought about a new high point, which led to various opinions on their reigns being aired publicly. Their habit of performing in public and their use of Apollo in the arts would play a vital role in the literature people wrote about them and their power.

Take, for example, two of the main authors who wrote praise for Nero's reign: the philosopher and Nero's tutor Seneca, and his nephew Lucan. Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, said to be written right after the death of Claudius in 54 CE, contains a section that praises Nero, comparing him directly with the god Apollo, further cementing his connection to him. Seneca writes that Apollo issues a prophecy predicting a ruler would come who is "similar to me in face

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<sup>143</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 33.

<sup>144</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 136.

and charm, inferior neither in singing nor in voice...Such a Caesar is at hand, such a Nero will Rome now look upon. His shining face blazes with relaxed glory, and his beautiful neck with flowing hair. (*mihi similis vultu similisque decore / nec cantu nec voce minor / ...talis Caesar adest, talem iam Roma Neronem / aspiciet. Flagrat nitidus fulgore remisso / vultus, et adfuso cervix formosa capillo, Apocol. 4.22-32*). Seneca emphasizes Nero being a musician and performer, as Apollo states he is his equal in voice and song, and the Fates, according to Toynbee, “spin out the thread of Nero’s Golden Age,” predicting the “return to justice and liberality,” something closely associated with Augustan propaganda concerning Apollo.<sup>145</sup>

Furthermore, in 60 CE at Nero’s first Neronia festival Lucan is believed to have performed the first book of his *Pharsalia*, an epic concerning the civil war of Caesar and Pompey, in the Theater of Pompey, where he also recited his “Eulogy of Nero.”<sup>146</sup> Lucan writes that after Nero’s death he will assume a place among the gods, “whether it pleases you to hold the scepter of Jove, or to ascend the fiery chariot of Phoebus, and with your roaming fire illuminate the earth, which dreads nothing from the changed sun” (... *seu sceptrum tenere, / Seu te flammigeros Phoebi conscendere currus, / Telluremque nihil mutato sole timentem / Igne vago lustrare iuvet... Pharsalia, 1.47-50*). But Nero is already a god in Lucan’s eyes, who says “but to me there is a divine will even now...you are enough to give power to Romans in song (*sed mihi iam numen... / tu satis ad vires Romana in carmina dandas, Pharsalia, 1.63-66*). These praises of Nero connect the two aspects of Apollo with which Nero identifies - “the driver of the chariot

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<sup>145</sup> Toynbee, “Nero Artifex: The Apocolocyntosis Reconsidered,” 86. Nero only started performing in 59 CE, and it is believed that this section of the *Apocolocyntosis* was a later addition to the work, as it can be removed without the rest of the story being affected. By comparing Claudius’ deformations and crimes with Nero’s youthful beauty, Seneca was proving they had truly entered a new Golden Age.

<sup>146</sup> Suet. *Vita Luc.* 1.

of the sun and hence benefactor of the whole earth, and Nero as the god of song and hence patron of the poet. In both cases, he assumes the role of Apollo.”<sup>147</sup> Lucan suggests that Nero will bring about a Golden Age of peace and poetry. Lucan’s praise of Nero is ironic because throughout the poem he criticizes Caesar’s dynastic line, which would paint Nero in a bad light. He does not exclude Nero’s reign from his critique and mourns Rome’s loss of freedom. While he never explicitly criticizes Nero, he does not state that Rome is in a good state under the emperor. But this criticism could show an even more pronounced admiration of Nero, because Lucan’s hatred for the imperial power is so great.<sup>148</sup> He may not agree with Nero concerning his politics and his power, but he still finds Nero’s artistic endeavors an inspiration for his own work.

Comparing Nero to Apollo in literature seemed to be a common theme, as there are many other texts from antiquity, such as the *Carmina Einsidlensia*, the *Bucolics* of Calpurnius Siculus, and fragments from the writings of Lucilius, who was a friend and correspondent of Seneca, that make similar comparisons to Nero as Apollo and as a patron of their art.<sup>149</sup> Yet while Nero may have been attempting to emulate Augustus in using Apollo as a symbol of order and peace, there were still some, particularly among the upper classes, who were not as satisfied with his actions. In fact, the sources that speak out against Nero are more numerous than those that praise him. This can be explained in part by the fact that the main sources from antiquity were usually written by men from the upper and senatorial classes, and so it is mainly their opinion that survives. Tacitus was a senator, Suetonius was an equestrian who worked under the Emperor

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<sup>147</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 114-115.

<sup>148</sup> Nigel Holmes, "Nero and Caesar: Lucan 1.33-66," *Classical Philology* 94.1 (1999): 75-81.

<sup>149</sup> John Mouratidis, "Nero: the Artist, the Athlete, and his Downfall," *Journal of Sport History* 12.1 (1985): 10.



Hadrian, and Cassius Dio was a senator and governor. Since Nero had a bad reputation with the upper classes because they felt disempowered by his existence and looked down on his actions, they often wrote negatively about him after his death. At the end of his life Nero was even declared a public enemy of the state by the Senate, which illustrates the strained relationship they had.

Apollo could not save him from the senate's negative opinions, then, and "few Roman conservatives could bear with equanimity the public exposure of their emperor on the stage."<sup>150</sup> For example, Dio stated "and indeed how could someone even bear to hear, much less to see, a Roman man, a senator, a patrician, a pontifex maximus, a Caesar, an emperor, an Augustus...both training the sound of his voice...and letting the hair on his head grow long" (καίτοι πῶς ἄν τις καὶ ἀκοῦσαι, μὴ ὅτι ἰδεῖν, ὑπομείνειεν ἄνδρα Ῥωμαῖον βουλευτὴν εὐπατρίδην ἀρχιερέα Καίσαρα αὐτοκράτορα Αὔγουστον...καὶ τὴν φωνὴν ἀσκοῦντα...καὶ τὴν μὲν κεφαλὴν κομῶντα Cass. Dio 63.9.1). Pliny the Elder spoke in similarly hateful tones about Nero in his *Natural Histories*. He frequently exposes his mistakes and continuously calls Nero out for his madness and crimes, portraying him as an enemy not just to Rome but to everyone.<sup>151</sup> Juvenal also states of Nero "nevertheless a noble mime is by no means a wonderful thing when an emperor plays the cithara" (*res haut mira tamen citharoedo principe mimus nobilis* 8.198-199). Nero thus became, in Champlin's terms, a "popular monster,"<sup>152</sup> meaning that he was looked down upon by the upper classes for his misdeeds, but he was actually popular with some of the lower classes, who had enjoyed the entertainment he provided. Some even continued to put

<sup>150</sup> Mouratidis, "Nero: the Artist, the Athlete, and his Downfall," 10.

<sup>151</sup> Plin. *HN*. VII.45-46.

<sup>152</sup> Champlin, "Nero Reconsidered," 98.

flowers at his tomb for years after his death, and erected statues of him on the Rostra.<sup>153</sup> Yet with the passage of decades and centuries, fewer and fewer positive sources appear to have survived, likely because Nero also persecuted the Christians, and Christians would copy these texts throughout the following millennia. As a result, his reputation as a beast who destroyed Rome because of his obsession with the arts followed him to modern times.

Similarly, and as we already noted in the plays of Racine, Louis XIV's use of Apollo in his propaganda brought about different representations of his character in the literature of his time. The literature of seventeenth century France and Ancient Rome were complex, but similar to one another in certain respects, in that many French authors had a familiarity with classics from antiquity. In fact, the writers under Louis XIV saw Rome as something to be surpassed in their literature.<sup>154</sup> Claude François Ménéstrier, an author and attendant of the French court of Louis XIV, wrote a sonnet for the king which praised his glory, saying "Louis alone occupies the Temple of Glory / the grandeur of his name and his immortal deeds / ...the Greeks and the Romans had no such things."<sup>155</sup> Because of Louis XIV's patronage of the arts, along with his symbolism of the sun, he was frequently compared to Augustus in literature. Louis XIV had epithets applied to his name in literature and the arts, some of the most common being august or brilliant, as in shining like the sun, another connection to Apollo.<sup>156</sup> Charles Perrault, Louis XIV's director of literary and artistic policy as Secretary of the Petite Académie and overseer of his major construction works like Versailles, wrote of him "One may compare without any fear

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<sup>153</sup> Suet. *Ner.* 57.

<sup>154</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 195.

