Galba, Otho and Vitellius are omitted (although it would be wrong to do so), we are still two places short.

A solution at this stage might be to resort to the mere symbolism of the number seven in this succession of emperors and to argue that the description of the beast in Rev. 13 and 17 as having 'seven heads and ten horns' (13.1; 17.3, 7, 12, 16; cf. 12.3) owes much to Daniel's vision in Dan. 7 of a beast with 'ten horns' (7.7, 24 LXX). Yet, the number seven does not occur in Daniel's portrayal and, as Garrow puts it, 'seven kings which are purely symbolic sit uncomfortably alongside the adjacent reference to the symbolic *and literal* seven hills of Rome (17.9)'.[18] It might therefore be best to try to make sense of the number seven and to see whether a normal chronological understanding of the succession of seven emperors in Rev. 17 fits the context of ancient history. I would argue that this is indeed the case. As we have seen (see table 1), on such an understanding, the sixth emperor under whom the author of Revelation purports to be writing must be Galba, who is succeeded by the seventh emperor, the short-reigning Otho, as the author knows from his vantage point at the very end of Otho's reign, when Vitellius has already claimed the emperorship. As I have already said, although not identical with Nero Rediturus himself, Vitellius (and Otho, too) could be regarded as an immediate prefiguration of Nero Rediturus.

3. *Otho and Vitellius and the Reappearance of Nero's Images in Rome*

Otho and Vitellius lend themselves as prefigurations of Nero since, unlike Galba, the first, unsuccessful successor to Nero, both were considered to follow deliberately in the path of Nero. Otho, a former friend of Nero, 'easily held the first place among the emperor's friends because of the similarity in their characters' (Suetonius, *Otho* 2.2). After succeeding Galba, Otho, 'in his desire to please the multitude, did not refuse at first to be hailed in the theatres by the name of Nero, and when statues of Nero were produced in public, he did not prevent it' (Plutarch, *Otho* 3.2). This appearance of Nero's statues is also reported by Suetonius, who tells the story twice, and adds that some displayed them on the rostra (Suetonius, *Nero* 57.1-2; *Otho* 7.1). Furthermore, Otho is the one who finished Nero's much disputed Golden House: 'the first grant that he signed as emperor was one of fifty million sesterces for finishing the Golden House' (Suetonius, *Otho* 7.1). Moreover, Otho is even said to have used the

18. Garrow 1997: 72 (italics mine); cf. 76.

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cognomen 'Nero' before his own name in official documents (Plutarch, *Otho* 3.2). Dio Cassius considers this the natural consequence of the fact that Otho's 'rule was sure to be even more licentious and harsh than Nero's' (*Roman History* 64.8). As Tacitus tells us, Otho

> brought up the question of celebrating Nero's memory with the hope of winning over the Roman people; and in fact some set up statues of Nero. Moreover, on certain days the people and soldiers, as if adding thereby to Otho's nobility and distinction, acclaimed him as Nero Otho (*Histories* 1.78; cf. 1.13 and 1.25).[19]

This aping of Nero is also exhibited by Vitellius. According to Suetonius, he had rendered Nero special services in the past (*Vitellius* 4). Vitellius, Tacitus stresses, 'cherished great admiration for Nero himself, whom he had been in the habit of accompanying on his singing tours' (*Histories* 2.71). Having embarked upon his short-lived career as emperor, Vitellius, according to Suetonius,

> to leave no doubt in anyone's mind what model he chose for the government of the State…made funerary offering to Nero in the middle of the Campus Martius, attended by a great throng of the official priests; and when at the accompanying banquet a flute-player was received with applause, he openly urged him 'to render something from the Master's Book as well'; and when he began the songs of Nero, Vitellius was the first to applaud him and even leaped to his feet (Suetonius, *Vitellius* 11).

According to Tacitus, the occasion on which Vitellius erected altars on the Campus Martius and sacrificed to the shades of Nero was Vitellius's birthday (*Histories* 2.95). Vitellius's emulation of Nero is also reflected in Dio Cassius, who says that Vitellius 'admired and lauded the name and the life and all the practices of Nero' (*Roman History* 64.4); he clearly 'wished to imitate Nero (τὸν Νέρωνα μιμεῖσθαι ἤθελε) and offered him a sacrifice to the dead' (64.7).[20]

It is very possible that Otho's and Vitellius's imitation of Nero, the reappearance of Nero's statues under Otho, and Vitellius's sacrifices to Nero are hinted at in Revelation. According to ch. 13, in his vision John also saw another, second beast, which 'had two horns like a lamb, but spoke like a dragon. It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf,[21] and made the earth and its inhabitants worship this first beast,

19. On the portrayal of Otho in Tacitus, Plutarch and Suetonius, see Perkins 1993 and Braun 1992.

20. On Otho and Vitellius as two new Neros, see also Carré 1999.

21. The phrase ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ (13.12) is a clear Septuagintism and can be

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whose mortal wound had been healed' (13.11-12). It persuaded the inhabitants of the earth 'to erect an image in honour of the beast which had been wounded by the sword and yet lived' (13.14).[22] Against the background of the ancient historians, who speak about the erection of statues of Nero (Tacitus, Plutarch, Suetonius) and the performance of funerary offerings and sacrifices to Nero (Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio Cassius), John's description of the two-horned beast, which erects an image of Nero and induces the people to worship it, reads as a veiled reference to Otho and Vitellius. Together they constitute the two-horned second beast, succeeding the first beast of the Julio-Claudian dynasty which came to an end with Nero.

It seems that people were very much aware of the fact that the Julio-Claudian line finished with Nero. Suetonius reports popular critical gibes and lampoons with which people assailed Nero, one of which poses the question: 'Who can deny the descent from Aeneas' great line of our Nero?' (*Nero* 39.2). According to Dio Cassius, at the time of the fire of Rome in 64 CE, the following alleged Sibylline prophecy circulated among the populace: 'Last of the sons of Aeneas, a mother-slayer [i.e. Nero, who had his mother killed] shall govern' (62.18.4-5). And Dio Cassius himself states about Nero: 'Of the descendants of Aeneas and of Augustus he was the last' (63.29.3). The figure of Aeneas, who travelled from Troy to Rome *by sea* and was construed as part of Augustus's lineage, could provide the reason why the first, Julio-Claudian beast is depicted as arising *out of the sea* (Rev. 13.1: Καὶ εἶδον ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον; see also §4 below on Nero's 'new Troy'). The second beast, then, ascends *from the land* (Rev. 13.11: Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλο θηρίον ἀναβαῖνον ἐκ τῆς γῆς) because Otho joined Galba's revolt against Nero from Spain (Otho himself being governor of Lusitania in Spain and Galba governor of Hispania Taraconensis). Vitellius, in his turn, was governor of Lower Germany when he rose against Galba and Otho. Galba's, Otho's and Vitellius's armies all advanced *overland*.[23]

translated as (1) 'before it', (2) 'in its presence', but also, more broadly, as (3) 'by its authority', 'on its behalf' (see Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich 1979: 270-71 s.v. ἐνώπιον). The phrase does not necessarily imply physical presence and in the context of Rev. 13.12 (and 19.20) the rendering 'on its behalf' is to be preferred.

22. John's description in 13.13-15 of miracles surrounding the image, such as the statement that it is given breath 'so that it could even speak', is similar to pagan beliefs concerning the miraculous behaviour of statues. See Price 1984: 195-98.

23. This interpretation of the contrast between the beasts ascending from the sea and from the land fits the context of 68/69 CE and makes more sense than an explanation in terms of a contrast between the foreign, imperial power of Rome ('the beast

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The second beast has two horns like a lamb inasmuch as both Otho and Vitellius had been protagonists, directly or indirectly, in the political turmoil of the rebellion against Nero. This applies especially to Otho, who had supported Galba and hoped to be his heir (Dio Cassius 64.5; Suetonius, *Otho* 5.1). Yet, although they seemed to resemble a lamb (the metaphor *par excellence* of Christ in Revelation; see, e.g., 13.8), they actually 'spoke like a dragon' (13.11). Given their involvement in the erection of images of Nero and their offerings to Nero, it is not difficult to see how John, convinced of Nero's return, saw them as paving the way for Nero Rediturus.

In a certain way, by portraying the second beast as 'two-horned', John makes up for an anomaly which has slipped into his expectations concerning Nero Rediturus. Events were moving so fast that his assumptions about the course of history were being overtaken as he wrote. As we have seen, in ch. 17 John assumes that Nero Rediturus will be the eighth emperor (17.11), immediately following the seventh emperor, Otho. However, Otho is succeeded by Vitellius who, strictly speaking, becomes number eight (see table 1 above), the number initially reserved for Nero Rediturus. In this respect, John's succession of emperors becomes inconsistent, although at least one can say that both Otho and Vitellius still prefigure Nero Rediturus by their pro-Neronian attitude. John's mild inconsistency seems to be compensated by his depiction of the single two-horned beast in ch. 13, which points at the pro-Neronian emperors Otho and Vitellius.

