The Alter-Imperial Paradigm

EMPIRE STUDIES & THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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BRILL
CHAPTER 4

The Date of the Book of Revelation pt. 1: The External and Internal Evidence

When the Revelation is stripped of actual historical references we are tempted to conclude that it is merely an expression of a mood or an eccentric worldview and is not 'about' anything.\(^1\)

Revelation's socio-historical context must be established to detect particular inflections of the imperial dialogue therein. While the Roman Empire's sovereign narrative is an important step forward, the date of Revelation offers further clarity to the Alter-Imperial paradigm. Since the subject narrative engages the sovereign narrative through 'points of conversation,' the different nuances and articulations of the Roman sovereign narrative by the various emperors must be respected. Thus, Revelation's date of composition elucidates the subject imagery's interaction with contemporary imperial propaganda.\(^2\)

There are two primary options for the date of the Apocalypse: the early-date (pre-70 CE) and the late-date (92–96 CE). Throughout the majority of the nineteenth century, the scholarly community rallied behind the pre-70 CE date for Revelation\(^3\) articulated by the Cambridge trio: F.J.A. Hort, B.F. Westcott, and J.B. Lightfoot.\(^4\) Generally speaking, this early-date option thought Revelation was written in response to the Neroic persecutions of the mid-60s CE and in preparation for the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. While the specific emperor varies, early-date advocates agree that the Apocalypse was written in the pre-70 CE time period.\(^5\)

Historically, though, the early-date option was not the dominant position of the church. As David Aune points out, "From the late second century AD until the nineteenth century, and again (after the interval of a century of criticism) in the twentieth century, the prevailing opinion has been that Revelation was written toward the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian."\(^6\) Indeed, the vast majority of modern scholars date Revelation's composition in the final years of Domitian's reign, between 92–96 CE.\(^7\)

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6. David E. Aune, Revelation (3 vols.; WBC 54A–54C; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997–1998), xlviii. Nevertheless, Aune, Revelation, xviii suggests the original composition was constructed earlier and a final edition was finished ca. 95–96 CE (possibly at the beginning of Trajan's reign). Writing in 1986, Bühler, Johannesapokalypse, 42, confidently states, "Der zeitliche Ansatz der Apokalypse vor 70 n. Chr. (Hadrian) ist heute allgemein ausgefeilt. An der Entstehung in den letzten Jahren Domsantian, also etwa 95 n. Chr., sollte nicht mehr gerungen werden."
With these options in place, this chapter examines the external and internal evidence to determine which date is most viable for Revelation’s composition. The initial part inspects the early Christian witness (external evidence) followed by an analysis of the internal evidence within the Apocalypse. With this data, a tentative date is suggested.

External Evidence: Early Christian Witness

While some early testimonies differ, the early Christian witness overwhelmingly supports the late-date option of Revelation (92–96 CE), including: Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215/17 CE), Origen (ca. 185–254 CE), Victorinus of Pettau (ca. 270 CE), Eusebius (ca. 263–339 CE), Jerome (ca. 347–420 CE), and others. The earliest and most significant voice is Irenaeus (d. 202 CE).

Born in ca. 125 CE in the city of Smyrna (Rev 2:8–9), Irenaeus writes in Adversus Haereses (ca. 180 CE) 5.30.3:

> We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For it was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian’s reign.

This statement interests both ends of the ‘date of Revelation’ spectrum. The late-date supporters posit this passage as evidence for Domitian’s reign; the early-date advocates criticize Irenaeus on two accounts: authorship and grammar.

As first suggested by John A.T. Robinson,7 early-date advocates argue that Irenaeus’ dating of Revelation is unreliable since he mistakenly equates the author of John’s Gospel with Revelation’s author.8 This argument is challenged.

