

THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN EPHEBUS AND THE DATE OF REVELATION, AGAIN

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Abstract

The importance of the date of Revelation looms large in Paul Trebilco's reconstruction of the early Christian community in Ephesus. Trebilco accepts a late date around C.E. 95 to support his hypothesis. This essay examines Trebilco's evidence for a late date and shows its 'certainty' is much more tenuous than Trebilco credits. Rather, this evidence is often contradictory and circular. Alternative interpretations of the data are considered with additional factors examined. The essay concludes that the historical and literary evidence instead favors an early date of around C.E. 69 rather than the late date. Such a finding would radically change the locus of Trebilco's proposed Revelation community. It would also provide a richer picture of the Christians in Ephesus and Asia during a period in which Trebilco has a lacuna in his projected trajectory of early Christian development.

Introduction

Paul Trebilco, in his newly published *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, has reopened discussion of the date of the Apocalypse by stating, 'Revelation was almost certainly written towards the end of Domitian's reign' (2004, 347). Trebilco bases this conclusion on four factors that he outlines in a section called "Dating". His otherwise extensive documentation is absent in this discussion because he offers little evidence to support his assertion. However, the date of ca. C.E. 95-96 serves as a foundation for his reconstruction of the Christian community in Ephesus in the late first century. This paper will seek to interact with Trebilco's four

factors as well as propose a number of others that must be considered in this question of dating.¹

Two periods have emerged as probable for the historical setting of Revelation-after Nero's reign (ca. C.E. 69) and at the end of Domitian's reign (ca. C.E. 95).² During the 19th century the early date was favored by scholars, while in the 20th century, following the publication of commentaries by Charles, Swete, and Beckwith, the latter became preferred (Wilson 1993, 587). This disparity in dating is noteworthy and presupposes two different periods within the Asian church during which Revelation was written. The conclusion of Michaels (1992, 46) that interpreters should learn to "live with a considerable degree of uncertainty about its date and historical setting" is perhaps realistic, yet it is critically unsatisfying. Hemer (1986, 3), on the other hand, says that "the problem of date is a crucial factor in the historical *Sitz im Leben*".

Feuillet (1965, 92-93) argues for a curious combination of early and late dating. John, while actually writing during Domitian's reign, fictitiously antedates his prophecy to the late 60s. He does not do this to deceive his readers or to suggest his prophecies are *ex eventu*; rather "He merely wishes to take a step backward, and to place himself under Vespasian before the destruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple, in order to see the theological significance of this event, the gravest crisis which the Christian community has had to face to date". Needless to say, few interpreters have accepted Feuillet's hypothesis.

The question of date is closely tied to that of authorship. Irenaeus' testimony (*Haer* 5.30.3) that the Revelation was "seen" at the end of the reign of Domitian has been generally accepted today. Schüssler Fiorenza accepts this date unquestioningly for her literary and historical presuppositions, and in her 1991 commentary gives only a limited discussion on the date, using the "tradition" of Irenaeus as evidence (1991, 17). Trebilco (2004, 294n. 4) likewise cites Irenaeus' remark as supporting a

1 Much of the material for this paper is drawn from the opening background chapter of my Unisa doctoral thesis, "A pie in a very bleak sky? Analysis and appropriation of the promise sayings in the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3" (1996). I wish to thank Prof H. A. Lombard for his labours in serving as my promoter.

2 Extensive discussions on Revelation's date can be found in D. Guthrie (1990, 948-62), J. A. du Rand (1991, 228-34), and S. Smalley (1994, 40-50).

late date.³ However, Irenaeus also states that the author of the Gospel and the Apocalypse are one and the same, and that the author is John the disciple of Jesus and one of the Twelve. These conclusions Schüssler Fiorenza, Trebilco, and many other critical scholars have found untenable.⁴ If Irenaeus' comments are found critically unacceptable on two of three counts, his third comment regarding date should likewise be critically examined (cf. Wilson 1993, 597). This is particularly true when other external evidence (e.g., Tacitus *Hist.* and Suetonius *Vitae*) provides no corroboration for the widespread persecution under Domitian of which Eusebius later speaks. Although Irenaeus' testimony seems incontrovertible, F. J. A. Hort, following Weiss, makes this plausible explanation:

Certainly at the beginning of Vespasian's reign Domitian, who first represented him at Rome, bore a hateful character (Suet *Dom* 1)... If Domitian in his youth, not yet emperor, was regarded as the future head of the beast, he would in a very true sense be a main subject of the Apocalypse, and the best coming representative of the hostile forces against which St John represented the Church as contending: and it is conceivable that if this were known and remembered, the association of his name with the book might by a possible confusion, after Domitian had come to be known as a persecutor, pass into a tradition that the book was written in his reign (1980, xxix).

1. The Name “Babylon”

Trebilco's first factor in dating is John's use of the symbolic name “Babylon” (14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21) for Rome. He (2004, 294) says that this “points decisively to a date after 70 CE”. Yarbro Collins (1984, 58) also sees this as a “weighty internal indication of the date”. “Babylon” is also found in other contemporaneous Jewish literature (4 *Ezra* 3:1-2, 28; 15:46; 16:1; 2 *Bar.* 11:1, 67:7; *Sib. Or.* 5.143, 159). However, it is doubtful that John learned this symbolic name from these sources, given his preference for OT traditions, such as those in Jeremiah. Yet Yarbro Collins

3 J. du Rand (1991, 232) cites Irenaeus' testimony as “the strongest external witness”.

4 Trebilco (2004, 293) adds a fresh complication to the discussion of Revelation's authorship. Whereas Papias gave us two Johns, Trebilco offers three. The author was neither the apostle nor the elder (whom he identifies as the author of the Gospel and the three letters); rather “we cannot identify ‘John’ the author of Revelation with any other known figure”.

(1984, 58) thinks it highly unlikely that the name would have been used before Titus destroyed the temple, so this points to a date after C.E. 70.

Yarbrow Collins's argument seems impressive except for one oversight. She omits the reference to Babylon in 1 Pet 5:13, whose probable referent is also Rome. In a later discussion of persecution under Domitian, she writes (1984, 69): "First Peter clearly reflects some degree of persecution, but its date is uncertain. The allusion to Rome as Babylon shows that it was written after C.E. 70". J. R. Michaels (1988, lxiii) argues similarly regarding the dating of 1 Peter: "'Babylon' as a designation for Rome is not attested before C.E. 70, but becomes frequent in both Christian and Jewish sources after 70". A circular argument is evident here regarding the use of "Babylon". Revelation cannot be dated before 70 because 1 Peter and other documents are dated after 70, and 1 Peter cannot be dated before 70 because Revelation is dated after 70.⁵

A solution to the frequent usage of "Babylon" in texts after C.E. 70 might be its use in 1 Peter and Revelation if they are dated before 70. Indeed Michaels (1988, lxvi-lxvii) concludes his twelve page discussion of authorship, saying, "The traditional view that the living Peter was personally responsible for the letter as it stands has not been, and probably in the nature of the case cannot be, decisively shaken".