It seems as if the latest developments surrounding Otho's succession by Vitellius have caused two small but indispensable changes in chs. 13 and 17. These changes, which brought the text up to date, might consist of : (1) the short clause καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μεῖναι which, from a position *ex eventu*, characterizes the reign of the seventh emperor, Otho, as short (17.10d);[24] and (2) the depiction of the second beast as 'two-horned' (13.11b): together the pair of pro-Neronian emperors form the two-horned beast from the land. Their pro-Neronian actions, described in

from the sea') and the local, provincial authority in Asia which promulgates the Roman imperial cult ('the beast from the land'). See Price 1984: 197. On the imperial cult as an implausible context for Revelation, see §5 below.

24. If this short clause in Rev. 17.10d is an addition, supplemented after the reign of the seventh emperor had quickly passed away, the description of the sixth emperor as 'now reigning' (ὁ εἷς ἔστιν) in 17.10b was authentic at the moment it was written. Galba, the sixth emperor, reigned from June 68 to mid-January 69. The sudden arrival and equally abrupt end of the seventh emperor, Otho, prompted John to add 17.10d, thereby rendering 17.10b inaccurate. He apparently wrote Revelation under Galba but finished it under Vitellius after Otho had briefly replaced Galba.

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the ancient historical writings (see the beginning of §3 above), are echoed in Rev. 13.12-17. Whereas the entire text of Revelation must have been under construction since Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome in 64 (see below) or at least since Nero's disappearance in 68, these latest changes allow for a very precise dating of Revelation, particularly since they show how John's original expectations regarding Nero Rediturus as the eighth emperor had been falsified, calling for last-minute emendations. Just as in the book of Daniel the transition from the author's *ex eventu* prophecy, based on historical facts concerning Antiochus IV Epiphanes, to his real expectations about Antiochus IV's final fate is clearly visible in the text,[25] in a similar manner the line between historical facts, expectations and amendments to those expectations also shines through in Revelation when exposed to the X-rays of ancient history.

This means that Otho's succession by Vitellius in mid-April 69 offers a *terminus post quem* for the completion of Revelation (for a detailed chronology of the year of the four emperors, see the Appendix). As there is no allusion in Revelation to Vespasian as an emperor in his own right, Revelation must have been finished before December 69, when Vitellius was put to death at Rome and succeeded by Vespasian. Perhaps the advance of Vespasian's troops to Rome after mid-July 69 could still have been regarded as the advance of the Eastern troops he had raised in his capacity as Nero's general, and to herald the return of Nero Rediturus from the East. In that case, Revelation could have been completed even in the autumn of 69 before the turn of events in December 69. More probable, however, is that Revelation was completed before news was received of Vespasian's acclamation by the Eastern troops in July 69, meaning that it must have been completed during the first half of Vitellius's reign, between mid-April and August 69, a period of approximately four months.

I do not believe that this chronological reconstruction is contradicted by a purported reference in Revelation to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, which took place in August 70. As I take it, in Rev. 11.2-3 the Jerusalem temple is still standing.[26] Although John reckons with the siege and capture of Jerusalem, he does not mention the temple's destruction. It would be wrong to deduce from the synonymy of Rome with 'Babylon' (14.8; 16.19; 17.5; 18.2, 10, 21), the destroyer of Jerusalem's first temple in 587 BCE, that the second temple had already been reduced to ruins, even

25. Scholars agree that this transition is made between Dan. 11.21-39 and 11.40-12.3. See, e.g., Collins 1993: 388-89; Goldingay 1989: 305; Di Lella 1978: 303.

26. Cf. Wilson 1993: 604-605.

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if this synonymy only otherwise occurs in post-70 Jewish sources.[27] The identification of Babylon and Rome could have been made as early as 66/67, at the beginning of Nero's suppression of the Judaean revolt. As Josephus makes clear, when Vespasian learns of Nero's death in June 68 he defers

> expedition against Jerusalem, anxiously waiting to see upon whom the empire would devolve after Nero's death; nor when he subsequently heard that Galba was emperor would he undertake anything, until he had received further instructions from him concerning the war (*J.W.* 4.491-98).

At that moment, as both Josephus and Tacitus show, Vespasian had already subdued all Galilee, most of Judaea and was preparing to march in full strength upon Jerusalem (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.120, 366, 410-13, 440-45, 490): 'Nero sent out Vespasian, who…within two summers occupied with his victorious army the whole of the level country and all the cities except Jerusalem' (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.10; cf. 2.4). Already at that stage Rome could have been likened to Babylon. Moreover, the final attack on Jerusalem itself was in the air.

The further unfolding of the year of the four emperors continued to affect Vespasian's attitude towards Jerusalem (see also the detailed chronology in the Appendix). After hearing that Galba had been assassinated and succeeded by Otho in January 69, Vespasian retains his policy of neglecting 'the invasion of Judaea, regarding an attack on a foreign country as unseasonable, while in such anxiety concerning their own' (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.499-502). With the prospect of civil war between Otho and Vitellius looming in January and February 69, and subsequently unfolding in March and April, Vespasian only advances against those districts of Judaea which have not yet been conquered, for the time being besieging Jerusalem but not taking it (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.550-55). Only after his own appointment as emperor in December 69 does Vespasian resume war against Jerusalem, having deferred it since the summer of 68:

27. This restricted occurrence is part of the standard argument against an early dating of Revelation (see, e.g., Collins 1984: 57-58). However, the *Commentary on Habakkuk* (1QpHab) among the Dead Sea Scrolls shows that figures from Israel's past, such as 'the Kittim', were already being identified with the Romans (I owe this suggestion to Dr Peter Williams, Aberdeen). In light of such associations, the characterization of Rome as 'Babylon' is not a solid piece of internal evidence for dating Revelation after 70 CE (*pace* Garrow 1997: 75). In Revelation, besides 'Babylon' also names such as 'Gog and Magog' (Rev. 20.8) are taken up from the Old Testament (Ezek. 38.1–39.16; cf. the repetitive occurrence of 'Babylon' in Ezekiel) and reinterpreted. On the reception of Ezekiel in Revelation, see Kowalski 2004.

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> The whole empire being now secured and the Roman state saved beyond expectation, Vespasian turned his thoughts to what remained in Judaea. He…dispatched his son Titus…to crush Jerusalem (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.657-58; cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.4, 4.51, 5.1, 5.10-13).

The continuous threat to which Jerusalem is exposed from June 68 onwards and its consequent ambiguous status of being passively besieged but not actively taken, is well reflected in Revelation. Jerusalem's temple still stands in Rev. 11.1-2, yet 'the outer court-yard of the temple' has been given over to the Romans, the prospect being that they will trample 'the Holy City' (i.e. Jerusalem) underfoot (11.2). The temple itself (11.1), however, is as yet excluded from this fate and not depicted as ruined. John reckons with the siege and capture of Jerusalem, but does not mention the temple's destruction as a *fait accompli*. This ambiguous situation can easily be explained if read in the context of 68/69. This offers a solid *terminus ante quem* for Revelation of August 70, the month of the actual destruction of the temple. As we have already seen, a more precise *terminus ante quem* is provided by the fact that Vespasian is not referred to as an emperor in his own right. For these reasons, Revelation must have been finished before December 69 but possibly already before news was received of Vespasian's acclamation by the Eastern troops in July 69. In all likelihood, Revelation has been completed during the first half of Vitellius's reign between mid-April and August 69.

4. *Nero's Image Par Excellence, the Colossus of Nero and his Golden House*

John's reference to Otho's and Vitellius's efforts to 'erect an image in honour of the beast' (13.14-15) may also betray a conflation, in John's own mind, of the multiple images of Nero set up by some under Otho, and the Colossus—the colossal, c. 35 metre-high bronze statue of Nero in Rome. Nero had erected it in the vestibule of his equally megalomaniac Golden House, the 'Domus Aurea', built after the fire of Rome in the period between 64 and 68 (Suetonius, *Nero* 31.1; Pliny, *Natural History* 34.45-46; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.42; Martial, *Epigrams* 1.70.7).[28] As Janet

28. Full collection and commentary of the sources in Bergmann 1994, with site map on p. 20, fig. 5, derived from *Antiquity: A Quarterly Review of Archeology* 30 (1956): 214. On the Colossus of Nero, see also Albertson 2001. For maps, see also Champlin 2003: 189 and, esp., 204, showing the triumphal route which passes through the vestibule of the Golden House.

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DeLaine summarizes this project, Nero turned

> a vast area…of the centre of Rome into a regal park, with residential nuclei dispersed within landscaped gardens extending from the Palatine to the Oppian and Caelian around an artificial lake. The main entrance was from the Forum along the new via Sacra through a porticoed vestibule housing a colossal bronze statue of Nero. New palatial buildings were added to existing imperial properties on the Palatine and Esquiline, the best preserved of which is the Oppian wing incorporated into the substructures of the baths of Trajan.[29]

Following Nero's death, his colossal statue was left unaltered by Otho and Vitellius, as is apparent from the report that Vespasian undertook to change the Colossus into a general statue of the Sun (Pliny, *Natural History* 34.45; Suetonius, *Vespasian* 18; Martial, *Epigrams* 1.70.7).[30] No doubt, Otho and Vitellius might not have had the time to change the Colossus, even if they had wished to do so, but from the perspective of John their passive policy in this matter might have seemed consistent with their other pro-Neronian actions, and would have confirmed his conviction that they actively promulgated the worship of Nero's image. Moreover, Otho was indeed determined to finish Nero's Golden House, as Suetonius reports: 'the first grant that he [i.e. Otho] signed as emperor was one of fifty million sesterces for finishing the Golden House' (*Otho* 7.1).