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8 Quisp. 42 (cf. Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.23.5–10).
10 Apoc. 10.13. Cf. 17.10.
11 Hist. eccl. 3.17–18; 3.23.1.
12 Wü. 28.1.
13 Ps-Augs. Quaest. Verba et Nomen Fest. 76.2.
15 Irenaeus, Haer. 5.30.3 (Roberts), The Greek is preserved Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3.83 and 5.86.
16 Robinson, Reading, 221.
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The author intends to refer to the document alone. A similar problem occurs if visa est refers to John (masculine), because the grammar demands visa est in order for this to be the sole referent. Instead, Aune points out that visa est refers to "the nomen of the Antichrist." With this referent, the Latin translates, "For [the name of the Antichrist] was seen no very long time since, but almost in our own day, towards the end of Domitian's reign." This Latin translation supports the late date of the Apocalypse. The "nomen of the Antichrist" refers to Irenaeus' immediate context discussing the textual issue of 666 from the Apocalypse. Understanding this difficulty, J. Stolt suggests a corruption of the Latin text and, therefore, asserts, without any textual evidence, that it originally read "visus est." The 'antecedent' objection is also applied to the Greek ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς ἁρμάν. The argument is that the οὐκ ἦν in Ephesians 2:6 does not refer to the end of Domitian's reign as Revelation's date but as the time in which John was living. To such an objection, two responses can be made. First, Aune posits that the passive "he/she/it was seen" is an inappropriate way to "describe the length of a person's life; it is much more likely that ἡ ἡμέρα means 'it [i.e., 'the Apocalypse'] was seen,' referring to the time when the Apocalypse was 'seen' by John of Patmos." Significantly, John A.T. Robinson, an early-date advocate, affirms this Greek translation and the traditional reading of Irenaeus; the referent is the Apocalypse and not John.

Second, the context in which Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 3:17–3:18 quotes Irenaeus, Haer. 5:30.3 (in Greek) suggests οὐκ ἦν refers to the Apocalypse. In Hist. eccl. 3:17, Eusebius describes Domitian's cruel punishment of Rome's "notable men." In comparison to Nero's persecution of the Christians, Eusebius states that Domitian "was the second to promote persecution against us" (Luke, t.c.t). After recording Vespasian's abomination of any similar persecutions, Eusebius suggests that in Domitian's persecution "the Apocalypse is not to be put out of the mind, and it is our duty to live in the island of Patmos for his witness to the divine word." Eusebius then offers Irenaeus, Haer. 5:30.3 as evidence for this tradition. Subsequently, Eusebius argues that Domitian...
persecutions are also described in non-Christian writings. Therefore, Eusebius does not see ἡ ἐπαφὴ του θεοῦ as a reference to the life-span of John; he interprets ὡς ἐπαφὴ to the Apocalypse received on the island of Patmos by John during a period of persecution under Domitian.

Thus, there are no adequate reasons to disregard the traditional interpretation of Irenaeus, Hær. 5.30.3: the book of Revelation was composed at the end of Domitian's reign. The evidence of the early Christian witness to the date of Revelation, therefore, is overwhelmingly in favor of the late-date tradition (92–96 CE). To quote F.J.A. Hort, an early-date proponent, "If external evidence alone could decide, there would be a clear preponderance for Domitian."

Internal Evidence: Attempts to Overturn the External Evidence

The early Christian witness to the late-date option could be legitimately overturned if the internal evidence decidedly concludes a different composition date. Consequently, two questions guide the analysis of Revelation's internal evidence: [1] Does the internal evidence demand a specific date? and [2] Is there enough internal evidence to overturn the late-date presented by the external evidence? This part focuses on the three most influential texts for early-date advocates: Revelation 11:1–2; 13:18; and 17:9–11.

Revelation 11:1–2—Measuring the Temple

In Revelation 11:1–2, the Seer receives a reed and the instruction to, "Rise and measure the temple (τοῦ ναοῦ) of God and the altar and the ones worshipping in it. But jettison the courtyard outside of the temple and do not measure it, because it was given to the nations. They will trample the holy city for 42 months."

Early-date advocates argue that this admonition to "measure the temple" is clear evidence that the Apocalypse was composed before the temple was destroyed (i.e., pre-70 CE).