<sup>155</sup> Claude François Ménéstrier, *Histoire du règne de Louis le Grand par les médailles, emblèmes, devises, jettons, inscriptions, armoiries et autres monumens publics.* (A Paris, 1693), n.p. « *Louis occupe seul le Temple de la Gloire / la grandeur de son nom et ses faits immortels / ... les Grecs et les Romains n'en eurent point de tels...* »

<sup>156</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 35.

of injustice / the age of Louis to the great age of Augustus.”<sup>157</sup> In 1663, well before he wrote the *Britannicus*, Racine wrote an ode dedicated to the king, as Louis XIV had just recovered from an illness, and described him overcoming the “insolent” illness and further comparing Louis to the sun and his reign to the Golden Age.<sup>158</sup> Indeed, Louis made sure of such positive treatments, like French kings and Roman generals did before him, by leading his troops in person to war, and bringing historians and artists with him so they could glorify his actions as they happened. Additionally, Louis XIV, with Apollo representing order and justice in his reign, was also called “the arbiter of Peace and of Glory.”<sup>159</sup> Writers during this time focused on the benefits of the sun, making further connections to the god Apollo, and they also showed that the king was equal in all aspects to the god. As Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière summarizes it, “There is no action, no attitude of the monarch that is not magnified by a comparison with the sun.”<sup>160</sup>

There are a multitude of works, then, praising Louis XIV as a new Augustus and a new Apollo that have survived from his reign. Yet while Louis XIV did all he could to present himself as “Arbiter of Peace and Glory,” eventually his actions did bring about dissent among certain groups of people, much as was the case for Nero. There were some who believed that the representation and glorification of the king was a trick, and according to La Bruyère, “It is a sure and ancient policy in the republics to let the people sleep at the parties, at the festivals...”

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<sup>157</sup> Charles Perrault, *Le Siècle de Louis le Grand* (A Paris, 1687), 3. «Et l'on peut comparer sans craindre d'être injuste / le Siècle de LOUIS au beau Siècle d'Auguste.»

<sup>158</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 23.

<sup>159</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 35, 72, 75.

<sup>160</sup> Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière, *L'image de Louis XIV dans la Littérature Française, de 1660 à 1715* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1981), 78. «Ainsi, il n'est aucune action, aucune attitude du monarque qui ne soit magnifiée par une comparaison avec le soleil.»

because these sorts of events were used as distractions, just like ancient circuses were.<sup>161</sup> The press was never free to print what it wanted, and publications such as the *Gazette de France* and the *Mercur*e contained only praise for the King, printing bi-weekly and monthly issues respectively on current events.<sup>162</sup> Even with his harsh censorship laws concerning his opposition, dissent flourished in the seventeenth century. Political pamphlets became popular among the people, known as *gazettes à la main*, and these became so problematic that in 1670 a law was passed forbidding people from selling libel.<sup>163</sup> Louis XIV may have been presented as a new Augustus in the literature that praised him, but to many his use of Apollo and his actions became distinctly Neronian in nature.

The works of dissent against Louis XIV came from different groups of people with different motives. There were those who acted as if loyal to him, and subtly gave unwanted advice or comments, and then those who were actively against the actions of the king. Negative opinions were not only circulated through literature, but also paintings, medals, and inscriptions. In some of these texts writers even refer to Louis XIV as *Nero Gallicanus*, or the French Nero, illustrating that people were aware of the reputation that Nero had as an emperor in antiquity, and thought it was a comparable title to give to the king.<sup>164</sup> So not only was Louis XIV aware of his possible connection to the Roman emperor, but many others were as well. Furthermore, instead of depicting Louis as Apollo, some critics instead called him Phaethon, the son of Helios

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<sup>161</sup>Jean de la Bruyère, *Oeuvres de la Bruyère* (Paris: L. Hachette, 1865), 364. «*c'est une politique sûre et ancienne dans les républiques que d'y laisser le peuple s'endormir dans les fêtes, dans les spectacles...*»

<sup>162</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 17.

<sup>163</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 118.

<sup>164</sup> E.g., *Nero Gallicanus, Or, the True Pourtraicture of Lewis XIV Wherein the Present War with France is Justified, from the Necessity of Reducing that most Christian King to a More Christian Temper* (London: R. Taylor, 1690).

who could not control the sun chariot.<sup>165</sup> Many of these images relied on parody of the official media sources that were published, and the dissenters used terms such as “sunset” and “solstice” in their works to oppose the image of Apollo and the *Roi Soleil* that the King embodied.<sup>166</sup> They did not buy the Augustan imagery he presented, and instead interpreted him to be a new Nero. In the theater, some plays even used Apollo in a negative way. For example, *Aricie*, written by Louis de la Coste, in the prologue depicts the myth of Marsyas, who was flayed alive by Apollo for daring to compete against him in a musical contest. Apollo is seen as the villain in this work, as he is unjust and shows excessive cruelty in his punishment. This symbolizes Louis XIV, as Apollo, censoring the arts in his absolutism to only show praise for himself.<sup>167</sup> Louis XIV did not want to be depicted as anything other than Augustan in nature, least of all Neronian, and he went to extreme lengths at times to avoid the latter kinds of comparisons.

To sum up, both Nero and Louis XIV presented themselves as reincarnations of Apollo (and, through the deity, as reincarnations of Augustus) in the theater and arts of their respective times. They were both described as becoming equal to Apollo in certain aspects, and often performed roles related to the god of the sun. The mythic roles they performed aided in cementing their positions of power by justifying their actions and showcasing their own achievements and glory. At the same time, Nero appears to have gone too far in his obsession with performing and the arts and attracted ample criticism. Louis XIV fared better, generally speaking, but in some circles, he likewise gained a negative reputation. Although Louis XIV

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<sup>165</sup> E.g., Nicolas Chevalier. *Histoire des médailles, qu'on a frappées comme autant de monumens des exploits glorieux, que les armes des Alliés ont fait éclater dans les campagnes de mil sept cent huit & mil sept cent neuf avec des réfections sur les médailles frappées en France contre les Alliés, & fur d'autres monumens publiques dressées à l'honneur & à la gloire de ce Monarque.* (A Utrecht: chés l'auteur où l'on trouve toutes sortes de medailles modernes à vendre, 1711), 112.

<sup>166</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 143.

<sup>167</sup> Cowart, *The Triumph of Pleasure*, 165-166.

wanted to be seen as even more august than Augustus, some thought he was actually more like Emperor Nero in many of his behaviors. Particularly problematic was the fact that spectacles were equally important in both rulers' reigns, and while it was not frowned upon for a ruler to perform in Ancien Régime France as it was during Nero's reign, Louis XIV was straying too far from his Augustan image in that Augustus himself never performed. Louis XIV's response to his ensuing comparison to Nero shows that he was aware of the emperor and the terrible reputation that followed him after his death, and that he did not want this same stain on his own regime. Yet no matter how much he encouraged an association with Augustus or a portrayal as an arbiter of peace for France, his actions demonstrated him to be *Nero Gallicanus* to dissenters, and this was something that no amount of propaganda could change.

## Chapter 3

### Apollo & Politics

There are a wide range of ways in which Apollo became influential and integral to Nero and Louis XIV's propaganda through their politics. Augustus was known to be a master of political theater, pretending that the Senate still had control of Rome while in reality he had all the power. Nero did not follow in his footsteps, and his reign can be considered borderline autocratic in the ways in which he conducted politics. Contemporaries of Louis XIV have been known to compare him to Augustus in his political propaganda because of his desire for peace and order, but through looking at the different ways he utilized Apollo throughout his reign, his politics do not seem to be Augustan, but more Neronian in nature. This is especially true because Louis XIV was an absolutist monarch, meaning he held supreme autocratic authority over France. His political actions, while they may seem like they are for the peace and benefit of France, demonstrate a lack of concern for peace which is more closely related to Nero's actions than Augustus'. While Louis XIV was hailed as a new Augustus during his reign through his connection to and his use of Apollo in politics, in reality he was using this as a facade to hide his more Neronian way of handling affairs.

Apollo is used in a variety of ways as a form of propaganda through the politics of Nero and Louis XIV. This includes affairs involving everything from war, triumphal processions, conspiracies and civil wars, and numismatics. This chapter will take a thematic approach to Nero and Louis XIV's rule, directly comparing their politics in different forms against each other. By shifting back and forth between rulers for these topics, the ways in which Louis XIV's efforts were more similar to Neronian political propaganda will become clear. While there are still some differences between Nero and Louis XIV concerning their political careers and

actions, the similarities prevail here. Louis XIV may have been called Augustus in his propaganda, but he was, as discussed in the second chapter, the French Nero.