John seems to have become so obsessed with what he perceives as the worship of Nero's image, one of the most noticeable features of Nero's Golden House, that he repeatedly mentions 'those who worship the beast and its image' (14.11: οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ; cf. 14.9; 16.2; 19.20) and contrasts them with those who refrain from this cult (15.2; 20.4). These strong feelings are understandable, given that the fire of Rome, which had created space for the construction of the Golden House, had been blamed on the Christians. Moreover, during the building of this extensive complex of buildings, Nero had started the suppression of the Jewish Revolt, and the general he had appointed was now besieging Jerusalem and its temple.

This all rendered the building of the Golden House very sensitive for (Jewish) Christians. If Romans themselves were critical about the Golden House, 'Rome becoming one house' (Suetonius, *Nero* 39.2; Martial, *De*

29. DeLaine 1996: 493, with bibliography. See further Bergmann 1994; Elsner 1994; Champlin 1998; and Ball 2003.

30. Yet it is likely, as Bergmann 1994: 9 observes, that Nero's statue already portrayed him in the guise of the Sun, in accordance with other portrayals of Nero after 64 CE. See also Hekster 2002: 123, with bibliography.

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Spectaculis 2), the Christians had even more reason to be so. The Colossus was one of the Golden House's most noticeable features, besides the artificial lake around which the buildings of the Golden House complex were arranged. Together with the Golden House, the statue symbolized the beginnings of a new golden age and closely associated Nero with Sol-Helios. On his Greek Tour, too, according to Suetonius, Nero 'was acclaimed as the equal…of the Sun in driving a chariot' (*Nero* 53). Nero's close self-identification with the Sun was also visible in the design and decoration of Nero's pavilion on the Oppian Hill, part of the Golden House complex. As Ida Sciortino puts it:

> Judging by what is Nero's palace on the Oppian hill, it was designed by the architects, Severus and Celer, to be flooded in light. The widespread application of gold-leaf and the pomp of the precious marbles, along with the help of the sun, must have made the gleaming golden dwelling worthy of an emperor who compared himself to the sun-god *Helios*.[31]

The intertwining of Nero's identity with that of the Sun was expressed in the Colossus. As we know from the only known representations of the Colossus, on coins issued in the reigns of Severus Alexander (222–235) and Gordian III (238–244),[32] at a time when the Colossus was still standing, Nero's head was adorned with sunrays and his left arm was bent to hold a globe.[33]

If we assume that the image of Nero which John criticizes is indeed this colossal statue of Nero in the vestibule of the Golden House, which represents Nero-Helios and embodies Nero's global, universal power, can it be coincidence that Revelation refutes this Neronian ideology in detail? Not only is Nero's image criticized, John also asserts that the future, ideal city ('the new Jerusalem') will not need the sun to shine on it (καὶ ἡ πόλις οὐ

31. Sciortino in Segala and Sciortino 1999: 74. Cf. also Segala in Segala and Sciortino 1999: 22.

32. See Bergmann 1994: table 2.1 and 2.2, with a description on p. 53, and an interpretation on pp. 10-11.

33. I agree with Segala in Segala and Sciortino 1999: 11, that these coins, esp. that of Gordian III, show a globe supported by Nero's left arm. Bergmann 1994 does not state this explicitly, but acknowledges the possibility: 'Ein Globus wäre dagegen möglich und passend für einen Weltherrscher' (Bergmann 1994: 11, 14-15 at 15, with fig. 3). Bergmann also draws attention to the fact that Nero's right foot is placed on a rudder which rests on a globe, symbolizing that Nero is the one who determines the universal course of history: 'Nero sollte in seinem Koloß durch die Gestalt des Sonnengottes als Herr des Goldenen Zeitalters und durch das Steuerruder als Weltenlenker und Glücksbringer erscheinen' (Bergmann 1994: 11, 16-17 at 17).

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χρείαν ἔχει τοῦ ἡλίου [21.23]); they 'will not need the light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will give them light' (καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν χρείαν φωτὸς λύχνου καὶ φῶς ἡλίου, ὅτι κύριος ὁ θεὸς φωτίσει ἐπ' αὐτούς [22.5]). In line with this, and making use of allusions to the Old Testament, the solar imagery is claimed for Christ: 'his face shone like the sun in full strength' (1.16: καὶ ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ δυνάμει αὐτοῦ; cf. Dan 10.6) and 'his feet were like burnished bronze' (1.15; cf. Dan 10.6).[34] Moreover, whereas Nero's image holds the globe in its left arm, Christ is emphatically and repeatedly described as the one who holds the seven stars, the planets, in his right hand: καὶ ἔχων ἐν τῇ δεξιᾷ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ ἀστέρας ἑπτά (1.16; 2.1; 3.1; cf. 1.20). In this way, Nero's idolatrous, solar and universal ideology is countered by John's carefully styled Christology, partly supported by well-chosen imagery from the Jewish scriptures.

Not only the Colossus seems to be referred to in Revelation; there may also be an allusion to the other important feature of Nero's Golden House: the artificial lake. Both features are mentioned by Suetonius:

> The entrance hall was designed for *a colossal statue*, 120 ft high, bearing Nero's head. So vast were the grounds, that triple colonnades ran for a mile. There was, too, *an enormous lake*, surrounded by buildings made to look like cities (*Nero* 31.1).

This artificial lake is also brought up by Martial when commenting on the Flavian amphitheatre, which later occupied the place of Nero's lake: 'Here where the venerable mass of the remarkable amphitheatre is being erected, was *the artificial lake*' (*De Spectaculis* 2). In the design of Nero's Golden House complex, this lake occupied a central position, constituting an ideal centre around which the various buildings were unified.

This lake seems to be alluded to in Revelation when John unfolds his very peculiar and elsewhere unattested view that in the end the beast, that is Nero, together with the 'false prophet' will be drowned in the 'lake of fire' (λίμνη τοῦ πυρός):

> The beast was taken prisoner, along with the false prophet [cf. Rev. 13.13] who had worked miracles in its presence and deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire with its sulphurous flames (19.20; cf. 20.10, 14-15; 21.8).

Against the background established so far, the simultaneous reference in 19.20 to (a) Nero, (b) the false prophet, who is identical with the second

34. Cf. also the solar imagery in Rev. 10.1 and 12.1.

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beast which represents Otho and Vitellius,[35] (c) the image of Nero, and (d) a 'lake' strongly suggests that, with the latter, John has the striking artificial lake of Nero's Golden House in mind, used now in a figurative sense. This is strengthened by the fact that the combined expression 'lake of fire' (λίμνη τοῦ πυρός) does not occur in Jewish literature before John.[36] The expression 'lake of fire' seems to acquire the double meaning of (1) *the lake* which occupied the site of the old city of Rome which was burned by *fire* ('the lake of *the* fire [of Rome]') and which, together with the Colossus of Nero, constituted the most noticeable features of Nero's Golden House, as well as (2) *the means* by which Nero will be punished, his final fate of being drowned in his own lake ('the lake of fire'). He almost seems to receive a double penalty inasmuch as he is not merely drowned, but drowned in fire—a death thought to be appropriate for an arsonist.

The latter emphasis is in line with the obsession with fire which John exhibits throughout Revelation[37] and which, at a psychological level, may be explained from the fire of Rome which raged in 64 and turned the fate of its Christian communities. In the context of post-64 Neronian Rome, it may be significant to read in Revelation that it is one of the heavenly angels who 'holds authority over fire' (14.18), and that 'whoever worships the beast and its image…he shall be tormented with fire' (Εἴ τις προσκυνεῖ τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ…βασανισθήσεται ἐν πυρί [14.9-10]). This prospect mirrors Nero's punishment of the Christians charged with the fire of Rome. According to Tacitus, 'they were fastened to crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night' (*Annals* 15.44). And it also not without significance to read that John expects 'the great city', Rome, to be burned by fire again, in God's imminent punishment: the 'ten kings' (probably a reference to ten contemporaneous client kings of Rome[38]), who 'for a brief hour will share royal authority with the beast' (17.12), will eventually 'burn her [Rome] up by fire' (17.16: καὶ αὐτὴν κατακαύσουσιν ἐν πυρί). She 'shall be burned up by fire' (18.8: ἐν πυρὶ κατακαυθήσεται)!

35. The functioning of the false prophet as described in Rev. 19.20 corresponds with the activities of the second beast in 13.11-17.

36. In *1 En.* 21.7 and *Jos. Asen.* 12.10 there is talk of an 'abyss full of great pillars of fire which are being poured out' (ἀβύσσος πλήρης στύλων πυρὸς μεγάλου καταφερομένων) and an 'abyss of fire' (ἄβυσσος τοῦ πυρός), not of a 'lake of fire'. If the expression ἄβυσσος τοῦ πυρός was known, John seems to consciously replace ἄβυσσος with λίμνη.

37. To give an impression, more than a third of all occurrences of πῦρ in the New Testament are found in Revelation alone.