While W. M. Ramsay (1905, 282ff) argued for a late date of C.E. 80 for 1 Peter and Peter's death, the historical tradition dating Peter's martyrdom to the Neronian persecution of ca C.E. 65-66 seems more certain (Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 25.5-7; cf. Chase 1988, 3.769). This would place the writing of 1 Peter before C.E. 70 and thereby attest to the use of "Babylon" for Rome before the destruction of the temple, the precise conclusion which G. Edmundson arrives at in his Bampton Lectures (1913, 119-20). Perhaps the Christians in Rome, during their suffering under Nero, began to interpret prophetically the capital city as the new Babylon. Peter used this cipher when he addressed the suffering Christians in Asia Minor, including those in the province of Asia. John might have become familiar with the use of "Babylon" as a metaphor for Rome through 1 Peter or through contact with Roman Christians.

5 The common fallacies used in critical dating were rigorously exposed by J. A. T. Robinson in his conclusions in *Redating the New Testament* (1976, 336-51).

2. The Nero *Redivivus* Myth

The second factor named by Trebilco is the Nero *redivivus* myth. He (2004, 294) writes: “Nero died in 68, and the legend is attested in 69, but since Rev presupposes widespread knowledge of the legend, a somewhat later date seems to be required”. This so-called evidence has little basis in historical reality. After the suicide of Nero, many residents of the eastern provinces could not believe that this popular, yet despotic, emperor was in fact dead. An urban legend developed that the emperor’s enemies had engineered a conspiracy to stage the whole event and that Nero would return (Nero *redux*) after escaping to the East. The continued circulation of imperial edicts in Nero’s name continued to fuel such speculation. Those who accepted that Nero had died somehow developed the notion that he would return to life (Nero *redivivus*).

In July 69 the residents of Asia became alarmed over a report that Nero had come again. A mob soon gathered around his look-alike. The pretender, believed to be a slave from Pontus or a freedman from Italy, was forced to land on the Aegean island of Cythnus. There he was soon confronted by Calpurnius Asprenas, the newly appointed governor of Galatia and Pamphylia who was on his way to assume his new post. Calpurnius soon captured and killed “Nero”, and ordered that his body be displayed first in Ephesus before being taken to Rome (Tacitus, *Hist.* 2.8-9; John of Antioch, fr. 104; Suetonius, *Nero* 57). In 80 another pretender named Tarentius Maximus appeared in Asia. His attempt to depose Titus as emperor proved unsuccessful. A third pretender appeared around 88-89, but the Parthians were forced to hand him over to Domitian.

Trebilco agrees that the myth is attested in 69 but fails to mention that it was known at that time in Ephesus, the target of his study. The proximity of the other six cities in Asia would ensure that the news of the first “Nero *redivivus*” would spread to them in days. Hence no time lag is needed, and a later date for Revelation is not required.

3. The Use of the Phrase οἱ δώδεκα ἀπόστολοι

The third factor Trebilco uses to date Revelation after C.E. 80 is the use of οἱ δώδεκα ἀποστόλοι in 21:14. He (2004, 294) cites Aune that the phrase is not attested before 80-95, but never gives the source of that attestation. Aune, however, shows that the only other similar text in the NT is Matt 10:2: “the names of the twelve apostles” (οἱ δώδεκα ἀπόστολοι). But since

“there is consensus that this [80-95] is the most likely period within which the Gospel of Matthew was written”,⁶ Aune (1997, lxiv) concludes that Revelation must be written later as well. Once again a circular argument is introduced for dating purposes: Revelation cannot be dated earlier because Matthew is dated after 80 and vice versa. Robinson exposed the weakness of such argumentation decades ago:

What seemed to be firm datings based on scientific evidence are revealed to rest on deductions from deductions. The pattern is self-consistent but circular (1976, 3).

Aune’s “consensus” of Matthean scholars who argue for a later date is not monolithic either. In fact, in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, the same series in which Aune published his statements on Revelation, D. A. Hagner has written on Matthew:

There is thus good reason to take seriously the possibility of an early (i.e., pre-70) dating of the Gospel (with, for example, Gundry, Reicke, Robinson, and Wenham). The inclination toward an early date taken here, however, is just that and no more. It needs to be re-emphasized that the dogmatism of critical orthodoxy concerning a post-70 date is unwarranted (1993, lxxiv-lxxv).

Trebilco’s third factor for a late date is therefore disputable.

4. The Temple in Jerusalem

Trebilco’s final point mentions factors used by proponents of an early date, but that “can be interpreted plausibly against the background of Domitian’s reign” (2004, 294). He identifies these factors in footnote 6: (a) references to the temple and Jerusalem in 11:1-2, 8, suggesting that the temple is still standing, and (b) John’s reuse of earlier materials accounting for pre-70 features in the book. Again Trebilco provides no further discussion or documentation for these assertions, although it is clear that he is dependent on Aune’s commentary again here. The first factor will be discussed next with the second factor to be discussed in section 5.

6 Aune cites Kümmel and Davies-Allison as representative scholars who hold this position.

Source analysis of Revelation has noted the significance of 11:1-2 for dating. For John to measure the temple, it must have still been standing, hence indicating a date before 70. To allow for a late date, Charles (1920, 1.270) postulated that this was an earlier source which John incorporated into this vision. Robinson (1976, 242), on the other hand, sees this reference as certain evidence for his premise that Revelation was written before the temple's destruction.

The temple (*ναός*) is first mentioned in 7:15, where the great multitude martyred in the great tribulation is serving God continually in his temple. This temple is the heavenly reality of which the earthly temple was only a copy (cf. Heb 9:1ff). In the three other passages where the temple is mentioned (14:15-17; 15:5-6; 21:22), its location is in heaven. A related expression in 11:2, "holy city", does not reappear until 21:2 when John sees the New Jerusalem descending from heaven prepared as a bride (cf. 21:10; 22:19). According to Park (1995, 281), "the expression 'the holy city' is consistently used for the Heavenly Jerusalem rather than the earthly one".

Yet to interpret the temple/holy city imagery in 11:2 as heavenly is problematic. A key source for John here is Jesus' statement in the Lucan version of the Olivet Discourse: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled" (Luke 21:24). Vos (1965, 123) observes that John substitutes "holy city" for the Lucan "Jerusalem", concluding that this change "may indicate a symbolical implication of this passage". Mazzaferri (1989, 321) believes that "the new Jerusalem, not the old, is in view". He (1989, 322) then asks why the nations attack the city, answering that "the main reason is probably that John here reinterprets Jesus' original prophecy, Luke 21:24, in the light of the fall of old Jerusalem".

The temple/holy city imagery in Revelation speaks predominantly of a heavenly reality rather than an earthly one. But given John's multivalent use of imagery (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 183ff.), the physical temple and city might still be in view, especially because of the later reference to the great city "where also their Lord was crucified" (11:8). Mazzaferri's tentative conclusion that old Jerusalem has fallen seems unsubstantiated, given the ambivalence of the imagery. Yet for multivalence to work in a text, the alternatives must be viable. Gundry (1987, 258) is on target when he observes that "the adjective 'new' contrasts this Jerusalem with the present earthly one". It is therefore possible that this text was written before the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in C.E. 70.