Both rulers had multiple wars and uprisings occur during their reign, but especially Louis XIV. Nero did not involve himself much in warfare, but the main conflicts he had while emperor concerned Armenia and Britannia with the Iceni Revolt. It would end up being a provincial uprising in Gaul under the governor Julius Vindex that would ultimately lead to Nero's forced suicide. It appears that Nero's focus on the arts and imagery surrounding Apollo made it so that he ignored dangerous matters like this revolt, and even the imperial army abandoned him after his two prefects did, believing him to be so out of touch with reality that there was no helping him.<sup>168</sup> Louis XIV had a variety of foreign wars in which he himself participated, including the War of Devolution, War of Spanish Succession, the Nine Years War, the France-Dutch War, and the conquering of various territories for France's empire. As King he led the troops into battle himself, and to record his glory and the bringing of peace, he brought multiple historiographers and artists with him to the front lines so they could capture the events firsthand.<sup>169</sup>

Through the various French wars during Louis XIV's long reign, he was seen as a protector of the peace. Louis XIV justified these conflicts saying that he was merely defending France and its glory. France at this time was considered the powerhouse of Europe, so they had a large reputation to uphold and protect, but also ample ability to abuse this power. Apollo is the god of peace and order, so it would make sense that Louis XIV, through his connection to Apollo, would want to represent peace. Many depictions of Louis XIV depict him being

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<sup>168</sup> Michael Grant, *Nero: Emperor in Revolt* (New York: American Heritage Press, 1970), 245.

<sup>169</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 72.



crowned with a laurel wreath, which is a symbol commonly associated with Apollo and also a symbol of peace. But, he does not seem to be acting solely for the purpose of defending France, and his motives concerning peace are questionable. There were multiple instances where the people did not want any more conflict, and thought that they had done enough, but Louis XIV continued to start new wars.<sup>170</sup> This does not seem like a protector of peace, but rather someone extremely ambitious who only wants to add more territory and the riches that comes with it to France's empire. If he was truly only interested in keeping the peace and restoring order, he would not have the need to have his glory documented and dramatized by historians and artists for the world to see. But in a way this also added to his Apollonian persona, as while Apollo was associated with peace and order, there are multiple myths that depict his darker side and instances where he is forceful in taking what he wants.<sup>171</sup>

The War of Devolution, referencing the transfer of power or property to a different owner, was one such war where his propaganda concerning peace shines through. This war, which was fought from 1667-1668, enforced Louis XIV's claim to the Spanish Netherlands through his connection to his wife Maria Theresa, and propaganda played a critical role in the affair. Supporters of the monarchy spread various pamphlets that portrayed the image of Louis XIV just wanting what was rightfully his. But the aspect of devolution was only hiding Louis XIV's real motives, which all appear to have centered around glory and securing the frontiers.<sup>172</sup> The king led his troops in person, and he brought along the aforementioned artists who recorded

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<sup>170</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 78.

<sup>171</sup> The myth of Daphne is one such example of Apollo trying to force his desires on others, and the story of Marysas, mentioned in Chapter 2, also shows the darker side of Apollo.

<sup>172</sup> Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 239.

the victory - Charles Lebrun and Adam-Frans van de Meulen.<sup>173</sup> After the French victory, there was a party at Versailles to celebrate, with a performance of *Pax nuperimmo factum* (“The Recent Peace”) and the creation of various medals, engravings, tapestries, paintings, and pieces of literature commemorating the event.<sup>174</sup> There was even a competition created by the Academy for paintings, and the theme was “Louis Giving Peace to Europe.”<sup>175</sup> In the following war from 1672-1678, the Dutch War, Louis XIV decided to take historians rather than artists with him to illustrate his glory. There was also a fireworks celebration at Tuileries, which showcased images of Apollo, Victory, and Holland under the yoke, and the Gazette described Louis XIV as more capable than the Caesars.<sup>176</sup>

All of these forms of art and writing were propaganda for the benefit of Louis XIV. When Louis XIV crossed the Rhine with his troops in 1672, Voltaire described it as “one of those great events which would stay in the minds of men.”<sup>177</sup> There had to have been a certain level of dramatization to these stories, but the legend surrounding the crossing of the Rhine, where the Flemish troops supposedly fled in terror at the approaching French army, remained more popular than the actual story. This demonstrates the effectiveness of his propaganda. But while there may have been some dramatization in the recording of these wars, the glory of Louis XIV and his army was not entirely false. Louis XIV led the troops himself with confidence, and

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<sup>173</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 72. Lebrun was also one of the main artists involved with the creation of Versailles. Meulen was a Fleming, and hence had to record the invasion of his own home.

<sup>174</sup> André Félibien, *Recueil des descriptions de peintures et d'autres ouvrages faits pour le roi*. (Paris: Chez la Veuve de Sébastien Mable-Cramoisy, 1689), 197.

<sup>175</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 72.

<sup>176</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 77.

<sup>177</sup> Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, 97. « un des grands événements qui dussent occuper la mémoire des hommes. »

was a brilliant strategist.<sup>178</sup> But historians argue that these wars were for nothing more than the king's own glory. The War of Devolution and the Dutch War were fought for glory, to prove his ability as king through military achievement, and gave him a reputation of being a conqueror.<sup>179</sup> No matter how much emphasis was put on the pursuit of peace, and his use of Apollo in his propaganda to illustrate this, Louis XIV "waged a war against all of Europe."<sup>180</sup>

Nero, while he did not often involve himself directly in politics, focusing more on the arts and his connection to Apollo. He did, however, have two major foreign conflicts during his reign - the war with Armenia and the revolt of the Iceni in Britannia. The revolt in Britannia started out when King Praustagus of the Iceni tribe died in 61 CE, and Rome refused to listen to his wishes when he named his daughters as heirs to his kingdom along with the emperor. While Rome was victorious in the end, the revolt led to the death of over 70,000 people, and the destruction of three Roman towns.<sup>181</sup> Before the decisive battle, Boudica, the leader of the Britons, gave a speech to her army, referencing Nero and his actions. Cassius Dio records the speech Boudica supposedly gave to her troops, where she calls Nero a woman because he plays the lyre, sings, and takes care to beautify his person.<sup>182</sup> This comment relates back to Nero using the image of Apollo, who is heavily involved with those characteristics, as his patron god. In this instance the propaganda and image of Apollo is used negatively against Nero. In Boudica's

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<sup>178</sup> Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 244-245. The real story is that around 20,000 French troops came across a small contingent of Dutch soldiers at the river, and they fled. The French then forded the river instead of swimming across.

<sup>179</sup> John Lynn, *The Wars of Louis XIV 1667-1714* (London: Longman, 1999), 105.

<sup>180</sup> Bluche, *Louis XIV*, 443.

<sup>181</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 14.29-39.

<sup>182</sup> Cass. Dio, 62.6.3.

eyes he was an embarrassment as an emperor because of his dedication to the arts and Apollo instead of war, and the Romans deserve to be enslaved to a bad lyre-player.<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, the conflict with Armenia and Parthia was a crucial event during the beginning years of Nero's reign. Domitius Corbulo was the general chosen to lead the fight against the East, and he was extremely successful, perhaps too successful for Nero's tastes.<sup>184</sup> Under the command of Nero, Corbulo brought the war to Armenia in 63 CE, after their own disgrace in 62 CE. Tiridates, the leader of the Armenians, agreed to peace with Rome, and laid his diadem before an image of Nero. Rome was successful in installing a Parthian prince as King of Armenia in this deal, and the peace with Parthia would last for almost sixty years.<sup>185</sup> There was a pageant a few days later for both of the armies, but the real spectacle in Rome took three years to prepare for, and the triumph would be one remembered as modest next to Nero's other exploits.

Both Nero and Louis XIV participated in the Roman triumph ceremony during their respective reigns, though not necessarily for the traditional occasion of a grand military victory. In Ancient Rome, the triumph was a grand spectacle and an extremely high honor for whoever received it. The procession wound through the streets of Rome, where it ended at the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitoline Hill and a sacrifice was made.<sup>186</sup> It included several typical elements such as the sacrifice of white oxen, the presentation of prisoners of war, and performances by musicians, while the magistrates and Senators marched along. One of the main occurrences for a triumphal procession in Nero's reign was the settlement with Parthia following

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<sup>183</sup> Cass. Dio, 62.6.4-5.

<sup>184</sup> Corbulo was ordered by Emperor Nero to commit suicide in 67 CE, after Nero became suspicious he was becoming too popular amongst the Roman people.

<sup>185</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 221-222.

<sup>186</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 210.

the conflict with Armenia and the East, and Nero's reception of Tiridates in 66 CE. Tiridates made his way to Rome on his own terms, and in his dialogue to Nero he does not give the typical surrender that an enemy would, but Nero accepts his own form of submission to Rome.<sup>187</sup>

The main spectacle of the reception of Tiridates was the Day of the Sun, where Nero planned an elaborate theatrical spectacle to show his own glory. Nero picked dawn as the time for the reception, and as Tiridates marched into the Forum with his procession, the first rays of sunlight would be shining on Nero where he was seated, dressed in triumphal robes. The citizens present were all dressed in white robes, so the sun would be blinding against their clothing. The Theater of Pompey was gilded for this occasion, and Nero sat shaded by a purple canopy with an image of himself driving the chariot of the sun.<sup>188</sup> The sun played a critical role in this procession, as the awning represented Nero as Apollo among the stars, and was surrounded by shining gold. The rising sun would shine brilliantly against the white clothing, the armor of the soldiers, the gold of the Theater of Pompey, and the weapons and standards present. As Tiridates approached, the sun would hit Nero full on, illuminating him.<sup>189</sup> It is worth noting an interesting connection exists between King Tiridates and Louis XIV, as there is a statue of him located in the gardens at Versailles.

