



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The *Fama* of the Theatre of Pompey between Antiquity and Antiquarianism

Frances Muecke

The University of Sydney, Australia  
Email: [frances.muecke@sydney.edu.au](mailto:frances.muecke@sydney.edu.au)

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### Abstract

This article shows how, from the time of its construction up until late antiquity and beyond, written sources reflected and perpetuated the *fama* of Pompey's theatre. Such was its reputation as the Roman theatre *par excellence* that, even after its absorption into the fabric of medieval Rome, in the earlier fifteenth century Italian proto-antiquarians were prompted by what they had read to attempt to locate it. A key figure in the process of sifting and applying the ancient sources was Biondo Flavio (1392–1463). Roughly contemporary with the early stages of Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, but probably preceding the blueprint of the Roman theatre in that work, Biondo's pioneering 'theatre-made-of-words' in his *Roma instaurata* presented a newly accurate understanding of its structure and use (clearly distinguishing it from the amphitheatre) which proved influential in inspiring further topographical and antiquarian interest and research in the early sixteenth century.

**Keywords:** Biondo Flavio; Cassiodorus; theatre of Pompey; Vitruvius; L. B. Alberti; Poggio Bracciolini

In the early sixth century CE, the high-ranking administrator Cassiodorus wrote on behalf of the Ostrogothic King Theoderic to the Roman aristocrat Quintus Aurelius Memmius Symmachus (consul 485 CE). He urged him to carry out restoration work on the magnificent but crumbling Theatre of Pompey, the monument that, in his account, had given Pompey his cognomen 'Great'. Praising Symmachus as *antiquorum diligentissimus imitator* ('a most assiduous imitator of antiquity'), he promised him *boni operis fama* ('the glory of a good work').<sup>1</sup> Again, when after nearly one thousand years of near eclipse Pompey's Theatre was 'rediscovered' in the mid-fifteenth century,

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<sup>1</sup> Cassiod. Var. 4.51. See Barnish (1992) 78–9.

what was emphasised was its once impressive size (*magnitudo*) and the fame redounding to its builder.<sup>2</sup> At this time Leon Battista Alberti gave these aspects pithy expression in his massive architectural treatise *De re aedificatoria: Pompeii theatrum ob egregiam operis magnitudinem et dignitatem laudibus et admiratione prosequimur, dignum opus et Pompeio et victrix Roma* ('We praise and admire Pompey's theatre for its exceptional size and majesty, a work worthy of both Pompey and all-conquering Rome').<sup>3</sup> The theatre exemplified decorum in its magnificence and therefore merited exception from his criticism of over-ambitious building projects.

By 1486, when Latin tragedy and comedy were being revived on the stage in Rome by the scholars and students associated with the humanist enthusiast for antiquity, Pomponio Leto, a restoration or actual (re)building of a theatre could be proposed.<sup>4</sup> *Theatro est opus* ('We need a theatre'), said the humanist teacher Giovanni Sulpizio da Veroli to a young Prince of the Church, Cardinal Raffaele Riario, mightily enriched by Sixtus IV, when dedicating to him a landmark in the history of architecture, the first printed edition of Vitruvius' *De Architectura*.<sup>5</sup> In his dedicatory epistle Sulpizio urged Riario, *certum litteratorum praesidium* ('sure protector of men of letters', 3v), to provide Rome with a permanent public theatre, now that he had been patron of the first production of a classical tragedy to take place for many centuries. The reference is to the performance in 1486 of Seneca's *Phaedra* with Riario's encouragement and in the open area in front of his palace, which abutted the northern corner of the Campo de' Fiori.<sup>6</sup> Hence, Sulpizio says,

theatro est opus. Quo quid fieri et presentibus et posteris iucundius potest? Si enim post Pompeianum illud marmoreum et capacissimum minora et incultiora magnae suis gloriae fuerunt auctoribus, quantae tibi nunc erit quom nullum integrum extet si aut dirutum reparaveris aut novum erexeris?

Sulpizio, dedication to Riario<sup>7</sup>

We need a theatre. What more than this could bring delight to people living now and in the future? If smaller and less elegant theatres built after Pompey's famous marble one with its huge capacity brought great glory

<sup>2</sup> See Biondo Flavio, *Roma instaurata* (henceforth *RI*) 2.108. I quote from Raffarin (2012).

<sup>3</sup> Orlandi (1966) 1, 103–5 (2.2). *De re aedificatoria* was in progress between 1443 and 1452, or rather, up to 1468 (Modigliani (2019) 161–4). The last phrase was repeated by Albertini (1510: sig. Fiiiiv (1 §10)) in his *Opusculum de mirabilibus novae & veteris urbis Romae*. On Alberti's understanding of *magnificentia* and how it differs from Pliny's, see Fane-Saunders (2015) 93–109.

<sup>4</sup> The first documented such revival is of Terence's *Andria* in Florence in 1476.

<sup>5</sup> Sulpitius (1486–7) sig. 4. Johannes Antonius Sulpitius (c.1450–1503) from Veroli in Lazio was a lecturer in rhetoric at the Studium Urbis in Rome 1480–1503; see Schullian (1984) 377–9.

<sup>6</sup> Cruciani (1983: 219–27) collects the sources. The play was performed in several venues. Alessandro Cortese, in a letter dated April 1486, says *prope Florae forum, ante aedes reverendissimi camerarii* (226).