5. The Seven Emperors

Trebilco's comment regarding "John's reuse of earlier materials accounting for pre-70 features in the book" is not developed. But again his dependence on Aune is evident, so we turn to Aune to understand what these "earlier materials" are. The discussion here revolves around 17:9-11, which is the primary internal evidence for dating in Revelation. However, little consensus exists among commentators regarding the identity of the $5+1+1=7+1=8$ emperors (cf. Beckwith 1919, 704-8). The major designations of the eight emperors are presented below, although each has additional permutations:

<u>Historic</u> ⁷	<u>Principate</u> ⁸	<u>Despotic</u> ⁹	<u>Roman</u> <u>Antichrist</u> ¹⁰	<u>Tyrannical</u> ¹¹	<u>Christological/</u> <u>Apocalyptic</u> ¹²
<i>Five Fallen</i>	<i>Five Fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>	<i>Five fallen</i>
1. Julius	1. Augustus	1. Augustus	1. Nero	1. Julius	1. Gaius
2. Augustus	2. Tiberius	2. Tiberius	2. Galba	2. Gaius	2. Claudius
3. Tiberius	3. Gaius	3. Gaius	3. Otho/Vitellius	3. Claudius	3. Nero
4. Gaius	4. Claudius	4. Claudius	4. Vespasian	4. Nero	4. Vespasian
5. Claudius	5. Nero	5. Nero	5. Titus	5. Domitian	5. Titus

7 The order in Suetonius; cf. Tacitus (*Ann.* 4.34; 13.3); Josephus (*Ant.* 18.32); *Sib. Or.* 5:12-51; and 4 *Ezra* 11-12. Giet (1957, 54) and Ford (1975, 290) follow 1-6 but opt for Vespasian as 7 and Titus as 8. Lightfoot (1889-90, 1.2.509), in interpreting the ten kings in *Barn.* 4:4, reckons the first king as Julius Caesar and the tenth as Vespasian.

8 Adopted by Robinson (1975, 243), Bell (1979, 93-102), and Rowland (1982, 403-13).

9 Adopted by Swete (1909, 220) and Charles (1920, 2.69); Hort (1908, xxix) opts for Domitian as 7.

10 Adopted by Turner (1912, 217) and Allo (1933, 281-82).

11 Adopted by Schüssler Fiorenza (1991, 97), who falls one emperor short by failing to list Claudius (cf. 1985, 42)

12 Christological adopted by Strobel (1963-64, 439-41). Schüssler Fiorenza (1985, 42) feels that this interpretation "finds its strongest support in Rev. itself", yet changes the identification in her 1991 commentary. Jewish apocalyptic adopted by Yarbro Collins (1984, 64) and du Rand (1991, 231).

<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>	<i>One is</i>
6. Nero	6. Galba	6. Vespasian	6. Domitian	6. Nerva	6. Domitian
<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>	<i>One not yet</i>
7. Galba	7. Otho	7. Titus	7. Unidentified	7. Trajan	7. Unidentified
8. Otho	8. Nero	8. Domitian	8. Unidentified	8. Unidentified	8. Unidentified

Boring (1989, 183; cf. Pretorius 1988, 127), because of such diverse identifications, has suggested that seven here is “a symbolic number standing for the whole line of Roman emperors (just as the ‘seven’ churches of chapters 2-3 represent the churches of Asia-and the world)”. While the number seven undoubtedly symbolizes the full sequence of Roman emperors (Bauckham 1993, 406-7), the historical reality of seven emperors underlies the tradition, even as seven churches existed. The beast who is the eighth is an emperor *redivivus* and is said to belong to the seven (Rev 17:11).

The “Historic” listing has strong literary backing. However, of the sources listed in its footnote, all date from the early second century except Josephus (ca. 93-94). Therefore they could not have influenced John directly, although their official sources and traditions might have. Rev 13:3 is a probable reference to Nero, the head with a mortal wound. Nero would be dead and could not be the reigning emperor. Therefore, this order is unlikely since Nero would be the reigning emperor (cf. Yarbro Collins 1984, 59).

Which emperor should begin the list has been a matter of dispute. Although Suetonius begins his list with Julius Caesar, the principate actually began with his adopted son Augustus. Augustus had a strong link to Asia through his slave Zoilos. In 39 B.C.E. the then Octavian influenced the senate to grant special status to Zoilos’ native Aphrodisias, near Laodicea. Around 35 B.C.E. he guaranteed the right of the Asian Jews to send the temple tax to Jerusalem. In 30 B.C.E. Octavian stopped in Asia on his return from Egypt. A year later he authorized the first Asian temple of the emperor cult in Pergamum and sponsored a sacred precinct for Roman citizens in Ephesus. Because of Augustus, the emperor cult had an early foothold in the province of Asia.

Around 9 B.C.E. Paulus Fabius Maximus, the proconsul of Asia, issued a letter to the *koinon* of Asia suggesting that Augustus’ birthday be made an

official holiday in the province as well as the beginning of the municipal new year (Lightfoot 1889-1890, 2.1.700-1). The *koinon* perfunctorily confirmed the proconsul's wishes, and the Asian calendar was changed. After the *koinon* issued the decree, the proconsul had it inscribed on a stele in both Greek and Latin and placed in the temple at Pergamum (Johnson et al. 1961, §142). The decree was apparently distributed throughout the province because copies have been found in five Asian cities.

Shortly before his death in C.E. 14 Augustus deposited an account of the things he had done (*rerum a se gestarum*; Suet *Aug* 101) with the Vestal Virgins. The three surviving texts of Augustus' *Res Gestae* have been found in Asia Minor-Ancyra, Pisidian Antioch, and Asian Apollonia. A copy of Augustus' deeds was probably also posted at the Augustan temple in Pergamum, as it was inscribed on the walls of its sister temple in Ancyra. Other copies of his deeds were likely to be found in other Asian cities, since such official correspondence would enter through the place of "First Landing"-Ephesus.

During Julius' lifetime the only provincial cities in the empire to issue coinage with his portrait were the Anatolian cities of Nicea and Lampsacus (Burnett et al. 1992, 1.38). The only Asian coinage to feature Julius was a posthumous issue from Apamea (2.769). However, the coming of the principate brought a major change to this pattern. "The portrait of the emperor pervades, though does not exclusively occupy, the obverses of provincial coinage" (1.38). Approximately two hundred provincial cities issued coins with Augustus' portrait. Speaking specifically of the province of Asia, Grant (1968, 75) writes: "In his reign seventy-three mints of the province (out of the ninety-seven for the whole peninsula) seem to have issued bronze coins". Such widespread attention given to Augustus in Asia suggests that in popular thinking he was considered the founder of the empire and hence its first emperor.

For his Christological interpretation Strobel (1963-64, 437) seeks to pinpoint the defining moment in Revelation: "für den Apokalyptiker bezeichnen Kreuz und Erhöhung das Telos des alten Äons in einem zugleich eminent historischen Sinne". He arbitrarily decides to begin his list not with Tiberius, the emperor who was then reigning, but with the first emperor after the exaltation, Gaius (Caligula). There is another Christological perspective to be considered, however. The birth of the male child (12:5) is the earliest historical reference in Revelation, and the birth and exaltation are described as a unified event. After the war in heaven the dragon is flung to earth where

his first activity is to attempt to devour the son (vv. 3-4). This perhaps refers to Herod's attempt to kill Jesus (Matt 2:13-18). Jesus was born of course during the reign of Augustus (Luke 2:1; ca. 4 B.C.E.). John's Christological perspective appears to begin with Christ's incarnation, not with his exaltation. Given the above evidence, we conclude that John's list begins with Augustus, not Julius Caesar or Gaius.