Was this considered a Roman triumph? While Suetonius and Dio make no mention of the word, and Tacitus' *Annals* cuts off before this event, Pliny calls this Nero's Armenian triumph.<sup>190</sup> Champlin agrees with Pliny that this was a form of triumph. Many of the components were there - the the decoration of the city, citizens holding laurel wreaths, soldiers in

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<sup>187</sup> Cass. Dio 63.5.2-3.

<sup>188</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 227.

<sup>189</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 228.

<sup>190</sup> Plin. *HN*. 30.16.

uniform, the foreign supplicant, Nero in his triumphal regalia and his salutation as Imperator, the banquets and games that followed, and the rare closing of the doors to the Temple of Janus, signalling peace.<sup>191</sup> While it may not have followed traditional Roman custom, it still could be perceived as a triumph. Nero was not one to follow traditional Roman customs, as with his pursuit of the arts, and so it would not be unusual that he would also stray from tradition in this aspect as well.

Nero's last triumph, celebrated when he returned from his Grand Tour in Greece in 67 CE, also had strong connections to Apollo. This procession followed the more traditional view of a triumphal procession to a certain extent, but Nero still made his own changes to the course. For the celebration, he chose a chariot that Augustus had used over a century prior for his own triumph. He wore a Greek cloak, an olive branch on his head to mark his victory in the Olympic Games, and held a laurel wreath in his hand, signaling his victory in the Pythian Games. He had the citharode Diodorus in the chariot with him, whom he had beaten in a contest at the games. The crowds chanted praises toward Nero, calling him Augustus and Nero Apollo as he rode through the city.<sup>192</sup> What was Neronian about his triumph is that instead of ending the procession at the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, after Nero stopped there, he doubled back and ended at the Temple of Apollo Palatinus. Apollo replaced Jupiter as the god of the triumph. After the parade Nero, according to Dio, held horse races in the Circus Maximus where he placed all of his crowns around the Obelisk of the Sun, and then raced himself.<sup>193</sup>

As he did not go abroad himself to fight with his legions, Nero himself did not have any military victories to earn a proper triumph, so he made his own reasonings and also changed the

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<sup>191</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 225.

<sup>192</sup> Cass. Dio, 63.20.1-5.

<sup>193</sup> Cass. Dio, 63.21.1.

events and traditions that had existed since Romulus to suit his own needs.<sup>194</sup> Placing Apollo prominently in both examples illustrates his connection with the god of the Sun, and how integral Apollo was to the image Nero wanted to represent.

Louis XIV held triumphs in France, and while he had many of his own military victories, one of the most famous occasions for a triumph was for his marriage in 1660 with Maria Therese of Austria. This was a condition of the Treaty of the Pyrenees which ended the Franco-Spanish War. Their entry into Paris was modelled after a Roman triumph, and this was typical of royal entries into cities during this time.<sup>195</sup> Triumphal arches were erected in the city to prepare for the royal procession, and while these arches were semi-permanent for this occasion, Louis XIV also erected permanent archways around Paris. They passed through a number of arches and gates that were decorated specifically for the occasion. The arches portrayed various themes relating to peace and triumph, as this was also a celebration of the end of the Franco-Spanish War. One of the gateways had the inscription *Ludovico Pacifico*, “To Louis the Peaceful.”<sup>196</sup> At the Marche Neuf, one of the triumphal arches also bore the inscription *Ludovico Pacatori Terrarum*, “To Louis who has Given Peace to the World.”<sup>197</sup> Peace was associated with Apollo, and through these inscriptions Louis XIV furthered his connection to the god.

Another archway took the form of Mount Parnassus, which featured Apollo and the Nine Muses, who represented the arts and sciences of Louis XIV’s reign, being released by this peace

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<sup>194</sup> In Rome’s foundation myths, Romulus is the son of Rhea Silvia, a Vestal Virgin, and the god Mars. He is said to have founded the city of Rome in 753 BCE after killing his twin Remus, and he became the first king of Rome.

<sup>195</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 19.

<sup>196</sup> Burke, *The Fabrication of Louis XIV*, 44.

<sup>197</sup> Jean Tronçon, *L’entrée triomphante de Leurs Majestez Louis XIV, roy de France et de Navarre et Marie-Thérèse d’Autriche, son espouse, dans la ville de Paris ... au retour de la signature de la paix générale et de leur heureux mariage...* (Paris, 1662), 21-22.

acquired in the Treaty of the Pyrenees. Apollo took the prominent place in the sculpture on the gateway, and he was able to be easily recognized by his long, blond hair, which was crowned in laurel branches, his costume, and the gold that gleamed from his lyre and his shoes.<sup>198</sup> This is similar to the approach that Nero took with Tiridates, as they both placed Apollo in important places in their procession, Nero placing his on the awning above him, and Louis XIV placing Apollo in a notable and well-seen place along the procession of his triumph. Gold was also used in both instances, and this would create blinding light effects when the sun shone on it, as Nero planned.

The actions of Nero and Louis XIV go directly against what Augustus decreed regarding the requirements for triumphs during his own reign. Augustus did have many foreign conflicts and territory disputes during his reign, but for the most part Marcus Agrippa dealt with many of these issues. After his triple triumph in 29 BCE, which was at the very beginning of his reign, Augustus never held a triumph for himself again, even when the Senate wanted to honor him with one. He, with the aid of Marcus Agrippa, set restrictions on the requirements for holding a triumph, limiting it to only his successors and later on members of the dynastic line.<sup>199</sup> He did not want further expansion of the Empire and saw triumphs as a glorification of war and expansionism.<sup>200</sup> Triumphs caused increased inflation, glorified civil strife between Roman

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<sup>198</sup> Jean Tronçon, *L'entrée triomphante de Leurs Majestez Louis XIV, roy de France et de Navarre et Marie-Thérèse d'Autriche, son espouse, dans la ville de Paris ... au retour de la signature de la paix générale et de leur heureux mariage...* 9.

<sup>199</sup> Frances Hickson, "Augustus "Triumphator": Manipulation of the Triumphal Theme in the Political Program of Augustus," 124.

<sup>200</sup> Harriet Flower, "Augustus, Tiberius, and the End of the Roman Triumph," *Classical Antiquity* 39.1 (2020): 21.



armies during the Republic, and led to generals gaining too much power and popularity with the Roman people. Augustus wanted to avoid all of these things.<sup>201</sup>

Furthermore, Emperor Nero and Louis XIV both had to deal with conspiracies and civil wars against their rule, and these events played into their use of Apollo in their propaganda. The main conspiracy that marked Nero's reign was the Pisonian Conspiracy in 65 CE. Seneca, Nero's tutor and advisor, along with Rufus, the praetorian prefect, joined with other prominent men and formed a plot to assassinate Nero. When some of the men were asked for their reasoning afterward, they told Nero that it was the only way to help him, and that they could not be a slave to a lyre player and charioteer.<sup>202</sup> They intended to murder Nero in the Circus Maximus in April, and replace him with Calpurnius Piso. This plot was considered dangerous to Nero because the plot was led by senior officers of his own praetorian guard.<sup>203</sup> There is a connection in this conspiracy to Apollo because the plot was overheard at the Temple of Apollo located near the Circus Maximus, where the crime was to take place. Apollo hears and sees everything as he pulls his sun chariot across the sky every day and since the plot was discovered at his temple, Apollo was saving Nero. The temple received honors afterward for revealing the plot with his divine power.<sup>204</sup>

Many prominent Roman men were executed or forced to commit suicide because of their complicity in the conspiracy. Two of the most famous are Nero's tutor Seneca and his nephew Lucan. Their involvement is interesting because they had praised Nero in both the *Apocolocyntosis* and *Pharsalia*. This suggests that their work and praise of Nero was actually

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<sup>201</sup> Flower, "Augustus, Tiberius, and the End of the Roman Triumph," 12.

<sup>202</sup> Cass. Dio, 62.24.

<sup>203</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 185.

