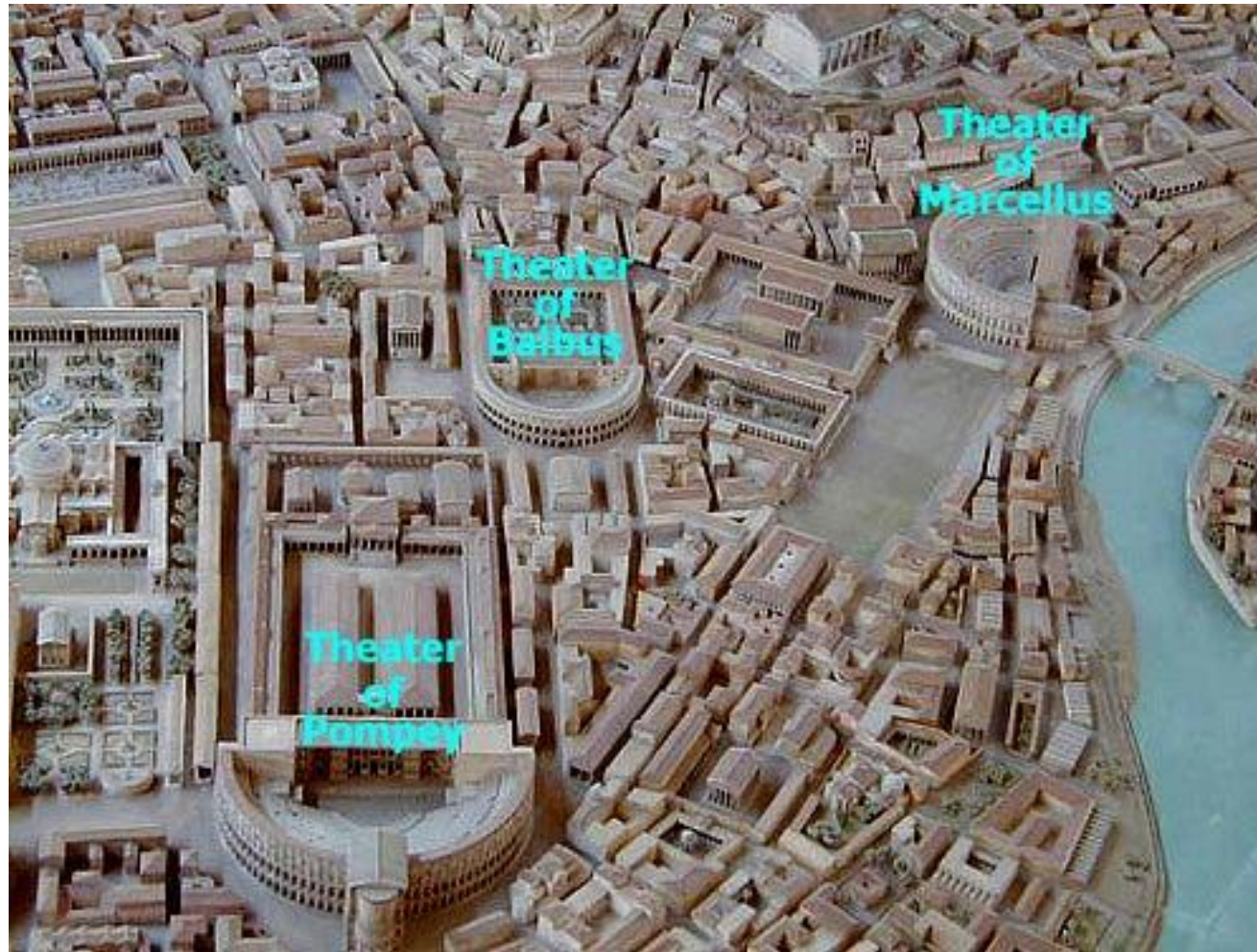


Rome: the Theater of Balbus in the 3rd century Catastrophe

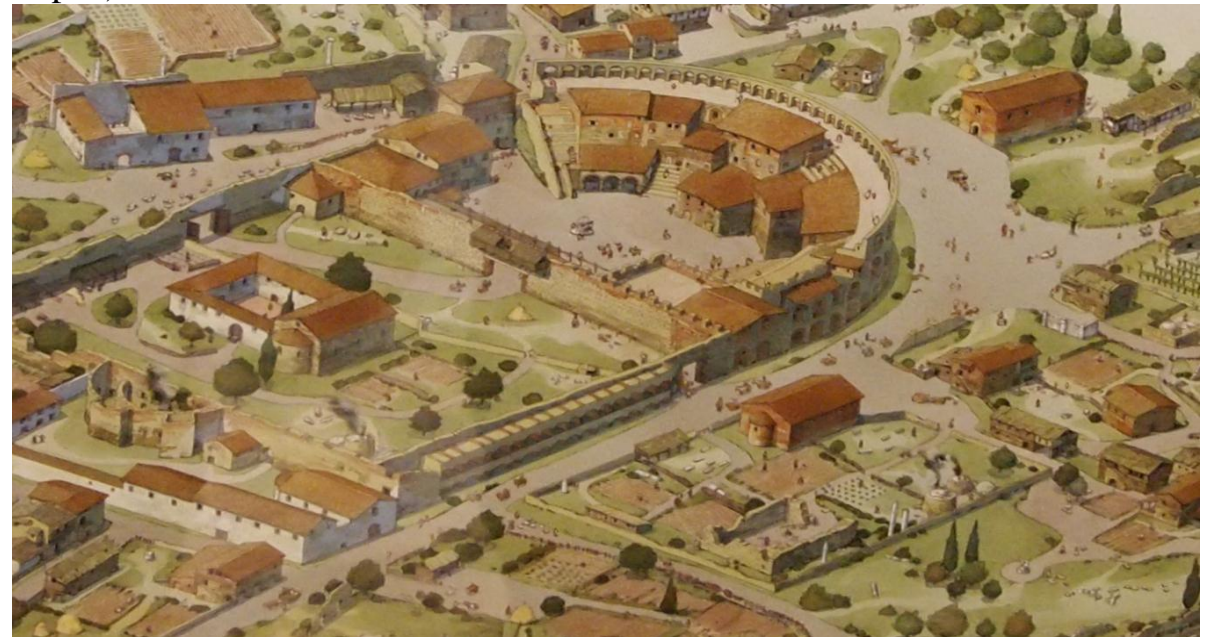
By Gunnar Heinsohn; 04/12



Situation of the Theater of Balbus (center) in the imperial period of 2nd century A.D. **before** the 3rd century catastrophe.