Some interpreters committed to a Domitianic date have recognized the problem of the sixth king being Domitian. Thus it has been suggested that the three civil war emperors should be omitted. However, all the lists that omit the three civil war emperors-Galba, Otho, and Vitellius-ignore the ancient literary evidence. The three are recognized as legitimate emperors by Suetonius, *Sib. Or.* 5:12-51, and *4 Ezra* 11-12, although these sources are of a later date than Revelation. Numismatic evidence reveals that coinage for Galba, Otho, and Vitellius was produced at the large mint in Alexandria (Burnett et al 1992, 2.735). "At Antioch there was a mint which had duly struck coins of Galba and Otho, though not (owing to the short period between the news of Vitellius' accession known in May and the beginning of the anti-Vitellian movement soon after) of Vitellius" (Wellesley 1989, 126). Although no coinage of Galba was minted in the seven cities of Asia, such coinage was produced at the Asian cities of Parium (Burnett et al 1992, 1.386), Ilium (1:392), and Cotiaeum where unusually "it produced coins for Galba, signed by no less than three 'magistrates' " (1.518). Other cities in Asia Minor that minted coins for Galba were Nicea, Nicomedia, Galatia, and Olba (2.735). Numismatic evidence demonstrates that the three were recognized as legitimate emperors in the provinces. Galba's representation on Asian coinage shows specifically that his rule was recognized in the region of John's audience. Therefore any identification omitting the three ignores that evidence.

Aune (1997, lxii) concedes that the logical calculation of the list in 17:9-11 "places the composition of Revelation from 54 (the beginning of the reign of Nero) to 79 (the end of the reign of Vespasian)". However, "scholars convinced of a Domitianic date for Revelation have used Rev 17:9-11 as evidence for a late first-century date, sometimes working back from Domitian to ensure that the calculation ends up with the appropriate emperor". One of the ways they do this is to suggest that John used an earlier source, either by updating it or not updating it.¹³

13 See Aune's discussion (1997, lxii) for the interpreters who take these perspectives.

The list of the seven emperors occurs in the fourth and final Ὡδέ saying (“This is...”). All the sayings (also 13:10, 18; and 14:12) speak directly to the Asia believers to understand the spiritual implications of the present crisis. John presumes that his audience not only can endure and be faithful, but it can also understand its opponent by calculating the number of the beast and by identifying the seven emperors. The first three sayings display no evidence of “back-dating” or earlier sources, so it is problematic to interpret 17:9-11 as such. Therefore, to use this *Hode* saying as evidence of a late date is again to misread the evidence.

6. The Persecution of Domitian

Although Trebilco does not list the alleged persecution of Domitian as a factor, he mentions it briefly in a footnote in the “Dating” section (2004, 294 n. 7) as well as in a discussion of whether John’s Ephesian audience was facing a crisis (2004, 343-44). The internal evidence in Revelation suggests localized persecution in Asia while in other parts of the empire, particularly Rome, massive persecution had produced innumerable martyrs. This picture of widespread tribulation is compatible with an early date during or after the reign of Nero, but incompatible with the historical evidence for a late date during Domitian’s reign.

The standard Roman sources portray Domitian as a tyrant and megalomaniac. Yet Pliny the Younger (*Ep. Tra.* 10.96) begins his letter to Emperor Trajan by confessing that he has never been present at the examination (*cognitio*) of a Christian. It is remarkable that this high Roman official served as a state prosecutor during Domitian’s reign, but had never attended a Christian proscription. The likely reason is that no systematic persecution emanated from Rome during this period against Christians, and therefore Pliny is ignorant on how to proceed with the prosecution of those brought before him.

The testimony of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.17-20) is also confused. On the one hand, he calls Domitian a second Nero whose policies resulted in persecutions and martyrdoms. On the other, he quotes Hegesippus that after Domitian met the accused grandsons of Jude, he freed them and decreed that the persecution of Christians was over. If Domitian were such a Neronic despot, it is difficult to understand such a dramatic flip-flop. Thompson (1990, 95-115), in his sweeping review of the emperor’s reign, argues convincingly that the persecution under Domitian was limited to those in his immediate circle and not directed against Christians as Christians.

Thompson (103-4) claims that later historians who have seized on Domitianic caricatures, particularly the emperor's alleged demand to be called "our Lord and God" (*dominus et deus noster*), err in proposing this period as Revelation's historical background.

Ramsay (1994, 71-72) recognized the lack of documentation for a Domitianic persecution of Christians and suggested that Revelation itself is the primary source. Robinson (1976, 230) criticizes Ramsay's use of "the evidence of the Apocalypse *already interpreted* as Domitianic material" and likewise asserts that "the primary sources present a rather different picture". If 1 Clement is dated to C.E. 95-96 (cf. Lightfoot 1889-1890, 1.346-58), it might provide evidence of a Domitianic persecution. For, as Holmes (Lightfoot et al 1992, 25) observes, "At the time of writing, the church in Rome appears to be facing some sort of persecution; in fact the letter to Corinth has been delayed because of it (1:1; cf. 7:1)". Merrill (1924, 161), however, objects to the evidential value of 1:1: "It is quite preposterous to claim that the innocent sentence with which it starts bears manifest and conscious witness to a persecution of the Church of Rome by Domitian". Edmundson (1913, 191) believes the reference to "sudden and repeated misfortunes and reverses" in 1:1 better refers to the political turmoil in 69, thus he argues that 1 Clement was written in early 70. Domitian's biographer B. W. Jones summarizes:

No convincing evidence exists for a Domitianic persecution of the Christians.... Perhaps a few Christians were amongst those executed or banished during the 90s: that hardly constitutes a persecution (1992, 117).

Such reassessments conclusively show that Domitian's persecution of Christians is more myth than fact.

Commentators who favor a late date, yet are aware of these historical difficulties, have proposed a new solution to the "crisis theory". Yarbro Collins (1984, 106) suggests that we look to psychological, sociological, and anthropological studies instead of historical ones for the answer. She concludes that the situation in Asia was only a "perceived crisis". The Christians experienced only "relative deprivation", and their persecution was no worse than that of others. Their suffering was not an objective one, but rather "due to the conflict between the Christian faith itself, as John understood it, and the social situation as he perceived it" (106). Though official Roman historiographers may downplay any Christian persecution, Schüssler Fiorenza (1985, 8), who herself holds to a late date, nevertheless

concedes “it is not borne out by the experience articulated in Rev. and other NT writings”.

Yarbro Collins’s solution to the lack of historical evidence for a Domitianic persecution is unconvincing. Gager (1975, 50) observes that the “concrete situation [is] persecution and martyrdom... Whatever its date and location, the writing inescapably presupposes a situation in which believers had experienced suffering and death at the hands of Rome”. Likewise, the point of Robinson is well taken:

One thing of which we may be certain is that the Apocalypse, unless the product of a perfervid and psychotic imagination, was written out of an intense experience of the Christian suffering at the hands of the imperial authorities, represented by the “beast” of Babylon (1976, 230-31).

Suffering was not a reality present in each of the seven churches. The Laodicean church was prospering, but perhaps that was because of its distance from the Aegean coast. The initial addressees-Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum-were the three “first” cities of Asia and centers of Roman civil and religious power. They were the churches that were experiencing hardship. Instead of dismissing the crisis as a psychological one, perhaps the solution is more a geographical one.