From this perspective, this text not only confirms the book's early date but also the book's purpose: to prepare the Christian community for the imminent destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, four lines of argumentation suggest a different conclusion to the imagery.

First, in Revelation, temple (τοῦ ναοῦ) imagery always refers to a heavenly temple accessible only to God and his faithful followers (including angels). In Revelation 3:7, the church in Philadelphia is told, "I will make the one conquering (ὁ ναὸς) a pillar in the temple (τοῦ ναοῦ) of my God [in heaven]." In 7:15, the great multitude in heaven worship before the throne of God "day and night in his [heavenly] temple (τοῦ ναοῦ)." After the seventh trumpet in 11:19 (the same chapter as the text in question), "the temple (τοῦ ναοῦ) of God in heaven" is opened revealing the ark of his covenant. Again, in 14:7, 17 and 15:5, 6, 8, the temple is specifically labeled as being in heaven (14:7; 15:5), but this time, angels emerge from it with commands (14:25) and tools (15:6) for judgment. In 16:1, a "loud voice" comes from the same heavenly temple commanding the seven angels to pour out the seven bowls of judgment on the earth. After the final bowl (16:7), the same voice from the heavenly temple (16:1) declares, "It is done!"

Finally, τοῦ ναοῦ occurs in Revelation 21:22 in reference to the new heaven and the new earth: "I did not see a temple (τοῦ ναοῦ) in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (τοῦ ναοῦ)."

In Revelation, τοῦ ναοῦ consistently designates a 'heavenly' temple only accessible to God and his faithful followers (including angels). If Revelation 11:1–2, then, refers to a temple on earth in the city of Jerusalem before its destruction in 70 CE, it would be anomalous at best and careless at worst. Instead, the temple in Revelation 11:1–2 should be regarded with the same definition of τοῦ ναοῦ found everywhere else in the Apocalypse: a heavenly temple only accessible to God and his faithful followers (including angels).
Second, the predominant parallel to the imagery of Revelation 16:1–2 is Ezekiel 40–48.39 In the preceding contexts of these two passages, both seers are commanded to eat a scroll (Ezek 3:3; Rev 10:9)40 and to deliver a prophetic message to God’s people (Ezek 3:4; Rev 10:11). After a symbolic action communicates the message in both passages,41 a striking shift occurs between the two texts. In Ezekiel 41–17, the prophet constructs a representation of Jerusalem under siege, foreshadowing the proclamations of impending judgment on the city (Ezek 5–12) and the destruction of the temple.42 The logical progression for the imagery and language of Revelation 16:1–2, then, would seem to parallel Ezekiel 4 and the context that follows (i.e., the siege and destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem). This progression would strongly support the early-date interpretation and purpose of Revelation: to prepare Christians for the siege and destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem (66–70 CE). But instead, John’s language and imagery in Revelation 16:1–2 parallels Ezekiel 40–48.

In both passages, the temple is measured (μετρεῖ [—Rev 11:1; Ezek 40:3b [LXX]]) by an agent of God (an angelic figure in Ezek 40:3b, and John in Rev 11:1). Both agents are given a “reed” (χόλας [—Rev 11:1; Ezek 40:3b [LXX]]) as the measuring device for the temple. In both passages, the measuring of the temple communicates the security and safety provided by God’s presence.43 Significantly, in Ezekiel 40–48, the temple’s measurement is envisioned when no temple in Jerusalem existed; it had been destroyed for over a decade.44 So why would Revelation 16:1–2 bypass Ezekiel 4 and instead parallel Ezekiel 40–48? The answer to this question comes in another parallel with Ezekiel: John is told to measure the temple at a time when the temple did not exist.45

Third, the title “the holy city” (τῆς πόλεως τῆς ἁγίας) in Revelation 11:2 distinguishes this image from “the great city” (τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγαλῆς) in 11:8,

