



## roman emperors did not die in their bed (part i)

How Roman Emperors died:

History repeats itself... The Julio-Claudian Emperors: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero.

If we look closely at the lives of Roman emperors, and there had been over 80 of them, it is amusing to notice how few of them actually died peacefully in their bed! Another element which emerges by looking at the long list of the names of Roman emperors, is the fact that after a just and good emperor, usually a psychotic one would follow. A bit like our modern Presidents or Prime Ministers...

Augustus, the first emperor, grand-nephew and adopted son of Caius Julius Caesar, was a shrewd and cunning politician who managed to give the fatal blow to the dying Republic without shedding Roman blood. His death was like his reign, calm and peaceful.

Tiberius, his successor, was the first of a long list of psychopaths who managed to ascend to the imperial throne. The sources portray him as a rather complex character, intelligent and shrewd, but also subject to depressions and melancholy, and with a touch of sexual depravity. He probably died of some kind of sickness, but, according to different sources he may have been killed by Caligula, his successor, or Macro, the prefect of the imperial guard.

The third emperor, Caligula, is famous for his cruelty, debauchery and sexual perversions. His real name was Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, nicknamed 'Caligula', 'little boots' because when he was a boy used to wear military boots while accompanying his father on military campaigns in Germania. He suffered from epilepsy and was a very extravagant character. He is famous for his tempestuous sex life. He was killed in 41 AD, by Cassius Chaerea, an officer of the imperial guard. Chaerea, together with a few senators and knights, decided to kill Caligula on the last day of the games organized in memory of Augustus. The Emperor was struck while trying to reach the palace complex after the show. Chaerea was the first to stab him, then Sabinus, another officer, and finally the other plotters. They stabbed him like savages, carrying on even after he was dead.

Claudius, Caligula's uncle, was proclaimed emperor shortly afterwards. He was 51 years old. Before then, he had been considered as a somewhat unworldly scholar who stumbled over his words and could not walk properly. However, he developed into a good emperor. He tried to build a good relationship with the Senate, but whenever he thought his life was in danger, he was capable of being merciless. In fact, he was ruled by his fear of being murdered. His fourth wife was Valeria Messalina, whose debauched sexual appetites made her famous through the centuries. His fifth wife was Agrippina, Nero's mother. Claudius, in 54 AD, died in mysterious circumstances. According to Tacitus, Agrippina was the instigator of a plot which caused the emperor's death by poisoning. She did it probably because she was afraid Claudius would appoint his son by Messalina, Britannicus, as his heir to the throne instead of Nero, her own son. The latter one was proclaimed emperor immediately after.

Nero has gone down in history as one of the most cruel and depraved emperors. His administration was characterized by treachery and murder. A highly intelligent young man, tutored by Seneca, soon after his accession to the throne he revealed his true nature. A long line of murders within his own family ensued: his stepbrother Britannicus, his mother Agrippina, and his two wives, Octavia and Poppaea Sabina. The latter one, while pregnant, was kicked to death by Nero himself, because she had come home late from the chariot races. During his reign, a great fire almost destroyed Rome. In July 64 AD, an enormous conflagration reduced to ashes a large part of the city. Nero blamed the Christians and started persecuting them. In 68 AD, Julius Vindex, governor of Gallia Lugdunensis, rebelled against him. He was supported by Galba, the governor of Hispania Tarraconensis. In Rome, many senators allied themselves with the rebels. Nero knew he had no way out and decided to take his own life. He left Rome together with Epaphroditus, one of his freedmen, and Sporus, his 'wife' (a man Nero had castrated and married), and took refuge in Phaon's villa, between Via Salaria and Via Nomentana. He asked his companions to kill him, but they refused. Then, he jabbed the dagger into his throat, but was given the fatal blow by Epaphroditus. He was the last emperor of the Julio-Claudian family. New men would try to occupy the now empty throne.