7. Food Sacrificed to Idols

Although the issue of food sacrificed to idols is not mentioned by Trebilco as a factor for dating, he discusses the subject in the context of the Nicolaitans (2004, 319-25). The issue of εἰδωλόθυτον is mentioned explicitly in the Pergamene (2:14) and Thyatiran (2:20) letters. Ramsay describes the situation:

In both Pergamum and Thyatira some of the Christians still clung to their membership of the pagan associations and shared in the fellowship of the ritual meal. If that evil were not burned out, the whole loose spirit of pagan society, its impurity and its idolatry, would continue to rule in the congregation (1996, 119).

Eating food sacrificed to idols was one of the four practices from which the Jerusalem council asked Gentile believers to abstain (Acts 15:29; 21:25). Lightfoot (1993, 309 n.1) in fact suggests that the expression οὐ βάλλω ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἄλλο βᾶρος (2:24) found in the Thyatiran letter “looks like a reference to the decree”. Paul addressed this issue in his first letter to the Corinthians (8:1ff; 10:19) written from Ephesus about C.E. 55.

Trebilco (2004, 320) places the Nicolaitan controversy in the 90s based upon his presuppositions regarding dating. Yet this raging issue, which tore apart congregations in the early decades of the Gentile churches, appears resolved at the end of the first century. In the *Didache* (6.3; ca. C.E. 100) the command, probably based on the teachings of Paul and John, is simply: ἀπό δέ τοῦ εἰδωλοθύτου λίαν πρόσεχε, λατρεία γάρ ἐστὶν θεῶν νεκρῶν. When Ignatius wrote his letters to the Asian churches (ca. 110), he does not mention the problem of εἰδωλόθυτον. Ramsay (1988, 759), who holds to late dating, concedes that the Thyatiran indecision regarding the issue of food sacrificed to idols appears to point to an earlier date than the reign of Domitian.

8. Apollo and Apollyon

In a discussion of John's use of the Leto-Apollo combat myth in Rev 12, Trebilco (2004, 399) writes that "Nero later identified himself with Apollo, and Apollo myths and the Apollo cult were used during Nero's reign as imperial propaganda". He cites approvingly (400) the analysis of Yarbrow Collins (1976, 190) that "the author of Revelation formulated a further element in the antithesis of Christ and Nero. The claims of the Apollonian Nero are rejected by the depiction of Christ as the true bringer of order and light". Although this Neronic connection with the Apollo motif is clearly accepted by Trebilco, he fails to draw out any implications for dating.

Since Grotius, Apollyon (Ἀπολλύων; 9:11) has been taken to be a word play on the god Apollo (Oepke 1.397) in his role as destroyer (from the verb ἀπόλλυμι or -ω). Bell (1979, 98-99) believes that John's mention of Apollyon is another clue to identify Nero as the church's persecutor; the name "is highly suggestive of Nero's patron deity Apollo and perhaps hinting at Nero's suspected role in the destruction of Rome". This identification is certain, given John's only other use of ἀπόλειαν in 17:8, 11 when the beast-the eighth emperor, Nero *redivivus*-is now ready to go to his destruction.

Both Seneca (*Apol.* 4.1.22-23) and Suetonius (*Ner.* 53) note comparisons of Nero's voice and appearance with Apollo's. Suetonius (*Ner.* 25.3) also mentions that following Nero's performing tour of Greece, he completed his triumphal return to Rome at the temple of Apollo, not of Jupiter. In the epitome of Dio's *Roman History*, Nero is hailed as "our Apollo" (61.20.5;

62.20.5).¹⁴ Nero also had a coin struck depicting himself in the guise of Apollo playing a lyre.¹⁵ Coins from Nero's reign (54-68) show him with a hairstyle identical to one depicted on Apollo (Griffin 1984, 121).

Caird (1966, 120) and others, most recently Grether (1992, 1.302), regard the reference as an indirect attack on Domitian "who liked to be regarded as Apollo incarnate". However, Caird gives no source for his information. None of the Roman historians mention such a relationship. Instead they record that Minerva was the god whom Domitian revered most (Suetonius *Dom.* 4.4; 15.3; Cassius Dio 67:1.2; 67.16.2 [Athena]).¹⁶ In fact, Jones (1992, 100) insists: "In private, his devotion to Minerva was absolute". This devotion was expressed by the consistent issuance of four coin types annually, the erection of temples, and the sponsorship of an annual festival in Minerva's honor. Publicly, however, Domitian was devoted to Jupiter who had saved his life in 69. "Throughout the reign, whether on coins or in the works of Statius, Silius Italicus or Martial, Domitian was linked with Jupiter and portrayed as his subordinate, his 'warrior vice-regent'" (Jones 1992, 99). Commentators who relate Domitian with Apollo have failed to check their sources and continue to perpetuate this identificational error.

If the references in 9:11 and 12:1ff are to Apollo and the Leto-Apollo myth, and they probably are, the historical connection is to Nero, not to Domitian.¹⁷ "The polemic against Greco-Roman culture", which Trebilco

14 Cassius Dio (62.14.2), however, also states that Nero abolished the oracle of Apollo and seized its territory on his visit to Greece, perhaps for the god's distressing predictions or because Nero was crazy.

15 M. T. Griffin (1984, 120) believes Suetonius is inaccurate in two respects: that the god, not the emperor, is actually depicted on the coin and that the coins were struck before 66 and thus before his return. However, she concludes: "But there is no reason to doubt that the coins were intended and understood as an allusion to the Emperor's performances". For an illustration of this coin, see Grant (1968, Pl. 9, #1).

16 For a coin type of Domitian showing a sacrifice to Minerva, see Grant (1968, Pl. 4, #1).

17 A. Kerkeslager (1993, 118) finds another link to Apollo in the first seal (6:2): the bow carried by the rider on the white horse "would have served as a fairly transparent symbol of Apollo". He avows that John uses Apollo imagery as "a polemic against the message of false prophets and the values of pagan society" (119). Although he asserts that the polemical usage of the Apollo imagery is most pointed in 9:11, he makes no mention of its association with Nero. Note the following Asian coin types of Apollo (Burnett et al 1992): with bow and stag (Miletus 2703, 2708, 2713-14), on rock holding a bow (Miletus 2712), on horseback with double ax (Hierapolis 2957), firing arrow from bow (Synaus 3107).

(2004, 400) suggests is occurring here, would have impacted the Asian believers more immediately in the late 60s. During Domitian's reign twenty-five years later imperial propaganda related to Apollo fails to appear in the historical record and hence would probably not have been an issue for the Asian church.

9. The Riches of Laodicea

Trebilco (2004, 436-38) mentions the riches of Laodicea in his discussion of John's critique of material possessions to the audience in the Seven Churches. He surveys briefly the background for the wealth of the city and mentions the earthquake that devastated the Asian cities of the Catacecaumene (i.e., "burnt land"), including Philadelphia and Laodicea in C.E. 60. However, he fails to make any links between this earthquake and the date of Revelation. Other scholars such as Hemer use the occasion of this earthquake to rule out an early date. They ask, How could Laodicea in less than a decade be portrayed as rich and wealthy (3:17)?

Laodicea had accepted aid from Rome following earlier earthquakes (Strabo *Geogr.* 12.8.18; Suetonius *Tib.* 8). Yet after the earthquake in 60, only Laodicea among the Asian cities refused to accept Roman financial assistance. Tacitus records that Laodicea "recovered by its own resources, without assistance from ourselves" (*propriis opibus*; *Ann.* 14.27.1). Citing a building inscription firmly dated to C.E. 79 (*CIG* 3935 = *IGRR* 4.845), Hemer (1983, 58) believes the surviving building inscriptions in Laodicea suggest a longer time frame more appropriate to a Domitianic date. However, Lightfoot (1993, 43) sees no problem of "only a very few years" between the two.