39 See Beale, Revelation, 533; Ford, Revelation, 168, 173; Boxall, Revelation, 159–61; Mounce, Revelation, 213–216.
40 Rev 10:9b, “... in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey” (ἐν τῷ στόματί ὑμῶν ἡ γλώσσα ὡς μελί) and Ezek 3:3b, “... in my mouth it was as sweet as honey” (ἐν τῷ στόματί μου ὡς μέλις γλώσσα).[LXX].
41 Bauckham, Cāmer, 107.
43 See Rev 1:10–17; 21:2; Sam 8:14; 1Kgs 8:17; Jer 32:30–40; Zech 1:6; Ezek 40:42.

referring to Jerusalem. Specifically, “the great city” connotes rebelliousness against God whereas “the holy city” indicates faithfulness. In 16:19, the seventh bowl is poured out and “the great city” (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγαλῆ) splits into three parts collapsing the “cities of the nations.” The next phrase is, “Babylon the great was remembered by God who gave her the wine cup of his fury and wrath.” Rebellion Babylon and “the great city” are connected throughout the Apocalypse. In 19:1, the harlot is defined as “the great city” (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγαλῆ) and in 18:21, 26, and 18 the kings of the earth, the merchants, and the seamen all lament, “Woe, woe, the great city (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγαλῆ), Babylon the strong city!”44 Climactically, in 18:21, a mighty angel proclaims everlasting judgment on “Babylon the great city (ἡ μεγαλῆ πόλις).” While the city differs in Revelation 11:8 (“... the great city [τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγαλῆς] which is symbolically called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified”),47 rebellion against God is still present.

The moniker “the holy city,” however, carries the opposite meaning: faithfulness to God. After Revelation 11:2, the title is found in Revelation 12:2, “And I saw the holy city (ὁ ἁγιός τῆς λύκων τῆς Δαφνίου), the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God having been prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Again, in 21:10, John describes, “And [the angel] showed me the holy city (ὁ ἁγιός τῆς Δαφνίου), Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” The final occurrence of “the holy city” is in 22:39, “And if anyone might take away from the words of this book of prophecy, God will take away his share of the tree of life and the holy city (τῆς πόλεως τῆς Δαφνίου). ...” Thus, every occurrence of “the holy city” connotes intimacy and faithfulness to God in contradistinction to the rebelliousness of “the great city.”

The incongruity of these two titles throughout Revelation suggests a sharp distinction between the image of 11:2 (“the holy city”) and the image of 11:8 (“the great city”). Since 11:8 clearly states that “the great city” is “where also their Lord was crucified” (i.e., Jerusalem), “the holy city” in 11:2 is not the city of Jerusalem. This further deteriorates the early-date assertion that Revelation 11:1–2 mandates a standing temple in the city of Jerusalem on the precipice of siege and destruction at the time of Revelation’s composition.

Fourth, disregarding the previous three arguments, even if Revelation 11:1–2 referred to the temple’s destruction, why would this necessitate a shift in Revelation’s date? For example, Revelation 12 depicts a pregnant woman crying

46 Rev 18:20. Rev 18:21, 26 each begin with “Woe, woe, the great city...” but do not include “Babylon the strong city,” although the reference is still Babylon. In Rev 19:1, the seamen ask, “What city is like the great city?”
47 Emphasis added.
The number 666 is found in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts.58 However, two other numbers emerge in the manuscript corpus: 66559 and 616.60 While 665 has been sufficiently dismissed through scribal error,61 the 616 tradition is more difficult to jettison. First, early attestation for 616 is quite strong. In addition to the late 3rd c. CE to early 4th c. CE document known as p45,62 Irenaeus acknowledges the existence of the 616 tradition as early as 180 CE. After describing 666, Irenaeus writes:

I do not know how it is that some have erred following the ordinary mode of speech, and have vitiated the middle number in the name, deducting the amount of fifty from it, so that instead of six decades they will have it that there is but one... Others then received this reading without examination; some in their simplicity, and upon their own responsibility, making use of the number expressing one decade...63