<sup>204</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 15.74.

criticism, or at least parts of it. Lucan's praise of Nero is especially interesting because throughout the poem he criticizes Caesar's dynastic line, which would paint Nero in a bad light as a Julio-Claudian. Seneca's death also marks an important turning point in Nero's reign. While the first five years of Nero's reign is considered the quinquennium Neronis, a period of commendable rule, this is typically attributed to the fact that it was not Nero ruling, but his mother Agrippina, Seneca, and Burrus advising for him.<sup>205</sup> Agrippina was murdered in 59 CE by Nero, and Burrus died in 62 CE, allegedly from poison. With Seneca's forced suicide in 65 CE, Nero was now the only person left to rule, and his obsession with the arts continued to quickly increase from this point onwards, with nobody to stop him. The conspiracy would also further alienate Nero from the Senate and upper class of Rome, as this was the group that plotted against him.

The Fronde is the major rebellion that occurred during Louis XIV's reign, and it was an event that would have an impact on his propaganda for the rest of his life. The civil war of the aristocracy rebelling against the monarchy was centered in Paris, which at this point in time was where the monarchy was located. Louis XIV was only a young boy during this revolt, which occurred between 1648 and 1653, and it had a considerable impact on him growing up as the young king of France. After the defeat in 1652, imagery and propaganda related to the Fronde began to appear in Louis XIV's representations. The failure of the aristocracy to limit the power of the monarchy allowed Louis XIV to become a monarch with absolute power, especially after his mother Anne of Austria was no longer his regent. As is discussed in Chapter Two, Louis XIV frequently played the character of Apollo in ballets, where he slays the poisonous serpent

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<sup>205</sup> Carlos Noreña, "Nero's Imperial Administration," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Nero*, ed. Shadi Barsch, Kirk Freudenburg, and Cedric Littlewood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 59.

Python. This was an allegory for the defeat of the Fronde, and Louis XIV as Apollo and his victory over the defeated forces.

Another problem that occurred in the reign of Louis XIV was the Affair of the Poisons. During his reign, the significance and use of love magic as a form of maleficium and its consequences created political implications that greatly influenced and tested the power and reputation of his court and reign because his mistresses and members of the aristocracy used love magic to vie for power and prominence. At one point there were even implications of an assassination plot against the king, his main mistress at the time, Madame de Montespan, supposedly tried to kill him with a poisoned petition after she started losing favor.<sup>206</sup> This scandal was so detrimental to his authority as king and his efforts at propaganda that Louis XIV burned most of the records regarding these events, so that nobody would find out that he himself was a victim of witchcraft, as this would weaken his image as Le Roi Soleil and an absolutist monarch.

The main similarity concerning the conspiracies of the reigns of Emperor Nero and Louis XIV is that they were widespread affairs that involved some of the highest-ranking court/senate members. In Nero's case one supposedly involved Seneca, his personal tutor and advisor, and various members of the aristocracy and senate, and for Louis XIV it involved many different men and women from his own inner court at Versailles, with his highest ranking mistress making an attempt on his life. There was a struggle for power within their respective political courts, and it led to the death of multiple conspirators in both cases. The Fronde and the Affair of the Poisons, which occurred almost thirty years apart from one another, had a dramatic impact on

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<sup>206</sup> François Ravaisson-Mollien, *Archives de la Bastille* (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 1873), 6:241-245.

Louis XIV's propaganda, as he increased his many allusions to Apollo to solidify his authority and power. Nero also credited Apollo and Helios for his victory over his conspirators, and continued to utilize Apollo's imagery on his various forms of coinage and art.

The coinage and medallions from their respective reigns also place a lot of importance on the imagery and mythology connected to Apollo. Coins were especially important in Ancient Rome for emperors, and minting a new coin was one of the first things done when a new emperor took the throne. For anyone other than the emperor to mint coins was seen as a challenge to their imperial power and authority.<sup>207</sup> In 23 BCE Augustus allowed the Senate to start minting brass coins once again in Rome, as the provinces were striking gold and silver coins under his authority. These first coins minted by the Senate bore the name of the moneyer, and on the obverse a portrait of Augustus. But after this the coinage bore the inscription S.C. on it, *senatus consultu*, meaning by decree of the Senate. Augustus chose not to involve himself with these affairs and allowed the Senate complete control over this new coinage, and S.C. became a distinguishing feature.<sup>208</sup> In 14 BCE Augustus established Lugdunum, the capital of Gaul, as the only imperial mint allowed to issue gold and silver coins.<sup>209</sup> This ended when Caligula became emperor, as around 38 CE silver and gold coins started to be minted from Rome instead, and Lugdunum became a branch mint. Nero would later follow in Caligula's footsteps.

Typically, a portrait of the emperor with a laurel wreath is depicted on the obverse of coins. Images of family members and previous, deified emperors also appear on various coins

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<sup>207</sup> Olivier Hekster, Erika Manders, and Daniëlle Slootjes, "Making History with Coins: Nero from a Numismatic Perspective," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 45.1 (Summer 2014): 28.

<sup>208</sup> H. Mattingly, "The Mints of the Early Empire." *Society for Promotion of Roman Studies* 7 (1917): 61.

<sup>209</sup> Mattingly, "The Mints of the Early Empire," 62.

from the Principate. Augustus was an exception to some of this, as many of his coins instead bore portraits of personifications from myth and deities.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, with the moneyers' depictions no longer appearing on coins, Augustus used coins to record his birth, his victories, the peace of the Empire, and his service to the state.<sup>211</sup>

One scholar argues that the coinage minted under the reign of Emperor Nero illustrates the highest form of artistic excellence in Ancient Rome.<sup>212</sup> Roman art in general had strong Greek characteristics, and the coins minted under Augustus, after 27 BCE, were influenced by Greek idealism. After Augustus, the artistic quality shifted back to being more Roman in nature, but Nero, being a philhellene, showcased a heavy sense of Greek imagery and style once again. He also re-introduced the full spectrum of coin types into the economy, with the *Asses*, *Denarii*, and *Sestertii* being the most common and known for their imagery featuring Apollo.

The Neronian coinage depicting Apollo is significant in that most of these coins omit the letters S.C. on them, *senatus consultu*, as the Senate had the authority to mint bronze coins. The beginning of Nero's reign was the most similar to that of Augustus in that Nero respected the power and authority of the Senate, and they regained increased powers during this time, not seen since 27 BCE.<sup>213</sup> While Augustus may have been the true ruler of Rome, he did still attempt to make the Senate think they were in control, but Nero was openly showing his power. After the removal of Seneca and Burrus from office in 62 CE, Nero took full control of the empire and his coins minted at the imperial mint in Rome started to discard the S.C. This is the opposite of the

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<sup>210</sup> Shelagh M. Bond, "The Coinage of the Early Roman Empire," *Greece and Rome* 4.2 (1957): 151.

<sup>211</sup> Bond, "The Coinage of the Early Roman Empire," 153.

<sup>212</sup> Edward Sydenham, *The Coinage of Nero* (New York: Sanford J. Durst Numismatic Publications, 1982), 34.

<sup>213</sup> Sydenham, *The Coinage of Nero*, 11-12.

actions of Augustus, who removed himself from issuing coins and instead left the power to the Senate.

A Bronze As of Nero from 62-68 CE, minted in Rome, states NERO CLAVDIVS CAESAR AVG GERMANICVS<sup>214</sup> (Figure 1) and shows the radiate head of Nero on the obverse, and on the reverse states PONTIF MAX TR POT IMP P P and shows an image of Apollo Citharoedus, laureate, playing the lyre (Figure 2).<sup>215</sup> Here the S.C. is missing. But a Bronze As minted in Lugdunum depicts NERO CLAVD CAESAR AVG GERMANICVS on the obverse (Figure 3), and on the reverse PONTIF MAX TR POT IMP P P S C with Apollo Citharoedus (Figure 4).<sup>216</sup> The S.C. had not yet been omitted on the coin minted in Lugdunum. Nero's *Aurei*, *Denarii*, and *Sestertii* typically show his head laureate, and on his *Dupondii* and brass *Asses* he typically has a radiate crown on his head, and sometimes the laurel wreath. On copper *Asses* and *Semisses* he is usually bare headed.<sup>217</sup> All of these symbols, such as the radiate crown and laurel wreath, relate back to Apollo, who was typically also illustrated on the reverse of the coin.

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<sup>214</sup> Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus: Nero's full name.

<sup>215</sup> Bronze As of Nero, RIC 1 Nero 123, ANS 1950.88.1, AD 62-AD 68. All figures of coins are part of the public domain, accessed through the American Numismatic Society's database.

<sup>216</sup> Bronze As of Nero, RIC 1 Nero 416, ANS 1916.106.21, AD 62-AD 68. The reverse states "Pontifex Maximus Tribunicia Potestas Imperator Pater Patriae." Pontifex Maximus was the highest religious office in Rome, and typically granted to the Emperor, along with Tribunicia Potestas, meaning the powers of the tribune. Imperator and Pater Patriae are imperial titulature given to emperors. All of these titles are common for imperial coinage.