A key word in the Laodicean letter is *πλουτέω* (Rev 3:17, 18; cf. 18:3, 15, 19). The Laodicean pride in her own self-accomplishment and financial independence appears to be exemplified in the church's attitude, for the congregation apparently partook of the wealth of its host community. The city's rebuilding need not be complete for this attitude to manifest. The socio-economic situation of Laodicea was a microcosm of Rome's (cf. Yarbro Collins 1980, 202). The dirge pronounced in chapter 18 decries Babylon's excessive materialism. Through the example of Babylon's destruction, the Laodicean church is again reminded to desist from its present course lest the judgment pronounced on the world's economic system, in which it indulged, would likewise come upon it.

Yarbro Collins (1984, 76) concludes that “this bit of evidence is of no positive help in dating the book”.¹⁸ Yet the exigency of the earthquake and the subsequent Laodicean refusal of aid better suggest an early date in accordance with the church’s rhetorical situation of riches and wealth presented in Revelation.

10. The Luxury of Rome

Trebilco (2004, 439) sees in Rev 18 an indication of the material possessions of his audience, so that “John is calling some of his readers to give up their involvement in trade, and hence their presumably profitable incomes”. This chapter is the only NT text that uses *σπρηνιάω* (vv. 7, 9) and *σπρήνος* (v. 3), meaning to “live in luxury, live sensually” (*BAGD* s. v.). Bauckham (1993, 338) calls the economic critique in this chapter “one of the fiercest attacks on Rome and one of the most effective pieces of political resistance literature from the period of the early empire”. The wanton luxury of several Caesars is well known. Both Tacitus and Suetonius document the licentious living of Nero and record all manner of his debaucheries. Griffin (1984, 128) notes that Neronian literature abounds with diatribes against luxury, citing the examples of Martial, Lucan, Petronius, and particularly Seneca.¹⁹ Vitellius’ extravagances are likewise noted by Suetonius (*Vit.* 13). The menu for one banquet was 2000 fish and 7000 birds. During his brief reign he spent approximately 900 million sesterces simply on banquets.²⁰ The list of edibles procured from every corner of the empire bears a remarkable resemblance to the cargoes of the sea captains mentioned in 18:11-13.²¹

18 Aune (1997, lxiii) likewise writes, “However, both lines of argument are capable of a variety of interpretations, so that a firm date late in the first century A.D. cannot be based on these arguments”.

19 Griffin lists the references in note 73, pages 271-72. She points out, however, that such attacks against luxury were standard in Roman schools of declamation and in works of Roman poets and philosophers.

20 For a discussion of the value of Roman money in today’s terms, see M. Wilson (2002, 4.349)

21 Wellesley (1989, 201), however, considers the portrait of Vitellius as a gluttonous and drunken host or guest at a succession of Trimalchian banquets to be Flavian revisionist history: “A dispassionate study of Vitellius hardly confirms the usual caricature”.

Domitian, on the other hand, while known for giving numerous and generous banquets, “usually ended them early; in no case did he protract them beyond sunset, or follow them by a drinking bout” (*Dom.* 21). The only extravagant entertainment that Domitian promoted was in the Colosseum and the Circus (*Dom.* 4). Suetonius, however, does term Domitian as “excessively lustful” and devotes a paragraph to his sexual proclivities (*Dom.* 22).

There is no doubt that the word group *σπρηνίδω* and *σπρῆνος* accurately describes the wanton luxury of the early principate. If John’s descriptive language seems to best characterize a period, the evidence suggests the early date rather than the late, although Domitian’s behavior was certainly debauched.

The following six factors are unmentioned by Trebilco but also provide important internal evidence regarding the possible dating of Revelation.

11. The Parthian Threat

The common identification of the first rider on a white horse (6:2) with the Parthians is problematic. Boring’s (1989, 122) statements that Parthia “was never subdued by the Romans” and that “the defeat of the Roman armies in the Tigris valley by the Parthian general Vologeses in 62 was still remembered in John’s time” are inaccurate and wrongly speculative. As Henderson (1927, 308) notes, “During the first sixty years of the first century of our era the two rival Empires of Rome and Parthia had quarrelled and fought insatiably”. But the situation changed under Nero. The following points on the Parthian campaign are drawn from Henderson’s (1903, 153-95) incisive analysis, following (*Ann.* 13-15 *passim*).

Parthia’s threat to Rome was regional, and the Roman campaign was primarily to secure its eastern frontier. Corbulo’s conquest of Armenia (C.E. 59) and victory over the Parthians was total. Only through the folly of the client king Tigranes in 60 and the ineptitude of his replacement Paetus were the Parthians able to regain an advantage by defeating the Romans at Rhandaia in 62. Once Corbulo reestablished the Roman position in 63, the Parthians again become suppliants with Tiridates forced to travel to Rome in 65 to receive his crown. The Parthian client king was treated as visiting royalty by Nero, and the emperor was hailed for restoring peace to the empire with his triumph over the Parthians. Tiridates visited the cities of Asia on his return to Parthia, and the impression given to John and the

Christians would have been of a submitted monarch rather than a victorious general.

The civil war in 68-69 would have been an ideal time for the Parthians to strike against their longtime enemy. Mucianus, the governor of Syria, had left the eastern frontier vulnerable when he led the sixth legion westward to depose Vitellius. “But neither Vologeses, nor his brother Tiridates in Armenia, showed any desire to break the peace and friendship recently secured by the Neronian policy” (Henderson 1908, 145). In fact, Vologeses offered Vespasian 40,000 Parthian cavalry to help him secure the principate. The Flavians were thus indebted to the Parthians for their cooperation during this tumultuous transition.

If Revelation were written during Domitian’s reign, as Boring and Trebilco believe, Roman memories would have been of three decades of peace with the Parthians. Henderson (1927, 59) explains: “After the fall of Jerusalem the eastern half of the Empire caused little anxiety to the Flavian Emperors”. In fact, the Armenian peace lasted over fifty years and is reflected by the total absence on Roman coinage of anti-Parthian war types, which only return again in the second century (Grant 1968, 48n). Ramsay (1994, 41-44) uses coin types from Parthia to identify the rider in 6:2 as Parthian. Although the portraiture of bow and horseman *may* have some use for general background, Ramsay fails to discuss why and how John would have a knowledge of Parthian coins. He acknowledges that Greek and Roman coins show the Parthians as vanquished (44), so it is improbable that John would depict them as victorious. Any use of the Parthian situation as an aid to date Revelation is fraught with problems.

12. The Great Multitude

In 7:9 John sees a “great multitude” (ὄχλος πολύς) in heaven slain during the great tribulation. This innumerable group is from every nation, tribe, people, and nation. Johnson (1981, 12.486) observes that this polyglot cosmopolitan multitude “might well describe the crowds common to the agora or the quay of a seaport in first-century Asia”. While a seaport like Ephesus would have a diverse representation, only in Rome could the total ethnic population represented in the empire and beyond be found (Reasoner 1993, 851). Juvenal’s statement (*Sat.* 3.62) bears this out: “Long ago the Orontes has overflowed into the Tiber”. Such ethnic diversity appears to have characterized the early church.