Although Irenaeus considers 616 erroneous and spurious, he demonstrates its strong tradition even at the time of his writing. In light of this evidence, J.N. Birksall concludes, "The reading 666 at 13:18 is, then, ancient and widespread."64 Thus, any interpretation of 666 that cannot also explain the 616 variant should not be considered a viable option. The 'Caesar Neron' option accounts for both numbers: 666 (as seen above) and 616. The Latin form of 'Caesar Neron' is rendered 'Caesar Nero.' If this moniker is transliterated into Hebrew (יְרֵאָם), the numerical value equals 616. So, 'Caesar Nero' can explain both 666 and 616. This conclusion leads early-date advocates to suggest that Revelation cryptically gives the modern audience a clue to its date through

Stauffer, "666," in Conscientia Neotestamentica (Lund: crk Gledrup, 1947), 237–244 argues that the Greek usual titles of Domitian (88–96 CE) abbreviated on some coins as A Kai ΗΟΜΗΣ ΣΕΒ ΕΕ (the AE of 666). See Barclay, "Great Themes," 286 for other figures in modern history.

65 665 is found in 8 A 43 66 204 205 AndreasByzantine: 66 204 665, with only minor spelling differences in these manuscripts.

66 665 is found in f1 66 665, 666.

67 616 is found in C arm 4 Tey 853 (PGreg 4499).

68 Scale, Revelation, 725 (n. 298).


70 Nuer, 5:203 (Roberts).

71 Birksall, "Irenaeus," 352. See also Zahn, Offenbarung, 2463–2478.
the ‘mark of the beast.’ Nevertheless, the ‘Caesar Nero(n)’ interpretation of the beast’s number is inadequate for at least five reasons.

First, no early church documents interpret 666 as ‘Caesar Nero’ or even just ‘Nero.’ In fact, David Brady concludes that this option ‘appears originally to have been suggested independently by four German scholars, each claiming priority.’ These four scholars wrote from 1821-1837, which makes the development of this option quite late.

Second, while there is early testimony of Nero as the cipher of 666, the methodology drastically differs from the Latin ‘Caesar Nero’ option above. In ca. 438 CE, the Liber Genealogus document solves the 666 cipher by adding up the numerical value of the letters in the Latin word for ‘Antichrist’ (= 154) and then multiplying by four, since Nero has four letters in his Latin name. The number acquired is 624. Thus, Nero was referred to as a solution for 666 at a somewhat early date (5th c. CE), but the methodology is significantly different from the modern Nero option.

Third, the ‘Caesar Nero’ option does not explain why 666 (a more difficult reading) would occur later than 666 (a less difficult reading). It only offers another name, among many, to explain the enigmatic number through creative manipulation. No explanation is offered for why a Latin-name-for-Nero’ interpretation (666) arises so early in contrast to a ‘Greek-name-for-Nero’ interpretation (666). The suggestion of an interpretative possibility for 666 does not show why 666 exists as a variant at all.

Fourth, why would Revelation use an honorific title (‘Caesar’) for Nero in a cipher? If it is a cryptic description of Nero only discernible to the Christian community, then why call him ‘King Nero’ instead of ‘Infuled Nero,’ ‘Donkey Nero,’ or some other pejorative label? The honorific ‘Caesar Nero’ for 666 (or 666) is awkward at best and counterproductive at worst given the overall trajectory of the book thus far, not to mention the material that follows.

Fifth, disregarding the previous four arguments, even if 666 (616) refers to Nero, why would this necessitate a shift in Revelation’s date? As in the case of Revelation 12:1–2, a reference to a past event (like Jesus’ birth in Revelation 12) does not demand a date concurrent with the historical allusion. Thus, if Revelation 13:18 does allude to ‘Caesar Nero(n),’ which is unlikely, a date change is still not necessary.

Revelation 17:9–11—The Seven Kings

In Revelation 17, the Seer is invited to view the punishment of the great harlot (17:3). John is carried away in the Spirit to the desert where the harlot is seated on a beast with seven heads and ten horns (17:3-4). Written on the woman’s forehead is “Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth” (17:5). Astonished at the sight (17:6), John, like other apocalyptic visionaries, receives an explanation from the attendant angel (17:7). In Revelation 17:9–11, the angel states:

This calls for a mind having wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills where the woman sits. And they are seven kings: five fell, one is, the other has not yet come. And when he comes, it is necessary for him to stay a little while. And the beast, who was and is now is, is an eighth [king]. He is from the seven and goes to destruction.