<sup>217</sup> Sydenham, *The Coinage of Nero*, 13.



Figure 1: Bronze As of Nero,  
Rome, Obverse



Figure 2: Bronze As of Nero,  
Rome, Reverse



Figure 3: Bronze As of Nero,  
Lugdunum, Obverse



Figure 4: Bronze As of  
Nero, Lugdunum, Reverse

Nero did not place much importance on representing military and other political matters on his coinage, as others did. There are no references, or at least not any that have survived, that allude to the Parthian Wars or the Boudiccan rebellion and Rome's victory, for example. Nero was not a military man like Augustus or Louis XIV, and if he would have depicted these events on coins it would not have brought attention and glory to him, but to Corbulo and the Roman army. This was something that Nero did not want, so many of his coins illustrated his passions for the arts and music, by representing Apollo Citharoedus and various other symbols pertaining to Apollo.<sup>218</sup> Because the Roman senate and aristocracy did not like Nero's obsession with the

<sup>218</sup> Sydenham, *The Coinage of Nero*, 37.

arts, there may have been some hesitation on Nero's part to mint coins with this imagery. But since Apollo was his patron god and to whom Nero was especially devoted, he was able to get away with personally overseeing this imagery being minted on coins.

One of the only depictions in Nero's reign that imitates the coinage and actions of Augustus was the imagery of the closing of the Temple of Janus, which represented peace. After less than two years had passed during his reign, Nero disregarded any familial lineage he had from the Julio-Claudian dynasty, and focused on his own imagery and propaganda instead.<sup>219</sup> But, peace from military success was a common theme in his coinage, and Victory and Apollo featured heavily in this respect. Closing the doors to the Temple of Janus was a physical representation of peace in Rome, and Nero was the first emperor to do so since Augustus. To commemorate this event, he minted a coin with an illustration of the facade of the temple on the reverse. An example is a gold Aureus minted in Rome, from 65-66 CE, which states NERO CAESAR AVGVSTVS<sup>220</sup> on the obverse with a laureate bearded Nero (Figure 5), and on the reverse IANVM CLVSIT PACE P R TERRA MARIQ PARTA, showing the closed doors on the Temple of Janus (Figure 6).<sup>221</sup> Nero used the same inscription Augustus used on his coinage, PACE P.R. TERRA MARIQUE PARTA, and this made his intentions of imitation clear.<sup>222</sup> One other thing that Nero did that imitated Augustus was that he took the praenomen Imperator, which had also not been done since Augustus.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Hekster, "Making History with Coins," 34-36.

<sup>220</sup> Nero Caesar Augustus.

<sup>221</sup> Gold Aureus of Nero, RIC 1 Nero 58, ANS 1944.100.39421, AD 65-AD 66. The inscription states "When the peace of the Roman people had been imposed on land and sea, he closed the Temple of Janus."

<sup>222</sup> "When the peace of the Roman people had been imposed on land and sea."

<sup>223</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 140.





Figure 5: Gold Aureus of Nero, Rome, Obverse



Figure 6: Gold Aureus of Nero, Rome, Reverse

Many coins from provinces in the Mediterranean, specifically Greece, also depicted Nero as Apollo on their coinage. This typically was referring to the coins minted around 66 CE, coinciding with Nero's tour of Greece to participate in the Olympic Games, and his liberation of Greece. Corinth had a coin with a laureate Nero, the Thessalian League had coins with the reverse depicting Apollo the Citharode, and Nicopolis honored "Nero Apollo the Founder" and illustrated Nero playing the lyre.<sup>224</sup>

While Louis XIV did not specifically use French coins for his propaganda, he did release a variety of medals throughout his reign that commemorated important achievements and events. A typical example of the coinage throughout his reign is a silver ecu minted in 1690 which on the obverse depicts a portrait of Louis XIV and the inscription LVD XIII D G FR ET NAV REX (Figure 7), and on the reverse CHRIS REGN VINC IMP (Figure 8) in between crowns.<sup>225</sup> There were over 300 medals minted throughout his seventy two year long reign, and there were printed catalogues of these medals that circulated during his reign to further the spread of his propaganda. The first edition of this catalogue was published in 1702, and a second version was

<sup>224</sup> Champlin, *Nero*, 117.

<sup>225</sup> Silver ecu of Louis XIV, GadMRF 216, ANS 1954.29.22, 1690. The reverse phrase stands for "Ludovicus XIII by the grace of God King of France and Navarre" and the obverse stands for "Christ reigns, conquers, commands." Ludovicus was the Latinized form of the name Louis.

published in 1723 after Louis XIV's death, titled *Médailles sur les événements du règne [entier] de Louis le Grand, avec des explications historiques*.<sup>226</sup> The creation of this catalogue made it possible for a much larger audience to view these medals, as while only a few would be able to have the actual medals themselves, anyone could see the catalogue. Also, since many people did not have the means to have access to the original, physical medals, this made it easier to spread propaganda concerning Louis XIV as there were occasions when the descriptions of the medals were later changed to further benefit him. Without the original medal, nobody would be able to know that this occurred.<sup>227</sup>



Figure 7: Silver Ecu of Louis XIV, Obverse



Figure 8: Silver Ecu of Louis XIV, Reverse

This propaganda was necessary, as 1702 was around the time of the War of Spanish Succession, where France faced off against the Grand Alliance of Holland, England, and the Holy Roman Empire. The medals minted show Louis XIV in his military glory, reassuring the French people of the power of France and Le Roi Soleil.<sup>228</sup> There are a number of medals that include imagery related to Apollo and the sun, including his own personal motto, *nec pluribus*

<sup>226</sup> Jeanne Zarucchi, "Medals Catalogues of Louis XIV: Art and Propaganda," *Notes in the History of Art* 17.4 (Summer 1998): 26.

<sup>227</sup> Zarucchi, "Medals Catalogues of Louis XIV," 27.

<sup>228</sup> Zarucchi, "Medals Catalogues of Louis XIV," 27.

*impar* (“not unequal to many”), which was originally created for the 1662 carousel.<sup>229</sup> An example of this is a medal from 1667 which features a large image of a face with sun rays radiating from its head, illuminating the earth, and the motto *NEC PLURIBUS IMPAR* on the obverse with a portrait of young Louis XIV (Figure 9) and the motto *LUDOVICUS XIII REX CHRISTIANISSIMUS* on the reverse (Figure 10).<sup>230</sup> Another connection to Apollo is a medal commemorating his birth, which shows the sun chariot rising across the sky surrounded by the constellations on the reverse, and on the obverse a portrait of young Louis XIV. The inscription listed with the medal even mentions that these are the same stars under which Augustus was born, attempting to further connect the two monarchs.<sup>231</sup> There are a variety of mythological and ancient figures that appear on these medals, but the radiate sun became the most important symbol of Louis XIV, and was used throughout Versailles as a decoration. It was characteristic of Ancien Régime France to imitate images from antiquity, like using imagery of Apollo, and then declaring that Louis XIV had surpassed even the Romans.<sup>232</sup> Ancient coins were the inspiration for these medals, and there was praise for the Roman age of Augustus which features so prominently in literature praising Louis XIV.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Louis XIV, *Mémoires* (Paris: Tallandier, 1978), 136. This event is mentioned in Chapter Two.

<sup>230</sup> Bronze Medal, *Cat Gen.1.174.Avar*, ANS 0000.999.44227, 1643-1715. The inscription states “Ludovicus XIII the Most Christian King.”

<sup>231</sup> Sébastien Leclerc, *Médailles sur les principaux événements du règne de Louis le Grand, avec des explications historiques. Par l'Académie Royale des Médailles & des Inscriptions.* (Paris: L’Imprimerie Royale, 1702), 2 reverse.

<sup>232</sup> Alan Stahl “The Classical Program of the Medallion Series of Louis XIV” *The Princeton University Library Chronicle* (Winter 2015): 267.

<sup>233</sup> Stahl, “The Classical Program of Medallion Series of Louis XIV,” 275.



Figure 9: Bronze Medal of Louis XIV, Obverse



Figure 10: Bronze Medal of Louis XIV, Reverse

Overall, the coinage and medals of Nero and Louis XIV stray from the program of coinage from the reign of Augustus. Nero seems to have been closer in imitating the coins of Augustus, but even he still made several changes to the program, such as which imperial mints were used, and what was depicted on coins themselves. Immediately after Nero's death the succeeding emperors abandoned his more complete system of coins, and returned to the simpler version of Augustus.<sup>234</sup> Nero's coinage was closer to the imagery of Augustus who did have some images of Apollo, since they featured Apollo holding a lyre on the obverse, which is not illustrated on the medals of Louis XIV. While the propaganda of Louis XIV strives to show Louis XIV as a new Augustus and a bringer of peace through his use of Apollo, this medallic history shows his thirst for glory and war instead. While Augustus also depicted his victories on coinage, he also advocated for stopping the expansion of Roman territory. The majority of Louis XIV's medals feature foreign conquests and military victories, which suggest a desire for war.