Both Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.44; *multitudo ingens*) and Clement (*1 Clem.* 6.1; *πολὸν πλῆθος*) speak of “immense multitudes” of Christians losing their lives under Nero. In his third vision Hermas (*Vis.* 3.1.9) is refused permission to sit at the right hand of the angel. This special place is reserved for those who have endured “scourgings, imprisonments, great tribulations, crosses, and wild beasts for the sake of the Name” (3.2.1). The scale of such suffering described in this postapostolic document (ca. C.E. 95-100) accords with the historical facts of the Neronian persecution. As we have seen, there is no evidence in the standard sources of a mass persecution of Christians in Rome under Domitian. John’s use of “great multitude” points to a time of conflict during Nero’s reign.

13. The Flight into the Wilderness

Renan (1899, 150ff.) first proposed that the flight into the wilderness (12:6, 14-17) describes the flight of the Jerusalem church to Pella (modern Tabaqat Fahil, approximately twenty miles south of the Sea of Galilee). Brandon (1957, 177) thinks that without the later accounts of Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3) and Epiphanius (*Pan.* 29.7; 30.2; *Mens.* 15) “it is very unlikely that the passage would ever have been regarded as containing an allusion to a concerted flight of Jewish Christians across the Jordan to Pella”. Sowers (1970, 315) insists, however, that “the chapter is patently describing historical occurrences (for example the birth and crucifixion-exaltation of Christ, v. 5, and the persecution of the Church, v. 17) in mythological terms”.

Chapter 12 is indeed difficult to interpret, but the woman’s escape to the wilderness has remarkable similarities with Jesus’ admonition (Matt 24:15-22; Mark 13:14-20; Luke 21:20-24) to flee from Jerusalem to the mountains. Although Pella is not in the Transjordanian Mountains, “it qualifies as a city of refuge in the terms of the oracle since it is in the foothills of these mountains” (Sowers 1970, 319). The dragon’s attempt to destroy the Jewish Christians first in Zealot-controlled Jerusalem and then while crossing the Jordan in the winter floods (*χειμών*; Matt 24:20; Mark 13:18) comes to naught. Instead the Gentile churches of the Decapolis rescued and aided (*τρέφουσιν*; 12:6) the Jewish Christian refugees (Sowers 1970, 315). With the Jerusalem church safe, the dragon now turns his attention to make war against the rest of the saints (v. 17). Such a reconstruction is plausible, since other alternatives have little to commend them. This interpretation again points to a date before C.E. 70.

14. The Beast of 666

In 13:18 the believer who has understanding (ὁ ἔξων νοῦν) is challenged to calculate (ψηφισάτω) the identity of the beast whose number is 666. By the time of Irenaeus the exact identity of the beast was lost (his best guess was “Lateinos”), although the variant 616 was already recognized (*Haer.* 5.28.2). For two millennia speculation over the identity of 666 has spawned intense debate. For an older review of the possibilities see Peake (1920, 312-27), while for a newer one see Bauckham (1993, 384-452).²²

Among the Roman emperors Suetonius mentions only Nero as having gematria associated with his name (*Ner.* 39.2). A Greek verse circulating around Rome lampooned Nero thus: “Nero, Orestes, Alcmeon their mothers slew/A calculation new (Νεόψηφον). Nero his mother slew”. The numerical equivalent of Nero’s name is 1005, the same as that of the rest of the sentence, “his mother slew”. Scarre (1995, 51, 54) states that “the murder of

22 The Hebrew and Greek gematria associated with the calculation of these names plus that related to Jesus is as follows:

<u>Neron Kaisar</u>	<u>Nero Kaisar</u>	<u>Lateinos</u>	<u>Jesus</u>
ⲛ= 50 N	ⲛ= 50 N	Λ= 30 L	
ⲓ=200 R	ⲓ=200 R	α= 1 A	Ι= 10 I
ⲓ= 6 O	ⲓ= 6 O	ⲧ=300 T	ⲓ= 8 E
ⲓ= 50 N		ϵ= 5 E	σ=200 S
ⲓ=100 K	ⲓ=100 K	ⲓ= 10 I	ο= 70 O
ⲓ= 60 S	ⲓ= 60 S	ⲓ= 50 N	ⲓ=400 U
ⲓ=200 R	ⲓ=200 R	ο= 70 O	ϛ=200 S
666	616	ϛ=200 S	888
		666	

ΝΕΡΩΝ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ is a common inscription on the obverse of coinage from Ephesus (Burnett et al 1992; e. g., #2626), Sardis (#3011), and Laodicea (#2917). Further, the Hebrew letter waw (ו) has the value of six. “Since there are six letters in the Greek spelling of the name of Jesus (Ἰησοῦς), the waw can stand as a sign of that name” (Finnegan 1992, 353). 666 is thus a defective and deceptive enumeration of the true One numbered 6.

his mother Agrippina...in 59 was the single most notorious act of Nero's reign".

Nero is twice compared to a beast (θηρίον) by Apollonius (Philostratus *Vit. Apoll.* 4.38). Indeed he is much worse because no animal "devours its own mother, but Nero is gorged with such quarry". Nero is also called a great beast (θήρ μέγας) in the Sybilline Oracles (8.157). Domitian is similarly called "the most monstrous beast" by Pliny the Younger (*immanissima belua*; *Pan.* 48.3), but this in the context of describing him as a *Nero redivivus*. Juvenal (*Sat* 4.38) likewise thought of Domitian as a second, albeit bald, Nero, and Martial (*Epig.* 11.33) referred to Domitian's death as Nero's.

Ancient "understanding" of the beast whose number is 666 points directly to Nero. In fact, Bauckham (1993, 384) unequivocally states that "Nero Caesar is the name of the beast". However, he avoids the obvious implication of an early date, claiming that "John has *historicized* the apocalyptic tradition of the eschatological adversary identified with the returning Nero" (444). This tradition is now fulfilled in the Flavian dynasty which reestablished imperial power following the civil war.

Several literary clues link this chapter back to chapters 2-3 where the seven churches are addressed. 13:9 contains the only other exhortation to hear in Revelation. And four Ὡδέ sayings related to the beast, which perform a hortatorical function like the promise sayings, are likewise found. The saying in 13:10 follows a reference to the *Nero redivivus* myth in 13:3 (cf. v 14), in which the beast has a fatal wound that healed. The person with wisdom in 13:18 can calculate the number of the beast—666. The persevering saints in 14:12 are to forgo the worship of the beast and his image and to refuse his mark. And in 17:9 the audience is invited to have understanding. The seven heads, which are seven hills, are a clue pointing to the city of Rome. Then follows the enigmatic mention of the seven kings/emperors. Through these four Ὡδέ sayings, the Asian churches are exhorted to recognize and act on the spiritual implications of the present historical exigence of the time of Nero and shortly after.

15. The Fire

Rev 18 describes the fall of Babylon the Great—Rome. This city on seven hills (17:9) was geographically accessible to the sea through its port Ostia at the mouth of the Tiber. A repeated image in this chapter is a city being destroyed by fire whose smoke is seen miles away by sea captains (18:17-

19). Although Jerusalem is also situated on seven hills, it is landlocked and cannot be the referent (*contra* Beagley 1987, 102-110). John certainly uses the judgment traditions concerning Babylon (Jer 50-51) and Tyre (Ezek 27-28). However, his description of this conflagration appears to extend beyond biblical imagery to contemporaneous historical events.