Despite manifold interpretative proposals, early-date advocates designate these three verses as “the crux of the problem” and “the leading objective evidence for Revelation’s date of composition.”

The early-date perspective asks two primary questions of this text: [1] With which emperor should the list of ‘seven kings’ begin? and [2] Should the list include Galba, Otho, and Vitellius? Once the initial question is answered, the five ‘fallen’ emperors (17:10a) are counted, and contingent upon the answer to the second question, the emperor that ‘is’ (17:10b) is selected, which ostensibly gives Revelation’s date. The answers to these two questions divide the early-date advocates into three ‘reigning emperor’ categories: Nero (54–68 CE), Galba (8 June 68–15 January 69 CE), and Vespasian (69–79 CE).


66 This does not mean that the modern option is incorrect, but that the modern option is just that modern.

67 Another possible solution to the 666/666 conundrum is the Greek word for ‘beast’ (θηρίον) and its genitive form (θηρίου). See Wood, “Simplifying,” 138–140.

68 Weiss, Offenbarung, 22. In addition, the identification of 666 (616) with a Roman Emperor reduces the symbol of the ‘beast(s)’ down to the Roman Empire alone. The beast imagery in Revelation, however, far exceeds the Roman Empire in its scope and application. For discussion on Rome’s relationship with the beast imagery, see Chapter 7 below.

69 Bell, “Date,” 97.

70 Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., The Beast of Revelation (Powder Springs, Ga.: American Vision, 2002), 377 [his emphasis]. Wilson, “Early Christians,” 170–171 offers a helpful chart listing six different interpretative categories for this passage. Incredibly, these six categories are still an oversimplification of the variations within each category. See also Horn, Apocalypse, xxvi; Robinson, Refutation, 242–248; Rowland, Heaven, 403.
Some early-date proponents begin their list of ‘seven kings’ with Julius Caesar based on the precedent set by Suetonius in the *Lives of the Caesars*, Sib. Or. 5.12–51, and 2 Esd 11–12. With this starting point, the last of the five fallen kings is Claudius (41–54 CE) and Nero is the sixth king who ‘is’. The answer to the second question divides this camp into two additional groups: (1) those who see Galba as the seventh king ‘to come’; and (2) those who see Vespasian as the seventh king ‘to come’.

Other early-date proponents reject Julius Caesar as the starting point and appeal to Tacitus *Hist.* 1.1, which, some say, presents Augustus as the first emperor. With this starting point, the last of the five fallen kings is Nero, but the sixth king is only determined by the answer to the second question: Should the list include Galba, Otho, and Vitellius? If the answer to this question is ‘yes’, then Galba is the sixth king that ‘is’ and Otho is the seventh king ‘to come’; if the answer to this question is ‘no’, then Vespasian is the sixth king that ‘is’ and Titus is the seventh king ‘to come’.

These three emperor options for early-date advocates (i.e., [1] Nero, [2] Galba, or [3] Vespasian) are addressed in reverse order, starting with the least supported option (Vespasian). While some of the objections to the Galba option could be leveled as well, the primary point of contention for the Vespasian option is the answer to the second question: Should the list include Galba, Otho, and Vitellius? If it is more viable to include these three ‘civil war’ emperors in the list, then the Vespasian option suffers as a legitimate conclusion.

The primary argument for the omission of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius comes from the phrase in Suetonius, *Vesp.* 1 that regards them as “rebels in a revolution” (rebellen tria trium principum) instead of emperors in power. Suetonius’s point, however, is not to discredit the legality of their reign as justified emperors but to describe the instability of the Roman Empire during the tumultuous period of their legitimate reign. There is no indication that Suetonius considered these three rulers as anything less than emperors of Rome. Indeed, all three are featured in individual chapters in Suetonius’s book entitled *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.