38. Aune 1998b: 950-51.

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It seems as if John's prophecy deliberately counters Nero's ideology of the new Rome,[39] rebuilt from the fire of 64. Nero's ideology seems to have been built on the narrative of the destruction of Troy and Aeneas's flight from Troy to Rome, which had now itself burned down. According to Tacitus and Suetonius, as the fire raged, Nero jumped up onto the stage of the imperial palace and sang 'The Fall of Troy', 'typifying the ills of the present by the calamities of the past' (*Annals* 15.39; cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 38).[40] We have already seen that Nero was considered to be part of the lineage running from Aeneas, through Augustus, down to Nero himself (see §3 above). Nero's claim of creating a new Troy is also apparent from the paintings in his Golden House with episodes taken from the Trojan cycle. As Elisabetta Segala states, 'the subjects can be linked to Nero's ideology: the emperor is the one who, from the ruins of the fire, will create a new Troy'.[41]

This ideology of a new city is vehemently opposed by John. Against this background, Revelation reads in fact as a 'tale of three cities': (1) Rome, the 'great city' (ἡ πόλις ἡ μεγάλη; see 16.19; 17.18; 18.10, 16, 18, 19, 21; perhaps also 11.8), whose fate is to be destroyed by fire (17.16; 18.8); (2) Jerusalem, the 'holy city' (ἡ πόλις ἡ ἁγία), which will be trampled underfoot (11.2); and (3) the 'city of God, the *new* Jerusalem (ἡ πόλις τοῦ θεοῦ, ἡ καινὴ Ἰερουσαλήμ) which is coming down out of heaven from God' (3.12), also called 'the holy city, the *new* Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God' (21.2 and 21.10; cf. 22.19). It is this new, eschatological Jerusalem which is itself of pure gold: καὶ ἡ πόλις χρυσίον καθαρόν (21.18). This opposition of three cities, the expectation that Rome will be destroyed by fire a final time, the image of Jerusalem in Judaea as under siege, and the description of the new Jerusalem as 'golden' read as a deliberate undermining of Nero's new Rome, with at its heart the 'Golden House', the οἰκία ἡ χρυσῆ or the 'Domus Aurea' as it is called in the ancient authors.[42]

The more a Neronian setting of Revelation emerges, the easier it

39. On Nero's ideology of the new Rome, see Tacitus, *Annals* 15.40: 'it seemed that Nero was aiming at the glory of founding a new city'. I wish to thank Professor Olivier Hekster (Nijmegen) for his comments on this section of my paper.

40. Cf. also Eutropius, *Breviarium ab Urbe Condita* 7.14.3. See also Champlin 2003: 78 and 82-83 on Nero's *Troica*, and 49 on Nero and the destruction of Troy.

41. Segala in Segala and Sciortino 1999: 37-38 at 38; cf. 5.

42. Suetonius, *Nero* 31 and *Otho* 7.1; Pliny, *Natural History* 33.54; Dio Cassius 65.4: 'not even Nero's Golden House could satisfy Vitellius' (οὐδὲ τῇ οἰκίᾳ τῇ τοῦ Νέρωνος τῇ χρυσῇ ἠρκεῖτο); Dio Chrysostom, *Oratio* 47.14-15.

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becomes to understand that throughout Revelation John is not only preoccupied with the language of 'image' and 'fire', but also with that of 'golden' (χρυσοῦς), 'gold' (χρυσός), and 'made golden/adorned with gold' (κεχρυσῶσθαι). According to John, Rome has been adorned with gold (17.4 and 18.16: καὶ κεχρυσωμένη χρυσίῳ)! His criticism reads as a conscious subversion of Nero's new Rome. Hence also his veiled language.[43] Rome's Golden House, which is still being finished by Otho (Suetonius, *Otho* 7.1), is contrasted with the golden city of the new, heavenly Jerusalem, which will replace the Judaean Jerusalem, beleaguered by Nero's forces.

Neronian overtones in Revelation do not stop here, however. Two more instances will be briefly considered.

(1) In ch. 15, John describes those who have been victorious against the beast and its image as standing beside the heavenly sea of glass, holding lyres (ἔχοντας κιθάρας) which God has given them (15.2), and singing songs (15.3-4). This is an extraordinary mirroring of the figure at whose hands they suffered, Nero, who performed and even took part in competitions as lyre-player and was ill-reputed for that practice (see, e.g., Tacitus, *Annals* 14.14-15; Suetonius, *Nero* 21.1; Dio Cassius 61.20.4-5, 62.6.3). In 66, Nero crossed to Greece on a grand tour 'for the purpose of driving chariots, playing the lyre, making proclamations, and acting in tragedies' (Dio Cassius 63.8.2). In Greece, he 'was acclaimed as the equal of Apollo in music' (Suetonius, *Nero* 53) and also on his return in 68 to Rome he was hailed as Apollo (Dio Cassius 63.20.5; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.38), the lyre-playing god (see, e.g., Euripides, *Ion* 164-65; Callimachus, *Hymn to Apollo* 2.19, 33; Propertius, *Elegies* 2.31.6; and Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 3.24.1).[44] Such identification between Nero and Apollo may also be behind Rev. 9.11 when John describes the appearance of 'the angel of the abyss' (cf. Nero in 17.8), 'whose name…in Greek is Ἀπολλύων, the Destroyer'. Following a widespread etymological

43. For the need for veiled language under Nero, see also Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 4.46. The same need will undoubtedly have applied in the reigns of his immediate successors.

44. See also Suetonius, *Nero* 39.2 integrating aspects of Nero and Apollo into a composite picture. For iconographic examples of lyre-playing Apollo, see the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC)*, art. 'Apollon' (Lambrinudakis *et al.* 1984), esp. §I D, Nos. 82-238; §II A, Nos. 630-43; §III E, Nos. 1043-44, with relevant commentary on pp. 321-23 on 'Apollon Kitharoidos' in the Hellenistic period and in the Eastern Roman Empire; and art. 'Apollo' (Simon and Bauchhenss 1984), esp. §I I, Nos. 349-54 and §II A, Nos. 532-54.

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derivation of Apollo from the verb ἀπολλύναι,[45] John seems to depict Nero in the guise of Apollo.[46]

In line with his identification of Nero with lyre-playing Apollo in Rev. 9.11, John now also depicts Nero as lyre-player in the following passage. John builds a contrast between heaven, where music is accompanied by lyres (15.2; cf. also 14.2; 5.8), and Rome, which will become devoid of lyre music. 'The sound of lyre-players…shall no more be heard in you' (καὶ φωνὴ κιθαρῳδῶν…οὐ μὴ ἀκουσθῇ ἐν σοὶ ἔτι [18.22]). Although John closely resembles the language of Isa. 24.8 LXX, describing the cessation of music because of God's judgment (πέπαυται φωνὴ κιθάρας),[47] the image is applied to Rome, I would contend, *because* John has Nero in mind.[48] This holds true for John's use of Old Testament prophecy in general. His mind being saturated with the Old Testament prophets, John easily applies them in his own particular, historical context. His emphatic assertion that lyre music will no longer be heard in Rome entails comfort for John's readers. Nero Rediturus will not be successful. At the same time, as we have seen so far, features of Neronian Rome are not simply criticized, but inverted and claimed by John for God's realm: lyre music becomes a feature of the heavenly worship. Previous characteristics of Rome are mirrored by the heavenly realm.

(2) This also holds true for the specific emphases John applies in his portrayal of God and Christ. Whereas Nero, in conformity with the logic of the Nero Rediturus topic, is depicted as the beast which 'was (ἦν) and is not (καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν), and is about to ascend from the abyss, and will meet its destruction' (17.8; cf. 17.11), God himself is repeatedly described as he 'who is, who was, and who is to come' (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος [1.4, 8; 4.8; cf. 11.17; 16.5]) (cf. Klauck 2001: 694). Nero and God are put in antithesis. Whereas Nero is currently absent but will return, the readers are comforted with the affirmation that God is present throughout and directs history: he is the actual παντοκράτωρ, ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (4.8; 11.17; 1.8). This emphasis in John's characterization of God is clearly occasioned by the figure of Nero Rediturus.

Something similar happens in John's Christology. It is not so much that

45. See Aune 1998a: 535. According to Aune, it is 'possible that an allusion to Nero is intended'.

46. For further identifications of Nero with Apollo in Revelation, see Collins 1976: 188-90 on the possible use of the myth of Apollo's birth in Rev. 12.

47. So Aune 1998b: 1008.

48. The observation that John's attitude towards the lyre-players of Rome in Rev. 18.22 reflects his criticism of Nero I owe to Soeting 2001: 89-90.