Through the analysis and comparison of the use of Apollo concerning Nero and Louis XIV, the politics of Louis XIV's reign seems to be more similar to Nero than Augustus. Louis XIV's need for personal glory and the glory of France led to various wars between France and the rest of Europe, and the subsequent triumphs do not compare to the policies of Augustus'

<sup>234</sup> Sydenham, *The Coinage of Nero*, 23.

reign. Nero, on the other hand, held triumphs for himself, even when he did not deserve them, and made a point to showcase Apollo as a focal point, just like Louis XIV. Nero received a terrible reputation over time because of his actions while emperor, and while Louis XIV would not have deliberately imitated Nero because of this (and in fact tried to avoid such comparison), his actions are more similar to Nero than Augustus whom he claimed to emulate. Augustus did have his own political propaganda of foreign and internal affairs, the *Res Gestae*, but it did not feature Apollo. The coinage also shows more similarities between Augustus and Nero rather than Augustus and Louis XIV, and Nero removed any mention of lineage after only two years on the throne. Imitating the imagery and mythology of Ancient Rome was a popular concept for propagandistic purposes during Louis XIV's reign, and while it is said that his reign surpassed that of Rome, there are many similarities between the actions of Nero and Louis XIV.

## Conclusion

Overall, while Louis XIV may have claimed to be more like Augustus in his actions and use of the god Apollo in his propaganda, his behavior seems to prove that he acted more Neronian in nature, no matter how he felt about the notion. Various references to both Nero and Augustus appear throughout the reign of Louis XIV, and Nero's comparison was used as a critique of his actions, as it alluded to Nero's bad reputation from antiquity. But these references show that Louis XIV did have knowledge of who exactly Nero was, and how his use of Apollo could be considered similar.

The Domus Aurea and Versailles, both innovative and monumental in their grandeur, outshine anything built by Augustus, and share similar concepts of the use of light and gold to reflect sunlight. Augustus during his reign never built anything on this grand a scale, and focused much of his attention on restoring the monuments destroyed by the civil wars that hit Rome in the Late Republic. The contemporaries of Nero expected him to build on a greater scale than his predecessors, and he did not disappoint with his Domus Aurea. Louis XIV also went beyond the creations of previous French monarchs, as while there are various palaces situated across France, none match the extravagance of Versailles.

The Domus Aurea is an architectural marvel dedicated to the sun god Apollo. Nero covered his palace in gold and gems, used a specific stone which had gold-colored veins, and positioned it specifically so that the sun would shine off of it from sunrise to sunset. The architects of the Domus Aurea, Severus and Celer, are two of the only imperial architects' names that remain in the record, and their innovation deserves recognition. They built a sprawling complex across Rome, created man-made lakes and miniature villas surrounding the main

palatial structure, and built Nero his own microcosm. The Colossus of Nero, built by Zenodorus, made Nero's connection to Apollo abundantly clear, as Nero commissioned a 120-foot-tall statue of himself with the features of Helios. The statue was made out of bronze, which would reflect the sunlight, and dominated the skyline. But this palace did not last long after the forced suicide of Nero in 68 CE, and the palace that was at one point considered a normal evolution of palatial structures during the Julio-Claudian dynasty soon became a symbol of Nero's excess and atrocities.

The art and architecture inside the palace also had ample symbolism related to Apollo. Fabullus, the main painter for the interior, created an art style that strayed from the one used during the reign of Augustus. Much of this artwork came to be known as the "grotesque" art style, and it has influenced art styles since its rediscovery in the 15th century, including the Vatican. The palace's various nymphaeum inside the complex also played a large role in redirecting sunlight, as the water would scatter the rays of light onto the walls which were covered in gems, marble, and gold. While no direct references to Apollo survive inside the palace, the use of sunlight makes a strong connection on its own. The Octagonal Room is the most prominent example of symbolism linked to Apollo, and the solar imagery that took place inside throughout certain times of the year made parallels between Nero and the sun god through the specific use of light. Nero could have also used this as the throne room, and Louis XIV also used similar Apollo and sun-related imagery inside his own throne room at Versailles.

The Château de Versailles started out as a small hunting lodge built by Louis XIII, and Louis XIV transformed it into an extensive palatial complex with immaculate gardens, filled with references to ancient history and mythology. One of the main rooms inside the chateau is the Apollo Drawing Room, and this room is considered to be one of the most extravagant rooms

in the entire palace. Louis XIV's throne was located inside the Apollo Drawing Room, connecting his personal power with the power and symbolism of Apollo. The surrounding rooms are named after the other planets, as Louis XIV wanted Apollo and the sun to be the center of his universe and his personal emblem, and the other planets revolved around the sun. On the ceiling is an enormous painting of Apollo driving his sun chariot, so that in all directions one is surrounded by imagery of Apollo. Other works of art connected to Apollo fill the palace, from statues to frescoes, tapestries, and paintings.

The Hall of Mirrors creates a connection between Augustus, Nero, and Louis XIV. There were the busts of twelve Roman emperors displayed in the hall during Louis XIV's reign, including both Augustus and Nero. This suggests that Louis XIV had a knowledge of Nero's existence, and he would have known of Nero's infamous reputation from antiquity. While Augustus's bust has remained there since the beginning, there were various instances where other busts were removed and relocated, but interestingly there is evidence from inventory lists that the pedestal of Nero's statue also remained. This could suggest that Louis XIV wanted to display other rulers who made similar connections with Apollo, especially as Louis XIV was trying to emulate a Roman emperor in many of his actions and depictions in propaganda.

Louis XIV's gardens featured various fountains related to Apollo in order to reflect the sunlight and show the power of the sun god. In addition to references to Apollo, there were over 200 statues and countless fountains to demonstrate Louis XIV's control over nature, as this was another divine aspect of Apollo. Four of the most magnificent fountains in the gardens are centered around various myths relating to Apollo, including the Grotto of Tethys, the Apollo Fountain, and Fountain of Latona, and the Neptune Fountain. The Grotto of Tethys depicts Apollo being washed by nymphs after driving his sun chariot all day, and the Apollo Fountain



shows the opposite, portraying Apollo in his chariot breaking out of the water to start the day. The Latona Fountain depicts Latona holding Apollo and Artemis in her arms as she turned local villagers into frogs, and the Neptune Fountain makes reference to Apollo slaying the monster Python, which Louis XIV used as a symbol of the defeat of the Fronde. All of these fountains include bronze or gilded elements, and in combination with the water, would have reflected the sunlight and made dazzling light effects. The presence of Apollo filled the gardens of Versailles. While Augustus built the Temple of Apollo Palatinus, the building projects of Nero and Louis XIV transcended the architecture that came before them and focused on Apollo as the centerpoint of their propaganda.

Concerning the arts, Nero became interested in the arts and chariot racing at an early age, but his mother Agrippina prevented him from practicing either. Finally after five years as emperor he had her executed, and was then able to become fully immersed in the arts, even if it was looked down upon by the upper classes of Rome. Actors were seen as *infamia*, one of the lowest classes in society, and it was not appropriate for the emperor to be associating himself with these roles and people. Apollo became Nero's justification for his actions. Since Apollo was the god of music, his sacred symbol was the lyre, and he rode his sun chariot across the sky daily, Nero was defending his own actions in performing similar acts. Apollo became his patron god and Nero became seen as a new Apollo. He further connected his power to Apollo by performing roles related to his myths, such as his first public performance, where he demonstrated Apollo's fearsome power in performing the myth of Niobe. He also used his public performances and his relationship with Apollo as a way to justify his crimes as emperor, an example being the murder of his mother. Apollo was the center of his propaganda as Nero became obsessed with the arts, and while this may not have worked as well in convincing the

upper classes to accept his actions, the lower classes loved his focus on public performances and games.

Louis XIV also performed in public, playing the role of Apollo in many performances in order to show his defeat of the Fronde and his power as monarch. The Fronde at the beginning of his reign heavily influenced what roles he chose in performances, and after its defeat he needed to re-strengthen his own authority as monarch. He had a different upbringing to the thought of performance, as it was not criticized by the elite like it was during Nero's reign. Noble men and women even participated themselves in the performances along with the king, showing their support. Many of Louis XIV's own performances focused on Apollo or the nine Muses and Mt. Parnassus, as he wanted to demonstrate his connection to the god as his personal emblem. But some of the literature written by his critics also showed the dark side of Apollo and subsequently Louis XIV, such as a recreation of the myth of Marsyas, who Apollo flayed alive for challenging his musical abilities. This was seen as a symbol of Louis XIV's censure of the press, as many of the newspapers and journals in France were made to print his propaganda. Louis XIV also put on various festivals and performances at Versailles for the nobles, making large spectacles out of them, in order to further distract the nobles from any thoughts of taking power.