This affirmation of Galba, Otho, and Vitellius is not unique to Suetonius. As Albert Bell remarks, “No ancient writer of whom I have knowledge omits these three men from his account of Roman history.” For instance, 2 Esd 113–123, an apocalypse written in the reign of Domitian, depicts an eagle-like beast emerging from the sea with twelve wings and three heads (111). In the vision’s interpretation (120–51), this eagle is identified as the fourth kingdom of Daniel and symbolizes the Roman Empire (121). The twelve wings of the eagle stand for twelve successive kings that reign “one after another” (1241, Charlesworth). Usually the second king, who reigns “for a longer time than any other of the twelve” (1245, Charlesworth), is interpreted as Augustus, who reigned for almost 42 years (27 BCE–14 CE) — the second longest is Tiberius at about 23 years (14 CE–37 CE). In 1222–28, the eagle’s ‘three heads,’ also a part of the twelve wings, are interpreted as the Flavian dynasty. Consequently, the twelve emperors in this vision contain Galba, Otho, and Vitellius just like Suetonius’s account of *The Lives of the Twelve Caesars*.

Still further, Eutropius (*Breviarium ab urbe condita* 7.12, 16–18) includes the three emperors, Plutarch (*Galb.* 27.6) states that the Senate declared these rulers *Caesar* and *Augustus*, and even numismatic evidence from seven different cities in Asia Minor confirm that these rulers were recognized across the empire as the emperors of Rome. Thus, there is no historically viable reason to omit Galba, Otho, and Vitellius from the list of Roman emperors, thereby casting significant doubt on the Vespasian option for early-date advocates.

Identifying Galba as the king who ‘is’ (Rev 17:10) falters through two lines of argumentation. First, this option begins with Augustus following Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.1; *Annals* 1.1) who ostensibly omits Julius Caesar because he ruled before...
sufficiently conclude that the Galba option for Revelation 17:9–11 is inadequate to overturn the early Christian witness to a late date.

Nero as the sixth king (17:10a) avoids some of the pitfalls of the previous two options—it includes Galba, Otho, and Vitellius⁸⁸ and it begins with Julius Caesar as the first emperor. Nevertheless, the Nero option suffers from the presence of the Nero myth in Revelation. At some point after Nero's suicide on 9 June 68 c.e.,⁹⁷ rumors circulated that Nero had either not died and escaped to the East to wait for the opportune time to return to his throne (redux) or, even more audacious, that he died but would resurrect with the same result (redivivus).⁹⁸ In the decades that followed, three different figures claimed to be a recovered Nero (redux): [1] 69 c.e. in the reign of Vitellius,⁹⁹ [2] 80 c.e. in the reign of Titus,¹⁰⁰ and [3] 89 c.e. in the reign of Domitian.¹⁰¹

While all three figures claimed to be Nero, none of them claimed to be a resurrected Nero (redivivus) but a Nero who did not commit suicide and has now returned (redux).¹⁰² In fact, Adela Yarbro Collins writes:

It is important to note that in the references to the Nero legend in the Greek and Latin authors there is no indication that the legend involved the return of Nero from the dead. The presupposition of this form of the legend was that Nero had not in fact died, but was living somewhere in secrecy, preparing to regain power... the persistence of the belief is not surprising since Nero was only 31 or 32 when he died in 68.⁹⁶

As time passed, the Nero redivivus tradition would likely increase, given that a longer period of time would necessitate a redivivus and not simply a redux.

