Chapter 4

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

When the Revelation is stripped of actual historical references we are tempted to conclude that it is merely an expression of a mood or an eccentric worldview and is not ‘about’ anything.¹

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

There are two primary options for the date of the Apocalypse: the early-date (pre-70 CE) and the late-date (92–96 CE). Throughout the majority of the nineteenth century, the scholarly community rallied behind the pre-70 CE date articulated by the Cambridge trio: F.J.A. Hort, B.F. Westcott, Adam Clarke, Interpreting the Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 49.

1  J. Ramsey Michaels, Interpreting the Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 49.
Generally speaking, this early-date option thought Revelation was written in response to the Neronian persecutions of the mid-60s CE and in preparation for the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. While the specific emperor varies, early-date advocates agree that the Apocalypse was written in the pre-70 CE time period.

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