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ATTRIBUTED TO
ANTONIO AVERLINO CALLED

FILARETE

FLORENCE 1400 – ROME 1469

NERO

LAST QUARTER 15TH CENTURY

Bronze
Diameter 11,5 cm

Obverse: portrait of Nero in profile. Inscription: *NERO CLAUD IMP CAES AUG COSVIIPP*

Reverse: Nero sitting before a male nude emerging from inside a vase
Inscription: *SC* on either side of the figures and *NERO AUG* on the base

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The present medal forms part of a series of portrait medallions of Roman emperors (Julius Caesar, Nero, Hadrian, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius and Faustina) that were until recently attributed to the "Medallist of Roman Emperors". This mysterious artist has now been identified as Filarete on the basis of comparisons with other medals and plaquettes, in particular with the medallions inserted in the doors of Saint Peter's in Rome (1445).

Nero (37 – 68 AD) succeeded his stepfather Claudius as Roman emperor in 54. In 64 he initiated persecutions against Christians, whom he blamed for the Great Fire of Rome. In 68, upon his return from Greece where he had been participating in the Olympic Games, he was confronted with rebellions. The Senate declared him a public enemy and he committed suicide.

Our medal, of substantial dimensions, features a curious scene that has been interpreted as Nero witnessing the death of the philosopher Seneca, his tutor and advisor, who had been accused of plotting against him and was forced to commit suicide by cutting open his own veins in a bath. According to ancient sources the emperor was in fact not present at the death of Seneca but Filarete may have relied on a more fanciful account in Jacobus de Voragine *Legend Aurea*, which describes the suicide as taking place immediately after a confrontation between Nero and his tutor. Another version of the present medal was formerly in the Kress Collection and is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Filarete is mostly known today for his work as an architect, extent testimonies of which are the tower on the façade of the Castello Sforzesco and the Ospedale Maggiore in Milan as well as the Duomo in Bergamo. He trained in Florence under Lorenzo Ghiberti and in 1445 worked in Rome for Pope Eugenius IV who commissioned him to make the bronze doors of Saint Peter's. In 1445 Piero de' Medici introduced him to the court of Francesco Sforza in Milan and he remained in that city until 1465. There, between 1460 and 1464, he wrote the 25 books of the Treatise of Architecture that he dedicated to the Duke of Milan. The treatise includes the plan for the city of Sforzinda, the first ideal town of the Renaissance to be illustrated and planned in detail. After his Milanese sojourn he worked for various courts, going to Florence in 1466 and to Venice the following year.