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Nero is depicted as an anti-Christ (despite popular confusion, the terms ἀντίχριστος and ψευδόχριστος do *not* occur in Revelation), but that Christ is construed as an anti-Nero. This shows the heat of polemics. Just as Nero, one of the seven heads of the beast, is described as ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον, '*as* or *as if* slain to death' (13.3), so Christ, too, is depicted as a lamb ἑστηκὸς ὡς ἐσφαγμένον, 'standing as slain in sacrifice' (5.6). Christ is τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἐσφαγμένον, 'the slain lamb' (5.12; 13.18). Christ and Nero are contrasted with each other and mirror each other's fate. This parallelism goes so far that the original Nero Rediturus topos starts to move in the direction of a Nero Redivivus figure. Whereas the original expectation concerning Nero was purely historical (Nero was not dead but had escaped to the East from whence he would return), due to John's juxtaposition of Christ and Nero, the latter also acquires characteristics of the former. Although the phrase ὡς ἐσφαγμένην εἰς θάνατον in 13.3 is still ambiguous insofar as it can describe Nero either 'as slain to death' or 'as if slain to death', there is no doubt that John eventually blurred the topic and implies that Nero had died as well but would come back to life.[49]

This becomes apparent from a comparison between the way Christ and Nero are represented in 2.8 and 13.14 respectively. Christ is described as ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος, ὃς ἐγένετο νεκρὸς καὶ ἔζησεν (2.8; cf. 1.18), 'the first and the last, who was dead but *has begun to live (again)*'. The same word ἔζησεν (an ingressive aorist) is also applied to Nero, who is depicted as him who 'received the blow of the dagger and yet has begun to live again' (ἔχει τὴν πληγὴν τῆς μαχαίρης καὶ ἔζησεν [13.14]). This blow was indeed a deadly blow (πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου) from which he nevertheless recovered: ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ ἐθεραπεύθη (13.3, 12).[50] In this

49. As Professor Jos Verheyden (Louvain) suggested to me, this might also be the reason why Nero is repeatedly pictured as ascending from 'the abyss' (Rev. 9.11 [cf. 9.1-2]; 11.7; 17.8), i.e. from 'the underworld'. See LSJ, 4 s.v. ἄβυσσος. Cf. Collins 1976: 175-76.

50. I disagree with Bauckham's interpretation of Rev. 13.3 which applies this recovery, in a figurative sense, to the recovery of the empire under Vespasian after the civil war, and not in a literal sense to Nero personally. See Bauckham 1993: 441-50, esp. 442, arguing 'that the mortal wound sustained by Nero (the head) was also a mortal wound to the imperial power as such (the beast) and that it was the imperial power, not Nero himself, which recovered'. Bauckham constructs an artificial contrast between the two visions of the beast in Rev. 13 and 17. In Rev. 13, according to Bauckham, John, from his post-69 CE perspective, sees the expectation of Nero's return '*already being fulfilled* in the Flavian dynasty which re-established the imperial power' (Bauckham 1993: 444; italics mine), whereas in Rev. 17 John is

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way, John models Christ and Nero on one another.[51] Christ is 'slain' (a terminology never used before of Christ's death) just as Nero is 'slain to death' by receiving a deadly blow from a dagger. Conversely, one could say that the original expectation of Nero Rediturus is now coloured by the death and resurrection of Christ to the effect that Nero Rediturus is now also Nero Redivivus.[52] Yet, this miraculously revived Nero is still represented as a historical figure whose return is imminent. Whereas Christ now lives for ever (1.18: ἐγενόμην νεκρὸς καὶ ἰδοὺ ζῶν εἰμι εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων; cf. 4.9-10), however, Nero will be thrown alive into the lake of fire (19.20). Just as God is the actual παντοκράτωρ, Christ is ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχων τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς (1.5), an expression of John's deepest theological conviction.

The clearly anti-Roman overtones can hardly be missed. This attitude is taken against Nero. John's theology and Christology amount to a full anti-Neronian ideology. The events of 68/69 furnish the best historical interpretative background for Revelation. To render this interpretation more plausible, however, I have to point out the weaknesses in the alternative, dominant interpretation which places much weight on the imperial cult in Asia as the primary context in which Revelation should be understood. After all, Revelation is addressed to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia (1.4). John receives the divine command to write what

concerned 'with *the future*' and 'must show how the empire had *only temporarily* escaped the divine judgment which Nero's death had symbolized and *only temporarily* recovered its strength under the Flavians' (Bauckham 1993: 449; italics mine). To me it seems much more likely that *both* chapters are concerned with John's expectations of a future return of Nero.

51. Cf. Collins 1976: 174: 'the wound and healing of the head seems to be a parody of the death and resurrection of Jesus'. See further pp. 175-76 at 176: 'There is an antithesis established…between Jesus…and Nero'; p. 183 about Nero as 'the mirror image in an antithetical sense of Christ'; and pp. 185-86.

52. The same conclusion is reached by Collins 1976: 176-83 at 176: 'the particular way in which the author of the book of Revelation has adopted the Nero legend involves the conception of a dying and rising Nero of sorts…this particular form of the Nero legend is peculiar to the book of Revelation'; p. 177: 'in the Greek and Latin authors there is no indication that the legend involved the return of Nero from the dead'; p. 183: 'The interest in the death of Nero and thus in his return as a return from the dead seems to be peculiar to the book of Revelation. This distinctive expression of the Nero legend was evidently formulated by the author of the book in its present form in order to characterize Nero, the agent of Satan, as the mirror image in an antithetical sense of Christ, the agent of God'. See also p. 187. I do not believe that Nero Rediturus = Nero Redivivus in *Sib. Or.* 5.367 at the end of the first century CE. See Van Kooten 2005: 184 n. 19; Van Henten 2000: 9; and Collins 1976: 180-81.

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he has seen in a vision to the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea (1.11). The actual contents of this revelation are preceded by introductory letters, dictated by Christ, and addressed to the Christian communities at Ephesus (2.1-7), Smyrna (2.8-11), Pergamum (2.12-17), Thyatira (2.18-29), Sardis (3.1-6), Philadelphia (3.7-13) and Laodicea (3.14-22) respectively. I shall first explain why the imperial cult in Asia is not sufficient as an interpretative background to Revelation, before giving my reasons for why the Christians in the cities mentioned should be particularly concerned about Nero Rediturus.

5. *The Setting of Revelation in the Roman Province of Asia*

a. *Nero's Image versus the Collective Nature of the Imperial Cult*

As I have already implied, John speaks of the 'beast and its image' in a consistent way. There is no talk of images in the plural, but only of one specific image, that of the beast. The image of the beast is first introduced not in the context of the 'provincial' introductory letters in chs. 1–3 but in ch. 13, in the context of the portrayal of the seven-headed beast, one of whose heads seemed to have been given a deadly blow, yet whose mortal wound was healed (3.1-10). In the course of this chapter, the beast's head (Nero) is itself presented as a beast and accompanied by a second, two-horned beast which, in my understanding, represents the pro-Neronian emperors Otho and Vitellius (13.11-18; see §3 above). They are the ones who persuade the inhabitants of the earth 'to erect an image in honour of the beast which had been slain by the dagger and yet had begun to live again'; in this context the term εἰκών occurs for the first time (13.14-15), and it is this context, together with the number 666 mentioned later (13.16-18), which identifies this image as Nero's. 'All who would not worship the image' are caused to be put to death (13.15). In the next chapter, there is a reference to 'the beast, its image, and its mark', a clear reference back to ch. 13, but now entailing John's warning against those who worship the image (14.9, 11). Whereas ch. 13 was directed against the image, now those who worship the image are held responsible.

This now becomes a kind of fixed category, 'those who fall down and worship the beast and its image' (οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τὸ θηρίον καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα αὐτοῦ). They constitute the opposite of 'all who would not worship the image' (ὅσοι ἐὰν μὴ προσκυνήσωσιν τῇ εἰκόνι τοῦ θηρίου) in 13.15; 'those who had been victorious against the beast, its image' (οἱ νικῶντες ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτοῦ) in 15.2; 'those who…had

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been beheaded, those who had not worshipped the beast and its image or received its mark on forehead or hand' and are awarded a thousand years rule for this in 20.4. The idolaters, 'the men that wore the mark of the beast and worshipped its image' are the object of God's wrath in 16.2; one of the seven bowls is poured out over them. They have been deluded by the ψευδοπροφήτης (also mentioned in 16.13 and 20.10, and identical with the second beast from Rev. 13.11-17), who is punished for that in 19.20 (19.20 referring back to 13.11-17). These six passages all talk about an image in the singular, and from the first time this term occurs in 13.14-15 it is unmistakably defined as Nero's image. The way this term is used remains consistent throughout chs. 13–20. This seems to signal that Revelation does not oppose the manifold images of the imperial cult, but opposes one particular image in particular, that of Nero, erected in Rome.

If John were concerned about the Roman imperial cult in one particular province, that of Asia, it would be very artificial if he were to speak only of one particular image.[53] In Asia, there is no evidence that a separate provincial imperial cult was devoted to Nero. From the beginning of the Roman Empire until the Flavians, the only *provincial imperial cults* were those at (1) Pergamum, established in 29 BCE in honour of Rome and Augustus; (2) Smyrna, founded in 23 CE and dedicated to Tiberius, Livia, and the Senate; (3) Miletus, founded around 40 BCE with exclusive devotion to Gaius but discontinued after his death; and (4) Ephesus, established in the late first century CE in honour of the Sebastoi, that is, of Domitian, Titus and Vespasian.[54] Friesen's conclusion is relevant to the matter in hand: after the first three emperors, Augustus, Tiberius and Gaius

> neither [Claudius] nor Nero received provincial worship in Asia. In fact, after Gaius there was no other provincial imperial cult established in Asia for over 40 years… For nearly sixty years—from 26 CE until the reign of Domitian in the late first century CE—Asia had two provincial cults [i.e. Pergamum and Smyrna] but was not successful in establishing a third.[55]

53. I owe this observation to Jan-Willem Drijvers, Groningen.

54. See Friesen 2001: chs. 2 (Pergamum and Smyrna) and 3 (Miletus and Ephesus). For an excellent summary of the development of the provincial imperial cult, see Friesen 2001: 53-54.

