

History's first serial killer A woman by the name Locusta is history's first serial killer

Locusta was born in the first century A.D. in one of the outer provinces of Rome called Gaul, in what is now current France. Her early years in the countryside gave her the chance to learn quite a lot about herbal lore and all the plants around her. Upon her arrival in Rome, she quickly and efficiently understood the context and atmosphere of the city-state. People in Rome were characterized by two main things: greed and ambition. Many Romans at the time made murder their easy way to get rid of political rivals and wealthy relatives, but it had to look like the victim died from natural causes. After Locusta understood everything, she started providing people with her knowledge and expertise, becoming a professional poisoner. She was arrested often but somehow easily managed to get out thanks to her wealthy clients. Around 54 A.D., Locusta was summoned by Empress Agrippina, the fourth wife of the Emperor of the Roman Empire, Claudius. Agrippina had a son from a previous marriage, Nero, whom she wanted to put on the Roman throne. To do that, Claudius had to die. That's where Locusta's service came in handy. On the 13th of October 54 A.D., Claudius was successfully assassinated. Nero, 16 at the time, was named Emperor. As for Locusta, she was thrown into prison and given a death sentence. Young Nero had his rivals and opponents. His half-brother Britannicus was one of them. Nero knew Britannicus had a "claim" to the throne and was ready to do anything to dispose of him. A few months after becoming Emperor, Nero ordered Locusta's release from prison, already preparing a new plan for her services. Under Nero's protection, Locusta enjoyed a lush and thriving business. Britannicus was effectively dead, and so were many of the emperor's political rivals. Members of his own family have become fearful of him; afraid he might use Locusta to have them murdered. It is unknown how many people Locusta killed precisely. But, given the tumultuous political atmosphere that reigned in Rome then, one can only assume her victims would be in the dozens. Nero's reign would see itself abruptly destroyed by a coup orchestrated by Vindex, the governor of a Roman province, in 68 A.D. He fled Rome and eventually committed suicide. The emperor appointed after the coup, Galba, condemned Locusta for her role as a tool of the tyranny of the previous ruler. She was executed the same year.