The fire in Rome in C.E. 64, rumored to have been started by Nero himself, was certainly of the massive scale described in this chapter. It burned for six days and seven nights. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.40) records that of Rome's fourteen districts only four remained. The only other possible destruction on the scale described by John occurred during Titus' reign. Suetonius (*Tit.* 11.8) mentions that a fire in Rome burned three days and nights consuming the area from the Capitol to the Pantheon. During Domitian's reign there is no record of any such destructive fire in Rome. The fire in Rome as a recent memory in John's prophetic account gives more credence to the early than the late date.

16. The Historical Situation of the Roman Empire in the Late First Century

Since the late first century is the period in which Revelation was supposed to have been written, it is instructive to survey briefly the historical situation of the empire during two critical decades. In their volumes B. W. Henderson (1903), M. T. Griffin (1984), and K. Wellesley (1992) provide excellent overviews of the turbulent period of the 60s. Here we simply outline the significant events surrounding the projected early date of Revelation. Many of the dates in this and the next chart are drawn from C. Scarre's excellent survey *Chronicles of the Roman emperors* (1995).²³

64	July 19	Fire in Rome
65	April	Pisonian conspiracy to kill Nero foiled
	Spring?	Persecution of the church begins
	Summer?	Martyrdom of Peter in Rome
		30,000 die of plague in Rome; hurricane at Campagna
66	June	Vinician conspiracy to kill Nero foiled

²³ I wish to thank S. R. F. Price for his suggestions as well as perusal of the chart for mistakes. Other charts of dates from the period can be found in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 2nd ed., volumes 10 and 11, and at the beginning of Barbara Levick's *Vespasian* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

July	Jews capture Masada and halt temple sacrifice for the emperor
August-	Jew/Gentile massacres with tens of thousands of Jews killed in Caesarea and Alexandria
Sept 25	Nero begins performance tour in Greece
Oct-Nov	Cestius attacks Jerusalem but forced to retreat in defeat Governor of Asia, Marcius Barea Soranus, prosecuted by Nero
Or 67?	Martyrdom of Paul in Rome
67 July	Jewish forces defeated at Jotopata; Josephus captured
68	Nero returns from Greece
March	Vindex revolts at Lugdunum, Gaul
April 3	Galba proclaimed emperor at Carthago Nova, Spain
May	Vindex defeated at Vesontio by German legions
June 8	Galba recognized by senate
June 9	Nero commits suicide by sword
June 20	Vespasian and Trajan occupy Jericho; Jerusalem surrounded
October	Galba arrives in Rome from Tarraco, Spain
Fall	False Nero executed on Aegean island of Cythnus; his body shipped from Ephesus to Rome Famine in Rome
69 Jan 2	Vitellius ²⁴ acclaimed emperor by Rhine legions at Colonia Agrippina
Jan 10	Galba adopts Piso as heir to principate
Jan 15	Otho usurps principate assassinating Galba and Piso
Feb	Titus visits Ephesus to conspire with Governor C Fonteius Agrippa
March	Otho leaves Rome to fight Vitellius
April 14-16	Otho's army defeated at 1st battle of Cremona; he commits suicide
May	Vitellius recognized by senate
Late June	Capitol burned by foreign mercenaries when Vitellius arrives in Rome
July 1, 3	Vespasian proclaimed emperor in Alexandria and Judea
August	Batavian revolt along the Rhine under Civilis
Sept	Dacian revolt along the Danube

24 The birth of a three-headed monster to a woman in Syracuse is interpreted by Apollonius (Philostratus *Vit. Apoll.* 5.13) to be the three emperors who reign briefly. Summing up the events of 69, he states, "And Fate's whole episode was past and over within a single year".

Oct 18	Moon turned to blood in lunar eclipse
Oct 24-25	Flavians under Antonius Primus defeat Vitellians at Cremona with the city subsequently burned
Dec 18	Capitol burned including temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus
Dec 20	Rome captured by Flavian army under Antonius Primus; Vitellius killed in the Forum
Dec	Domitian with Mucianus begin to govern jointly in his father's absence from Rome
	Flood of Tiber in Rome
70 January	Gaul's revolt
Winter	1st, 4th, 16th, & 22nd legions mutiny in Germany ²⁵
70 May 1	Titus besieges Jerusalem
June	Domitian and Mucianus leave Rome to campaign in Gaul
Sept 26	Titus captures Jerusalem and destroys the temple
Oct	Vespasian arrives in Rome to assume principate

In their volumes Henderson (1927) and B. W. Jones (1992) provide excellent overviews of Domitian's reign. Here is an outline of the significant events of the late 80s and early 90s, which precede the proposed late date.

88	False Nero appears in Asia and finds refuge among Parthians
89 Jan 1	Saturninus, governor of Upper Germany, revolts
Spring	Revolt of Chatti in Germany
Summer	Revolt of Dacians on the Danube; 1st Pannonian War
91	Manius Acilius Glabrio exiled for atheism
Fall	Grain famine causes Domitian in the spring to issue edict to destroy vineyards
92 May	Sarmatians & Suebi revolt on the Danube; 2nd Pannonian War
	Famine in Pisidian Antioch
93 Fall	Domitian's reign of terror begins
94	Reign of terror continues

25 The revolt in Germany is the setting for one of the adventures of the fictional Roman informer Marcus Didius Falco who ruminates: "At any other period it would have been impossible. Yet in the Year of the Four Emperors, when the whole Empire blazed in ruins while the imperial contenders slogged it out, this was just one especially colourful sideshow amongst the wide-scale lunacy" (L. Davis 1992, 27).

95	May	Flavius Clemens (first cousin of Domitian) killed His wife Flavia Domitilla (niece of Domitian) banished to Pontia (Eusebius) or Pandateria (Cassius Dio)
	Summer	3rd Pannonian War?
96	Sept 18	Domitian murdered by his attendant Stephanus

A comparison of these two periods shows that the decade of the 60s was indeed the more turbulent one. Although such evidence is circumstantial, it nevertheless suggests that this period better accords with the historical exigence of the church's rhetorical situation.

Conclusion

The situation of the Roman Empire in the late 60s was indeed a tumultuous one, with five emperors ruling and a large Christian persecution occurring. While there was a limited persecution by Domitian in the 90s, it is doubtful whether Christians were killed as Christians. The hypothesis that the situation in the Asian churches was simply a perceived crisis is untenable. Irenaeus' testimony to a Domitianic date, cited by Trebilco as the first factor for a late date, is the strongest argument in favor a date in the 90s. However, a viable reinterpretation of that testimony has been presented to accord with the early date. When the internal evidence of Revelation is viewed together with the historical situation of the Roman Empire, the late 60s appears a more viable date for Revelation's composition than the 90s. This is likewise the conclusion of the Roman historian, B. W. Henderson (1927, 45): "But the earlier dates are to be preferred, and all that is left as authority for the "squall of persecution" under the Flavian Emperor is too remote to be of value". The early date is also more consistent with the literary, numismatic, and historical sources. The sixteen examples discussed in the paper provide important data regarding the date of Revelation. Although individually inconclusive, they cumulatively point to a date in the late 60s. Trebilco's presupposition of a late date seems not so certain and even unlikely in light of this evidence. His reconstruction of the Christian community in Ephesus would consequently need to be moved back over twenty years to accommodate this new dating scenario.

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