55. Friesen 1993: 27. Pace Burrell 2004, who suggests, unconvincingly, that Ephesus was calling itself 'Neokoros' in 65/66 CE after a provincial temple which it may have finally won in the reign of Nero; see Burrell 2004: 60-61, 277, 363 (as she acknowledges: 'the grant is anything but certain, and the circumstances unknown'). Burrell, however, confirms the chronological succession of the provincial imperial temples established in Asia by Augustus in Pergamum (Burrell 2004: ch. 1), by

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From a broader perspective, taking both the provincial imperial cults into account as well as all other imperial temples and shrines in the seven cities of Revelation listed in the catalogue compiled by Price,[56] one can note that, as we have just seen, until the Flavians three cities upheld provincial imperial cults (Pergamum [No. 19: Rome and Augustus], Smyrna [No. 45: Tiberius, Livia and the Senate], and Ephesus [No. 31: Flavians]), whereas two cities in this period did not contain any imperial temple or shrine (Philadelphia and Thyatira); the two remaining ones accommodated a temple of Augustus (Sardis [No. 56]) and an imperial temple under Domitian and Domitia (Laodicea [No. 87]). In addition, Ephesus not only held the provincial imperial cult, but also a temple of Rome and Julius Caesar for Roman citizens of Asia (No. 27), a temple of Augustus in the Artemision (No. 28), a temple of Augustus in the city itself (No. 29), and a royal portico with statues of Augustus and Livia (No. 30). This shows that *before* the Flavians (if we stick to a Neronian date for Revelation) only four of the seven cities had imperial temples and shrines (Pergamum, Ephesus, Sardis and Smyrna), most of these being dedicated to Augustus. Most importantly, however, there is no evidence of any imperial temple or shrine devoted to Nero which might have explained the prominence of Nero's image particularly in Revelation.

Without doubt, images of Nero occurred in Asia in an imperial cultic context, but they would have been accommodated within the existing imperial temples and shrines among the images of Nero's predecessors and of other members of the imperial families. The imperial cult itself was normally of a collective nature, as Price makes clear: 'the collective nature of the cult allowed for the addition of new statues' (Price 1984: 178). This can be illustrated by examples taken from Bubon (just without the borders of Asia in Lycia) and Aphrodisias, within Asia, which show that Nero's image was included in the general imperial cult. At Bubon, about twenty bronze statues and their bases of imperial figures were uncovered in the local Sebasteion. They appear to have been arranged chronologically:

> the series run[s] over the conventional dynastic divisions between Julio-Claudian, Flavian, Antonine and later emperors… This desire for continuity and stability is a major feature of the Roman empire. On the one

Tiberius in Smyrna (ch. 2), by Gaius in Miletus (ch. 3), and by (Nero and) the Flavians in Ephesus (ch. 4).

56. See the 'Catalogue of Imperial Temples and Shrines in Asia Minor' in Price 1984: 249-74.

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> hand cults and dedications asserted that the rule of any given emperor would last for ever, while the successive erection of statues of new emperors implied the durability of imperial rule (Price 1984: 161).

Among these finds, also the pedestal of a statue of Nero was recovered (Price 1984: 159-61). Within the imperial cult Nero's statue would have been part of a broader series of statues.

This is confirmed by archaeological finds at Aphrodisias, which reveal that Nero was part of the Julio-Claudian dynasty honoured in the Sebasteion there, a municipal imperial cult which began under Tiberius and continued into the reign of Nero. Besides the base of a statue of Nero, reliefs depicting Nero's ascension to the throne and his conquering of Armenia were also found on the portico of the Sebasteion (Friesen 2001: 77-95). Friesen's analysis of the Sebasteion is most relevant for our topic:

> The period of Nero seems to have been rather quiet with regard to imperial worship. The major known imperial cult monument of the period is the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias. The monument was probably begun in the Tiberian period and honoured all the Julio-Claudians. Completion of the project extended into the reign of Nero, who is shown in a relatively reserved manner (Friesen 2001: 148-49).

These examples from Bubon and Aphrodisias may suffice to show that the imperial cult has no direct bearing on our topic. If John had been primarily concerned about the imperial cult in Asia, one would have expected a more general attack on images in the plural. Instead, John focuses on one image in particular, that of Nero. This focus can be better understood in the light of the reappearance of Nero's images under Otho and, in particular, with relation to the Colossus of Nero. What was at issue was something more specific than the imperial cult.

b. *The Silence about the Imperial Cult in the Introductory Letters*

This suggestion that the imperial cult is not a sufficient explanation of Revelation is supported by the silence about this cult in the introductory letters in Revelation. There are no allusions to the cult, with the possible exception of the letter to Pergamum, as we shall see shortly. Instead of hinting at the imperial cult, these letters bear witness to a variety of tensions of a different kind which permeated the Christian communities in these cities.[57] There seem to be four kinds of tensions involved.

57. Cf. Friesen 2005, who argues 'that Revelation had *several* social settings, not one; that these settings were characterized by *distinct* problems having mostly to do

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1. Tensions with Jewish synagogues: Both in Smyrna and Philadelphia there are synagogues which John labels as 'synagogue of Satan'. In the letter to Smyrna John refers to 'those who claim to be Jews but are not; they are really *a synagogue of Satan*' (2.9). This tension has to do with the perception that the Christians at Smyrna are being 'slandered' by these Jews. In the letter to Philadelphia, too, John makes reference to 'those of *Satan's synagogue*, who falsely claim to be Jews' (3.8).

2. Tensions within the Christian communities themselves: In Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira there are clear signs of strains and stresses among Christians, 'the others' being regarded as deviant and named after ominous forerunners or leaders. In Ephesus there are those who claim to be apostles but are not (2.3), as well as 'Nicolaitans' (2.6). The latter are also found in Pergamum (2.15), alongside 'some that hold to the teaching of Balaam' (2.14). This teaching appears to be related to the eating of food sacrificed to idols (εἰδωλόθυτα), a broad phenomenon that is also addressed in Paul's letters (1 Cor. 8.1-10; 10.19). In Thyatira, the same phenomenon is now connected to the teaching of Jezebel, 'the woman who claims to be a prophetess and whose teaching lures my servants into fornication and into eating food sacrificed to idols' (2.20). John describes this practice as the experience of 'what they call the deep secrets of Satan' (2.23-24). This practice does not only affect Thyatira and Pergamum: John expects that his warning is relevant for 'all the churches' (2.23), thus pointing at a common exposure to the practice of eating food sacrificed to idols.

3. External threats: Although causing divisions among Christians themselves, the phenomenon of food sacrificed to idols in Pergamum and Thyatira is in fact a threat from the outside. The internal tensions are the result of outward challenges. There is no reason, however, to relate these challenges specifically to the imperial cult in Asia, as Paul also encountered them in Corinth. The outward challenge posed by the pagan environment also makes itself felt in the letter to Sardis. The Christians of Sardis are encouraged, in a rather vague, general way, to follow the example of the 'few people in Sardis who have not polluted their clothing' (3.4-5). In a similar, non-specific way the Christians at Laodicea are exhorted not to be lukewarm but wholehearted (3.15-16).

4. Tensions with the Roman government and/or with the imperial cult:

with relation to outsiders' (pp. 351-56 at 352; italics mine). I agree with him that 'there are no references to imperial cults anywhere in the messages to the seven assemblies' (pp. 356-67 at 367; although I am less sure about the letter to Pergamum, see below), but disagree with his thesis that nevertheless imperial cults constitute the proper background to Rev. 13–19 (Friesen 2005: 367-73).

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In Smyrna John expects the devil to throw some of them in prison (2.10). Yet in the letter this is not related to the imperial cult, but most probably to the slander caused by Jews: 'I know how you are slandered by those who claim to be Jews but are not; they are really a synagogue of Satan' (2.9). It seems to point to tensions with the Jewish synagogue just as in Philadelphia. This imprisonment by the authorities seems due to disturbance of public order and cannot be linked to the imperial cult as such.

However, there may be one possible allusion to the imperial cult in the letter to Pergamum. John describes Pergamum as a place 'where Satan is enthroned' (2.13a: ὅπου ὁ θρόνος τοῦ Σατανᾶ) and seems to relate this to an incident in which a Christian called Antipas was put to death in this place 'where Satan dwells' (2.13b: ὅπου ὁ Σατανᾶς κατοικεῖ). This 'throne of Satan' could possibly refer to either (a) the local Jewish synagogue at Pergamum or (b) the imperial cult at Pergamum. Its synonymy with the Jewish synagogue is supported by the fact that John does call the Jewish synagogue 'the synagogue of Satan' in the letters to Smyrna (2.9) and Pergamum (2.13). We know that there were well-established contacts between Jerusalem and Pergamum, that there must have been a local Jewish community, and that Herod the Great acted as a benefactor to Pergamum.[58] All in all, the '*throne* of Satan' in Pergamum may well be a '*synagogue* of Satan' such as those in Smyrna and Philadelphia.