Revelation 13:3, 12, 14; and 17:9–11 describe both Nero redux and redivivus myths for the beast from the sea. Revelation 13:3 portrays a "blow of death" (ἐπὶ ἀκροκόμῳ) to a head of the beast. After a miraculous healing

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⁸⁸ Otho as the eighth king 'to come' is bit difficult given his reign only lasts three months (15 January 69–16 April 69 c.e.).
⁸⁹ Suet., Nero 49.1–4.
⁹⁰ Tac., Hist. 2.8–9; Augustine, Civ. 20.33–34; Sib. Or. 4.103–124; 5.28–34; 55.90–120; 5.154, 214–227, 364–384; cf. Dio Chrysostom, Or. 21.10.
⁹¹ Tac., Hist. 2.8–9.
⁹² Dio Cass. 60.14.3; cf. Tac., Hist. 12.2.
⁹³ Suet., Nero 57.2.
⁹⁴ Wilson, "Problem," 529.
texts. Revelation communicates through symbolic imagery, especially symbolic numbers. In addition to the wide array of numbers throughout Revelation, the number seven is used fifty-five times. In Jewish literature,
the number seven was often associated with ‘completeness’ or ‘totality’ (e.g., the complete cosmos was created in its totality in seven days in Genesis 1). Revelation adopts this Jewish interpretation for the number seven throughout the entire book: the slain lamb of Revelation 5:6 has “seven horns and seven eyes” (complete power and total knowledge), the earthquake of Revelation 11:13 kills “seven thousand people” (the complete number of deaths), and even the three sets of seven judgments (seals, trumpets, bowls) indicate the complete and total judgment of God. Consistently in Revelation, the number seven symbolizes ‘completeness’ or ‘totality.’ It would be anomalous, then, to surmise that the number seven in Revelation 17 follows a different interpretative methodology (‘counting’) than the number seven in the rest of Apocalypse (‘symbolism’). Moreover, John was not obligated by history to select the number seven for the kings of Revelation 17, but rather, the number seven alludes to Daniel’s apocalyptic vision. In Daniel 7, four beasts emerge from the sea (7:2–3): the lion-like beast (7:4), the bear-like beast (7:5), the leopard-like beast with four heads (7:6), and the fourth beast adorned with ten horns (7:7). These four beasts, interpreted by the attendant angel as four kingdoms (7:17), instruct the beast imagery in Revelation 13:1–3—a beast comes out of the sea (Dan 7:2–3) with ten horns (Dan 7:7) and resembles a leopard, a bear, and a lion (Dan 7:6–7). Significantly, the seven heads of the beast in Revelation 13:1—three of which are the seven kings in Revelation 17:9–10—also parallel Daniel 7 and the four beasts who have a total of seven heads (i.e., one head for the first, second, and fourth


107 All three sets of seven judgments brings the world to its complete destruction—seals (Rev 6:1–4), trumpets (Rev 8:1–4, esp. v. 8), and bowls (Rev 15:1–21).

108 Mounce, Revelation, 21, adds, “Since the seven heads are also seven hills (17:9) and the eighth is one of the seven (17:10), it is probably unsafe to base a literal computation on what appears to be a highly symbolic figure.” It is often objected that the number seven has a historical referent due to the fact that there were seven churches in Asia Minor addressed in Revelation 2–3. Caird, Revelation, 281 returns, “No one supposes that he wrote to seven churches because there were only seven in the province of Asia, nor even because there were only seven in his diocese, a diocese so erratic as to contain Ephesus but not Magnesia or Tralles, Laodicea but not Colossae or Hierapolis.”

beasts and four heads for the third beast). John did not therefore choose the number seven to parody the amount of rulers in the empire; the number seven was chosen for him by one of his sources, Daniel 7. Given the significant flaws and methodological peculiarities in each emperor option, Revelation 17:9–11 fails to offer conclusive evidence for an early-date of Revelation’s composition. Thus, the early Christian witness to a Domitianic date remains unassailed.

Conclusion

The early Christian witness to the date of Revelation decisively points to the end of Domitian’s reign (92–96 CE). If conclusive internal evidence dictates a different date of composition, then the early Christian witness should be disregarded. However, the internal evidence offered by early-date advocates (i.e., Rev 11:1–2; Rev 13:18; and Rev 17:9–11) proves insufficient. In the absence of any internal evidence to the contrary, the tentative conclusion of a Domitianic date is pursued further. The next chapter considers the late-date in its socio-historical context specifically addressing the alleged persecution of Christians under Domitian.