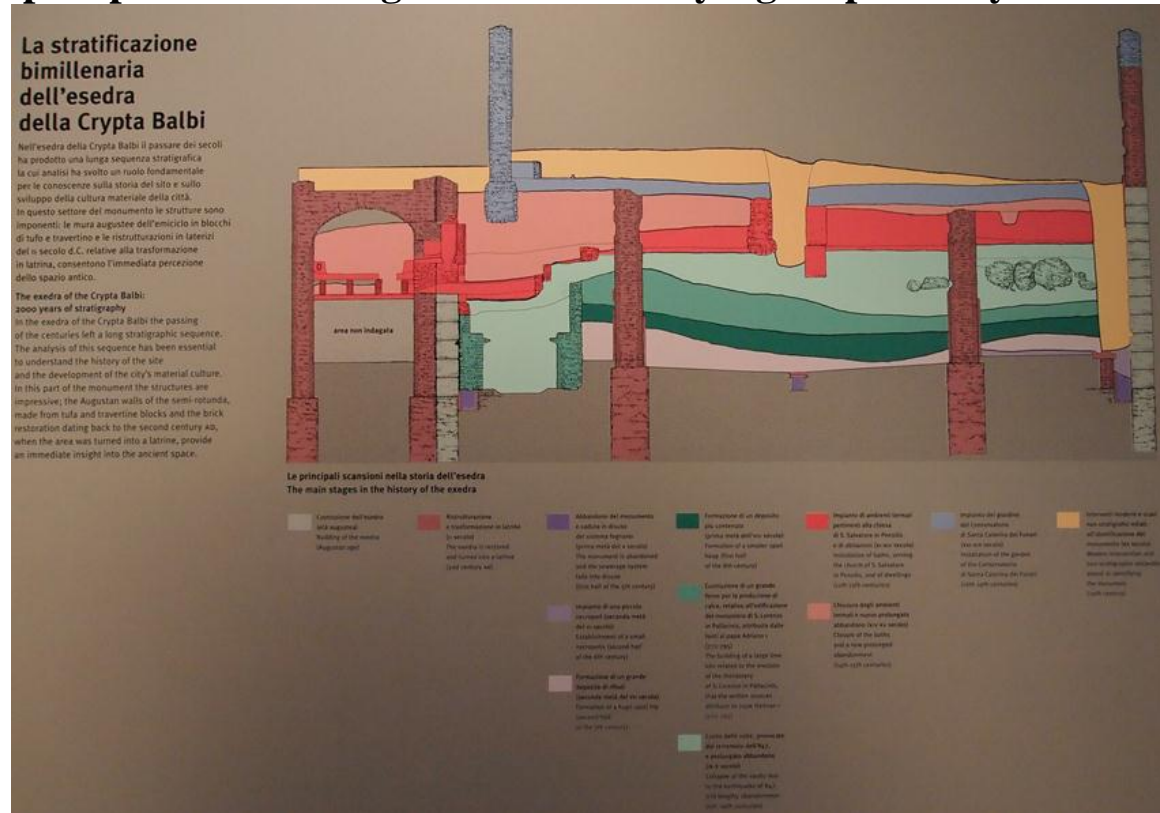


Balbus-Theater in the 2nd century A.D. (before the catastrophe)



Reconstruction of the small scale development **after the catastrophic destruction of the Balbus site**. It is dated to the 9th century, yet it follows immediately upon the unbuilt sediment layers lying on top of the late 2nd century, therefore belong to the 3rd century. (Photo in the Balbus Museum J. Sidorczak-Heinsohn)

Unbuilt layers above the Imperial period of the 2nd and early 3rd century, smothering Rome: marked, from the bottom, in pale pink and dark green colors. They signal probably a flood washing in, then out.



Stratigraphy of the excavations under the Theater of Balbus (Photo J. Sidorczak-Heinsohn). The light grey vertical structures are Augustean (around the beginning of our era, 1st century). The vertical structures in dark pink belong to the transformation of the building into a latrine around 120 under Hadrian. The period of use of the latrine remains everyone's guess, but may have lasted as late as the crisis of the Empire in 230 A.D. The light-pink layer represents a deposit which is assigned to the late 7th century, whereas the dark green layer represents also a deposit layer, which is attributed to the 8th century. For the period from 230 to the late 7th century nothing exists. The medium green layer on top of the dark green layer is attributed to a lime burning kiln used for the recycling of antique marble columns and dated to the end of the 8th century. The very light green layer on top is supposed to result from a roof collapse in 847, after which until the end of the 10th century, nothing at all happens. The brick-red layer above is assigned to the 11th to the 13th century. The dark pink layer without traces of use above that is attributed to the 14th and 15th, whereas the light blue layer belongs to the 16th to the 19th century.

The catastrophe which is described by Ammianus Marcellinus in his *History of Rome* (Book XXVI, chap. 10: 15-19), conventionally dated to 366, could well also belong in the early 3rd century catastrophe of the empire, and describe events which destroy also the Italian capital (suggestion of Ewald Ernst):

“15. While the usurper, whose various acts and death we have been relating, was still alive, on the 21st of July, in the first consulship of Valentinian and his brother, fearful dangers suddenly overspread the **whole world**, such as are related in no ancient fables or histories.

16. For a little before sunrise there was a terrible earthquake, preceded by incessant and furious lightning. The sea was driven backwards, so as to recede from the land, and the very depths were uncovered, so that many marine animals were left sticking in the mud. And the depths of its valleys and the recesses of the hills, which from the very first origin of all things had been lying beneath the boundless waters, now beheld the beams of the sun.

17. Many ships were stranded on the dry shore, while people straggling about the shoal water picked up fishes and things of that kind in their hands. In another quarter the waves, as if raging against the violence with which they had been driven back, rose, and swelling over the boiling shallows, beat upon the islands and the extended coasts of the mainland, levelling cities and houses wherever they encountered them. All the elements were in furious discord, and the whole face of the world seemed turned upside down, revealing the most extraordinary sights.

18. For the vast waves subsided when it was least expected, and thus drowned many thousand men. Even ships were swallowed up in the furious currents of the returning tide, and were seen to sink when the fury of the sea was exhausted; and the bodies of those who perished by shipwreck floated about on their backs or faces.

19. Other vessels of great size were driven on shore by the violence of the wind, and cast upon the house-tops. as happened at Alexandria; and some were even driven two miles inland, of which we ourselves saw one in Laconia, near the town of Mothone, which was lying and rotting where it had been driven.”

[http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/ammianus_26_book26.htm]