However, it cannot be excluded that, in this instance, John has the provincial imperial cult in mind.[59] As we have seen, Pergamum held the oldest provincial imperial cult in Asia, established in 29 BCE in honour of Rome and Augustus. If we compare the expression 'the throne of Satan' to other expressions entailing 'the throne of' in Revelation, there are two similar phrases: the 'throne of God' (12.5; 22.1, 3), but also the 'throne of the beast' (16.10). The latter phrase suggests that 'the throne of Satan' in the Pergamum letter (2.13) might well be 'the throne of the beast' (16.10). This need not necessarily imply that the 'throne of the beast' is located in Pergamum, but the imperial cult at Pergamum might be taken

58. See Josephus, *Ant.* 14.247-55, containing a decree of the people of Pergamum to be dated in the time of Antiochus VII Sidetes (138–129 BCE) or Antiochus IX Cyzicenus (113–95 BCE). Cf. Trebilco 1991: ch. 1.2. See further Cicero, *Pro Flacco* 28.68 on the seizure of Jewish temple tax in Pergamum in 62 BCE; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.128 and *J.W.* 1.187 on the alliance between Mithridates of Pergamum and Antipater, Herod the Great's father, who came to the rescue of Julius Caesar during his campaign in Egypt in 48–47 BCE; and Josephus, *J.W.* 1.425 on the benefaction made by Herod the Great (37–4 BCE) to Pergamum.

59. But cf. Friesen 2005: 361-64.

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as a representation of the imperial throne in general, located in Rome. In that case 'the throne of Satan' is a reference to the oldest provincial imperial cult of Asia at Pergamum.

That does not mean, however, that the imperial cult constitutes the sole interpretative background of Revelation. There is a conspicuous absence of any recognizable reference to the imperial cult in the letters to Smyrna (home to the second provincial imperial cult of Asia) and Ephesus. The latter absence especially should make the proponents of a Domitianic date of Revelation, after the establishment by Domitian of the provincial imperial cult in Ephesus, think again.[60] Even if we have an isolated reference to the provincial imperial cult at Pergamum, the main objections against the imperial cult as the appropriate setting for understanding Revelation still stand. (1) John is concerned with one particular image, that of Nero, not with the multiple images of a collective imperial cult. As the province of Asia has no separate imperial cult devoted to Nero, the reappearance of Nero's image at Rome under Otho and the Colossus of Nero in Nero's Golden House offer the best explanation for John's concern. (2) The tensions addressed in the introductory letters relate to different issues, such as, most notably, problems with Jewish synagogues, tensions among Christians, and the question of how to deal with the food sacrificed to idols.

c. *The Common Theme of the Introductory Letters*

An additional objection is that, although the introductory letters are very diverse in content, they are all unified in one respect which relates directly to the events under Nero. Formally, each letter finishes in the same way as the others, containing a final promise to 'those who are victorious'. The actual contents of these promises differ (Ephesus: 'to eat from the tree of life' [2.7]; Smyrna: 'not to be harmed by the second death' [2.11]; Pergamum: 'to receive some of the hidden manna' [2.17]; Thyatira: 'to receive authority over the nations' [2.26]; Sardis: 'to be robed in white' [3.5]; Philadelphia: 'to be made pillars in the temple of God' [3.12]; Laodicea: 'to be granted a place besides Christ on his throne' [3.21]), yet

60. See, e.g., Price 1984: 197-98: 'If one accepts the conventional Domitianic date for Revelation, it is tempting to think that the establishment of the provincial cult of Domitian at Ephesus, with its colossal cult statue, is what lies behind our text (Cat. No. 31). Indeed I have seen no other interpretation which fits the known geographical and temporal contexts.' For colossal equestrian statues raised by Domitian in the Forum Romanum in Rome, perhaps in competition with the one colossal statue of Nero, see Cancik 1990.

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each ending opens with the phrase 'those who are victorious…' (τῷ νικῶντι or ὁ νικῶν).

This theme of 'being victorious', first introduced here, unifies these diverse letters at the beginning of Revelation and forms an inclusio with the end of Revelation. There, Christ addresses the readers again by telling them: 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water from the spring of life as a gift. Those who are victorious (ὁ νικῶν) will inherit these things' (21.6-7). In between John elaborates on this theme throughout Revelation and establishes an explicit link with the exemplary victory of the Neronian martyrs standing beside the heavenly sea of glass, '*those who have been victorious* against the beast and his image…and are now holding the lyres which they received from God' (οἱ νικῶντες ἐκ τοῦ θηρίου καὶ ἐκ τῆς εἰκόνος αὐτου… ἔχοντες κιθάρας τοῦ θεοῦ [15.2; cf. 13.15-18; 12.11]). Their fate gives a sense of urgency to the addressees in the seven Asian cities, who have to emulate their example. In this way, the introductory letters are linked with the events under Nero in Rome. But why should Christians in Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea fear Nero?

d. *Nero Rediturus and the Province of Asia*

The answer to this is that the seven cities of Revelation are all located on the possible approach route of Nero when he will return from the East to the West. This expectation that Nero will really return from the East to Rome, though not stated explicitly, is necessarily contained in the topos of Nero Rediturus (Rev. 13.3, 12, 14; 17.8) which was widespread at the time (see Van Kooten 2005: 179-81). It was often linked with the belief that Nero Rediturus would be supported by the Parthians, with whom he had been on strategic, friendly terms. Some of the false Neros who appeared in the decades after Nero's disappearance were indeed backed by the Parthians.[61] There is a widespread consensus that these Parthians are hinted at in Revelation. Garrow, for instance, comments as follows on the so-called six seal visions in Rev. 6:

> Vision one [Rev. 6.1-2] describes the conquering activity of a Parthian warrior. That the first rider is a Parthian is made almost certain by his representation as a mounted archer, a combination known only in the regions of the east beyond the Euphrates… As such the first rider foreshadows the events described in Revelation 16.12: 'The sixth angel

61. See Tacitus, *Histories* 1.2; Suetonius, *Nero* 57.1-2 and *Domitian* 6; and Dio Cassius 66.19.3.

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> poured his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water dried up, to prepare the way of the kings from the east'. Revelation 17.12 and 17.17 interpret this event as the destruction of Rome by Nero *redivivus* and his Parthian allies…[62]

This expectation of Nero's return from the East to Rome lends Revelation a sense of urgency. Its explicit purpose, phrased in an inclusio which spans the entire writing, is 'to show…what must *soon* take place' (δεῖξαι…ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐν τάχει [1.1 = 22.6]).[63] John is of the opinion that Nero will return soon. This imminent prospect gives all Christian community life some urgency so that they have to purify themselves, both within the community and in their relations with outsiders. It is against this background that the introductory letters must be read. The communities addressed are all situated on the main thoroughfares through the Roman province of Asia. As we know, for instance, from a description in Josephus, armies from the East, when travelling by land, could travel through Cappadocia and Phrygia (*J.W.* 4.630-32), taking the Cilician Road through Phrygia. They would enter the province of Asia through Laodicea, one of the seven cities. From there they could either travel along the Aquillian Road, which Manius Aquillius built from Laodicea, along the Maeander, to Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum (the coastal road from Laodicea to Pergamum), or, alternatively, take the inland road which leads from Laodicea to Pergamum through Philadelphia, Sardis and Thyatira.[64] Without exception, all seven cities to which Revelation is addressed are situated on these two main roads. Far from the Neronian upheaval being an event of the past, the province of Asia may be affected by Nero's return in the near future.

That the province as a whole was very much aware of this impending danger is underlined by a report in Tacitus on the alarm engendered by the appearance of a false Nero in the Aegean at this time. Asia was

62. Garrow 1997: 19-20; cf. also pp. 98, 102 and Rev. 9.14-19.

63. Cf. also the other *inclusiones*, expressed in the phrases ὁ καιρὸς γὰρ ἐγγύς ἐστιν (1.3 = 22.10) and ἔρχομαι ταχύ, spoken by Christ (3.11 = 22.7, 12, 20; cf. 2.16 and 11.14).

64. See Grant 1994: map 58; Talbert 1985: 160-61; Mitchell 1993: I, map 3 at the end of the volume; and Talbert 2000: Laodicea (map 65B2), the inland road from Laodicea through Hierapolis (65B2), Tripolis (65A1>62A5), Philadelphia (56H5), Sardis (56G5) and Thyatira (56F4) to Pergamum (56E3), and the coastal road from Laodicea through Antiochia (65A2>61H2), Tralles (61F2), Magnesia (61F2), Ephesus (61E2) and Smyrna (56E5) to Pergamum (56E3). See also Talbert 2000 for Thessalonica on the Egnatian Road (57A1), Patmos (57E4), Cythnos (57C4) and Corinth (57A4). On the early Roman roads of Asia Minor, see French 1998.

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terrified by the appearance of a false Nero on the Aegean island of Cythnos between the autumn of 68 and January 69 in the year of the four emperors, most probably in January 69 after Otho's ascension (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.8-9; cf. Dio Cassius 64.9.3).[65] According to Tacitus,

> the alarm spread far and wide. Many came eagerly forward at the famous name, prompted by their desire for a change and their hatred of the present situation. The fame of the pretender was increasing from day to day (*Histories* 2.8).