But the performance of *Britannicus*, written by Jean Racine, would change Louis XIV's opinion on performing in public. In this play Nero was described as a spectacle to the Roman people for performing in public. Voltaire wrote that once Louis XIV heard this dialogue, he supposedly became insulted by this notion. He never again performed in public after seeing *Britannicus*. But this depiction by Voltaire furthers the evidence that Louis XIV had knowledge of who Nero was. Not only were there plays written which were set during the reign of Nero,

but he was one of the main characters. It was the lines insulting Nero which struck Louis XIV the most, suggesting that he would have had at least some knowledge of the reputation performing gave Nero both during his reign and after his death. While the French nobility did not place the same stigma on performance as the Roman elite, Louis XIV seemed to want to try and distance himself from being seen as a spectacle.

Seneca and Lucan wrote the main pieces of literature that praised Nero. Both of these works and passages directly reference Apollo and compare him to Nero. Seneca's *Apocolocyntosis*, while focusing mainly on Claudius, has a passage at the start which depicts Apollo giving a prophecy that Nero will become the new Apollo and reach the same level as himself in song and beauty. Lucan states in his *Pharsalia* that Nero is his muse, and he does not need Apollo to help him write his poetry. Both works praise Nero in his musical and artistic abilities, and Lucan even describes the future apotheosis of Nero upon his death, where he will ascend to Olympus. But Nero's critics were numerous, especially as he was not liked among the upper classes, and it is the elite that typically wrote these records and histories. Apollo could not save him from being critiqued, and he gained a reputation of being a monster that has lasted since his death.

Louis XIV also had similar experiences in having both works of praise and critique. For the most part literature published in France praised the king, especially as Louis XIV created multiple academies dedicated to the arts and literature, and had a censure on the press to limit what they could and could not say. Authors like Félibien, Perrault, and Racine are examples of people who gave immense praise to Louis XIV in their writings. There are even some supporters of the king who called him more august than Augustus and made direct comparisons between the two rulers, and strove to surpass the glory of Rome with their skill in writing. But criticism still

existed during Louis XIV's reign, and Apollo featured heavily in it. Louis XIV was compared to Phaethon, the son of Helios who crashed the sun chariot out of the sky, instead of Apollo.

Critics also started calling him the "French Nero," recognizing his similarities in propaganda and performance to Nero, instead of his parallels to Augustus. This again helps to prove that Louis XIV and others during the Ancien Régime had knowledge of who Nero was, as people were able to make a connection between the events of Nero's reign and his actions, and their similarities to Louis XIV. Augustus never got personally involved with the arts, and he certainly never performed himself, and in this way Nero and Louis XIV once again share more similarities with their use of Apollo than they do with Augustus.

Lastly, the use of politics is a way in which Nero and Louis XIV are more similar to one another than to Augustus. Nero placed more importance on the arts and chariot racing, but there were a few different political affairs that directly involved him during his reign. Rome was heavily involved in the Armenian War during his reign, and with the help of the general Domitius Corbulo, there was peace with Parthia for the first time in years. Nero celebrated this event with a spectacle of a triumph in Rome, and symbolism linked to Apollo flourished, especially as he held the event at sunrise so the sun would shine right where he was sitting. Augustus severely limited triumphs during his own reign, but Nero held one anyways, even though he himself had no personal military victory abroad. The Boudican rebellion was another major event, and Boudica even criticized Nero in her speech for being an actor and singing.

Additionally, Apollo played a critical role in the conspiracies against Nero. The main conspiracy to assassinate Nero, the Pisonian Conspiracy in 65 CE, was discovered in the Temple of Helios, as the sun sees everything in the sky. This furthered the propaganda connecting Nero and Apollo, as Apollo supposedly saved his life. The coinage of Nero also prominently featured

symbols sacred to Apollo, such as a radiate head or laurel crown, and often pictured Apollo himself playing the lyre on the obverse of the coin. Apollo permeated all levels of Nero's politics and propaganda.

Louis XIV had a multitude of political affairs during his 72-year long reign. He claimed to desire peace and order, and used Apollo as a symbol of this in his propaganda. But he involved France in a variety of foreign wars and conflicts, such as the War of Devolution and Dutch War, and this suggests that he was not interested in peace, but glory for France. His triumphs also were not all militaristic in nature, such as his triumph celebrating his marriage in 1660. He erected Roman-style arches throughout Paris, many of them decorated with symbols of Apollo. The Fronde at the beginning of his reign also had a large impact on his future actions as monarch, and much of his propaganda featuring Apollo referenced the defeat of the Fronde through depicting Apollo slaying Python. His coinage was not as varied as either Augustus or Nero, but there were some references to Apollo on the obverse of coins. Louis XIV referenced Apollo the most in his medals, and his personal emblem of the sun with a face on it featured heavily. This form of propaganda was extremely beneficial to him because most could not afford the actual medal but could read the catalogues published, which were changed over time to further glorify Louis XIV.

Louis XIV's supporters claimed he was the new Augustus, and sometimes even better than Augustus. Augustus did have foreign disputes and wars during his reign as emperor, but Marcus Agrippa deserved most of the credit for his victories, as Augustus was not the most skilled strategist or soldier. But, one thing that sets him apart from Nero and Louis XIV was the use of triumphs. Augustus refused them, but both Nero and Louis XIV had a multitude of triumphs both for military honors and other events, and made sure to represent Apollo as the

focal point of their displays. As for coins, Apollo features prominently in the coinage and medals of all three rulers, but Nero and Augustus seem to be the most similar in their propaganda, as both of them feature Apollo Citharoedus on their coins, while Louis XIV did not.

Augustus, Nero, and Louis XIV are not the only rulers to have utilized the image or persona of Apollo in their propaganda. But they are three of the most well-known instances. Apollo may have been used as the patron deity of all three rulers, but because of his varied and many domains, he was able to be used in a multitude of different ways to suit the needs of each respective ruler and their personal propaganda. Louis XIV attempted to portray himself as following in Augustus' footsteps and as an advocate for peace and order through the imagery of Apollo. But his actions and thirst for glory show that he was more like Nero instead, who utilized Apollo to focus on the arts and justify his own crimes. Apollo has remained a powerful and prominent figure in propaganda both in antiquity and beyond, and his use in the reigns of rulers like Augustus, Nero, and Louis XIV has aided in advancing their personal agendas.

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## **ACADEMIC VITA**

### **Samantha J. Dolen**

#### **EDUCATION**

The Pennsylvania State University 2017 – Present  
Majoring in History - Schreyer Honors Graduation Spring 2021  
French Language and Culture – Schreyer Honors – Student Marshal  
Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies - Ancient Languages – Schreyer Honors  
Minors in Latin and Ancient Greek  
Thesis: The Power of the Sun God – Apollo throughout the Ages

#### **ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE & RESEARCH**

Teaching Assistant in the Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies Department  
August 2018 – 2020

- Helped students with course material on Roman civilization and Latin grammar and syntax, and also assisted the professor with assignments, grading, discussions, along with holding review sessions and tutoring for students
- Courses: Latin 101, Latin 102, CAMS 33: Roman Civilization  
Academic Trip to Greece

Spring 2018

- Went abroad to Greece as part of CAMS 400W and gave a presentation at Delphi on my research  
Rome: Study Tour of Roman History and Archaeology

Summer 2019

- Studied abroad in Rome and gave a presentation on the Palatine Hill on my research to the class, as well as taking HIST 499 and CAMS 199 as courses
- Conducted independent thesis research on Emperor Nero and Apollo

#### **SKILLS**

- Excellent language skills as evidenced by completing advanced English and Rhetoric courses, along with language courses in French, Latin, Ancient Greek, and Middle Egyptian Hieroglyphics, as well as independent study of Old Norse
- Leadership skills and involvement in the Classics and History communities with the creation of the CAMS Club on campus, along with setting up and managing a book club of Vergil's *Aeneid* for Fall 2020, and participating in a Spoken Latin group

#### **HONORS, AWARDS, & ACTIVITIES**

Schreyer Honors Scholar

Paterno Fellows Member

Member of Phi Alpha Theta History Honor Society

Member of Eta Sigma Phi Classics Honor Society

Recipient of the Thomas Bermingham Scholarship for Excellency in the Classics 2018 & 2019

Recipient of the Judge Benjamin F. Keller Memorial Fund Scholarship 2020

Recipient of the Oftsie Award in the Department of History 2019

Creator and President of the Classics and Ancient Mediterranean Studies Club