The man was taken captive and put to death, however, by a Roman governor who was on his way to Asia and accidentally ran into him on the island of Cythnos, and his dead body was carried to Asia (to Ephesus, in all likelihood), and from there sent to Rome (2.9). This event terrified both Asia and Achaia: 'Achaia and Asia were terrified by a false rumour of Nero's arrival' (2.8). As it happens, Cythnos lies in the Aegean, on the Greek side, as does Patmos, the alleged place of writing of John's apocalypse (1.9) (on the Asian side).

Two caveats apply, and at the same time allow me to summarize the contextual reading of Revelation proposed in this article. (1) The above is not meant to suggest that the actual appearance of a pseudo-Nero on Cythnos in the Aegean in January 69 is what triggered John's expectations, but it does serve to demonstrate that at that time there was a widespread opinion that Nero had not died, but lived, and would return imminently. (2) Nor is it to imply that Patmos, in the Aegean, is to be taken at face value as Revelation's place of writing. It could have been chosen because of its proximity to Ephesus, or because the setting of an island allows John to see the first beast rising out of the sea (Rev. 13.1). This Rome-dominated sea is contrasted with the heavenly sea of glass (4.6; 15.2) and is said to exist no more in the end (21.2). Alternatively, Patmos could have been chosen because of the associative link which can be established between 'island' (νῆσος; Rev. 1.9) and the 'wilderness' (ἔρημος) into which the church fled and is being looked after by God (Rev. 12.6, 9), and where John receives one of his visions (17.3). The combination of νῆσος ἐρήμη ('wild island') is well attested in Greek and fits nicely with Revalation's rhetoric against 'the great city'. In any case, it is important to observe that ancient writers like Strabo (*Geography* 10.5) and Pliny (*Natural History* 4.12.69) offer no evidence that in the Roman period Patmos was known as a place of banishment.[66]

65. On matters of dating, see Tuplin 1989: 365-68

66. Cf. Aune 1997: I, 78: 'Pliny *Hist. nat.* 4.12.69 does *not* refer to Patmos as a

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It is more probable that Revelation was written in either Rome or Ephesus. The long-established links between the Christians in these two cities would also explain why an author in Ephesus should be well informed about events in Rome.[67] Moreover, this information about Rome need not be very specific. If the author has become alert to the dangers posed by Nero after his persecution of fellow-Christians in Rome following the fire of Rome in 64, all he need otherwise have heard of is the subsequent construction of Nero's Golden House with its colossal statue and lake, and of the pro-Neronian attitude of Otho and Vitellius. Since the author is aware of the dramatic developments of the year of the four emperors and shares the common belief in Nero Rediturus, and his mind is saturated with the Jewish scriptures, Revelation is the expression of his conviction that, even in these historical circumstances, God is the omnipotent one (παντοκράτωρ) (cf. Marshall 2004: 126-27). This is Revelation's most frequent designation of God (Rev. 1.8; 4.8; 11.17; 15.3; 16.7, 14; 19.6, 15; 21.22). It is within the atmosphere of the year of the four emperors, probably during the first half of Vitellius's reign between mid-April and August 69, that Revelation can most plausibly be situated.

Appendix: Timetable of the Year of the Four Emperors (68/69 CE), with terminus post quem *and* ante quem *for the Completion of Revelation*

Events preceding the Year of the Four Emperors

July–August 64	Fire of Rome and Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome; Nero starts the construction of his Golden House, left unfinished in June 68.
September 66–Spring 68	Nero's Greek Tour; beginnings of the first Jewish Revolt against Rome—Nero sends out his general Vespasian, who 'within two summers occupied with his victorious army the whole of the level country and all the cities except Jerusalem' (Tacitus, *Histories* 5.10).
March–April 68	Conspiracies against Nero by Vindex and Galba.

Roman penal colony or as a place of banishment as many scholars have erroneously claimed… Further, there is no historical evidence that any other individual was banished to Patmos' (italics his).

67. See the recent monographs on Christian Rome (Lampe 2003) and Ephesus (Trebilco 2004).

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Emperor I—Galba (June 68–January 69)

9 or 11 June 68	Nero declared an enemy of the Roman state by the Senate; Galba recognized as Caesar; Nero commits suicide or is thought to have disappeared from Rome to the East.
June–July 68	Having subdued all Galilee and most of Judaea, and preparing to march in full strength upon Jerusalem (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.120, 366, 410-13, 440-45, 490; Tacitus, *Histories* 2.4 and 5.10), Vespasian learns of Nero's death and defers 'his expedition against Jerusalem, anxiously waiting to see upon whom the empire would devolve after Nero's death; nor when he subsequently heard that Galba was emperor would he undertake anything, until he had received further instructions from him concerning the war' (*J.W.* 4.491-98). This situation is reflected in Revelation. Jerusalem's temple still stands in Rev. 11.1-2. The 'outer court-yard of the temple' having been given over to the Romans, and the prospect being that they will trample 'the Holy City' (i.e. Jerusalem) underfoot (11.2), the temple itself (11.1) is excluded from this fate and is not depicted as ruined. John reckons with the siege and capture of Jerusalem, but does not mention the temple's destruction as a fait accompli. This offers a *terminus ante quem* for Revelation of August 70, the month of the actual destruction of the temple.
15 January 69	Galba killed in Otho's conspiracy. After hearing that Galba had been assassinated and had been succeeded by Otho, Vespasian upholds his policy of neglecting 'the invasion of Judaea, regarding an attack on a foreign country as unseasonable, while in such anxiety concerning their own' (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.499-502).

Emperor II – Otho (January–April 69)

15 January 69	Otho formally recognized as emperor by the Senate; prospect of civil war between Otho and Vitellius. During the civil war between Otho and Vitellius, Vespasian only advances against those districts of Judaea which had not yet been conquered, now besieging Jerusalem but not yet taking it (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.550-55).
Between Autumn 68 and January 69, probably in January 69	Achaia and Asia terrified by a false rumour of Nero's arrival on the Aegean island of Cythnos (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.8-9 and Dio Cassius 64.9.3; for dating, see Tuplin 1989: 365-68).

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14 April 69	The first Battle of Cremona or Bedriacum in northern Italy between the Othonians and the Vitellians, won by the latter.
16 April 69	Otho kills himself.

Rev. 17.10d: 'When he (i.e. the seventh emperor, Otho) does come, he is to last for only a little while' (καὶ ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὀλίγον αὐτὸν δεῖ μεῖναι) must have been written after 16 April 69, referring back to Otho's brief, three-month rule. This sets a *terminus post quem* for the completion of Revelation. However, sufficient time should be allowed for news to travel through the Roman Empire.

Emperor III – Vitellius (April–December 69)

19 April 69	Vitellius granted imperial powers by the Senate.
Late June 69	Vitellius's entry into Rome.

Rev. 13.11 about another, pro-Neronian beast which 'had two horns like a lamb but spoke like a dragon' must have been written after Vitellius had succeeded Otho on 19 April 69. Together these pro-Neronian emperors formed the two-horned beast. This provides a more precise *terminus post quem*. Of course, sufficient time should be allowed for news to travel through the Roman Empire.

1 July 69	Acclamation of Vespasian in Alexandria.
3 or 11 July 69	Acclamation of Vespasian in Caesarea (Tacitus, *Histories* 2.79 and Suetonius, *Vespasian* 6.4 respectively).
Mid-July 69	Vespasian's conference at Berytus (Beirut) to plan campaign.
Early August 69	Confidential news must have reached Vitellius in Rome of Vespasian's proclamation.
24 October 69	The second Battle of Cremona in northern Italy between the Vitellians and the Flavians, won by the latter.
20 or 21 December 69	Vitellius put to death in Rome.

Revelation must have been written before Vespasian's appointment as an emperor in his own right. There is no allusion in Revelation to Vespasian as emperor. Yet the advance of Vespasian's troops to Rome could have been regarded as the advance of the Eastern troops raised by Vespasian in his capacity as Nero's general, bringing with him Nero Rediturus from the East. This gives a *terminus ante quem* at the very end of 69. The writing of Revelation seems to have been finished between Vitellius's ascension and death, i.e. in the eight-month period between mid-April and the end of December 69. As sufficient time should be allowed for news to travel through the

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Roman Empire, this implies that Revelation was probably completed between May 69 and January 70 but possibly already before Vespasian's acclamation by the Eastern troops in July 69.

Emperor IV – Vespasian (December 69–79)

20 or 21 December 69	Domitian in Rome presented to the leaders of Vespasian's party and greeted by them as Caesar (Tacitus, *Histories* 3.86; 4.2). Vespasian, still in the East, voted imperial honours by the Senate (Tacitus, *Histories* 4.3; cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 4.655).
January 70	Vespasian resumes war against Jerusalem after deferring it since the summer of 68: 'The whole empire being now secured and the Roman state saved beyond expectation, Vespasian turned his thoughts to what remained in Judaea. He…dispatched his son Titus…to crush Jerusalem' (Josephus, *J.W.* 4.657-58; cf. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.4, 4.51, 5.1, 5.10-13).
August 70	Destruction of the temple of Jerusalem. This destruction is neither described nor implied in Revelation (see above on Rev. 11.1-2), offering an absolute *terminus ante quem* for Revelation of August 70

Timetable based partly on Wiedemann 1996 and Wellesley 2000. Other dates are directly supported by references to ancient sources.

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