<sup>7</sup> The dedicatory letter, unpaginated, has the heading *Raphaeli Riario cardinali sanctaeque romanae ecclesiae camerario Io. Sulpitius foelicitatem*. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

to their sponsors, how great will yours now be, when none survives intact, if you repair one that is in ruins or build a new one?

Sulpizio flatteringly held up Pompey's marble and capacious theatre to Riario as a sure source of glory. Long since colonised by private housing, to all intents and purposes this monument had vanished from view.

How the Theatre of Pompey retained its fame, retrieved its dominant position in the memory map of Rome, and, through Biondo Flavio's restoration of its cultural significance, came to play a role in what has been called 'the long humanistic battle for revival of the public theatres of antiquity' is the subject of my paper.<sup>8</sup> In the first section, I put Pompey's theatre into its ancient setting and in the second I trace the survival of the theatre's fame and name from its physical eclipse in the early Middle Ages to its written recovery in the Rome of the humanists up to 1527, the year of the Sack of Rome.<sup>9</sup>

### Pompey's Theatre

Before considering how written sources perpetuated the *fama* of the theatre, I must situate it in time and place. Pompey's theatre complex was built in the southern Campus Martius, a flat, flood-prone area in the curve of the river Tiber.<sup>10</sup> In the Republican and early Imperial periods, this place was kept free of dwellings. The Greek geographer Strabo of Amasia, who spent some time in Rome towards the end of the first-century BCE, describes a vista of open space combined with monumental public building:<sup>11</sup>

In fact, Pompey, the Deified Caesar, Augustus, his sons and friends, and wife and sister, have outdone all others in their zeal for buildings and in the expense incurred. The Campus Martius contains most of these, and thus, in addition to its natural beauty, it has received still further adornment as the result of foresight. Indeed, the size of the Campus is remarkable, since it affords space at the same time and without interference, not only for the chariot-races and every other equestrian exercise, but also for all that multitude of people who exercise themselves by ball-playing, hoop-trundling, and wrestling; and the works of art situated around the Campus Martius, and the ground, which is covered with grass throughout the year, and the crowns of those hills that are above the river and extend as far as its bed, which present to the eye the appearance of a stage-painting – all this, I say, affords a spectacle that one can hardly draw away from. And near this campus there is another campus,

<sup>8</sup> Tafuri (1995) 147.

<sup>9</sup> From an enormous bibliography see especially Gagliardo and Packer (2006) and Packer (2014). Packer (2014: 38–9) suggests that one reason the structure did not survive intact was the damage caused by an earthquake in the early seventh century. A recent monograph is Monterroso Checa (2010) (note the review by Sear (2013) 539–42). Basic is Sear (2006) 57–61, with 134–5 for ancient references and bibliography.

<sup>10</sup> See Coarelli (1997) 539–80.

<sup>11</sup> Two good analyses of this passage are Wiseman (1979) and Jaeger (1995).

with colonnades round about it in very great numbers, and sacred precincts, and three theatres, and an amphitheatre, and very costly temples, in close succession to one another, giving you the impression that they are trying, as it were, to declare the rest of the city a mere accessory.

Strabo 5.3.8; Jones' Loeb translation

In late antiquity illegal housing began to encroach and by the later Middle Ages the old Rome on the hills (Strabo's 'rest of the city') had been largely abandoned. The ground level of the Campus Martius rose enormously over time, as can be seen from the stratification of the wall visible in the Museo Nazionale Romano Crypta Balbi. Temples and circuses sank, stone blocks and columns were removed for reuse. Eventually housing took over.<sup>12</sup> By the late twelfth century it had expanded to cover the area of the Tiber bend west and south of Piazza Navona.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, as Jan Gadeyne has shown in his essay on the formation of the medieval street system in Rome, the ancient monumental complexes underwent a process of fragmentation and dissolution, with small streets making passageways through them. One laneway, for example, now the Passetto del Biscione, goes right through what was the *cavea* of the theatre, while another street, Via dei Chiavari, follows its old stage wall.<sup>14</sup> Today, the discernible remains of the theatre are all within the block that abuts the eastern corner of Campo de' Fiori. The footprint of part of the semi-circular *cavea* can be followed in Via di Grotta Pinta. The shape of the theatre is known from the fragments of the Severan marble plan that came to light in 1562, only to be mostly lost again.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout its history, to quote a modern topographer, Pompey's theatre was 'one of the showplaces of Rome'.<sup>16</sup> It was the first stone theatre in Rome, which brought it notoriety as well as fame, and, marginally, the largest.<sup>17</sup> It was one of the first major buildings in the late Republican transformation of Rome, not just a theatre, but part of a massive, luxurious, personalised complex, with an associated residence, decorated with many works of art.<sup>18</sup> Its builder was a world conqueror, the greatness of whose name survived his ultimate defeat by Caesar.<sup>19</sup> From Pliny the Elder's later perspective, Pompey's victories equalled the brilliance of Alexander the Great's, and almost those of Hercules and Dionysus; the glory was not his alone but redounded to that of the Roman empire:

Verum ad decus imperii Romani, non solum ad viri unius, pertinet victoriarum Pompei Magni titulos omnes triumphosque hoc in loco nuncupari,

<sup>12</sup> Gadeyne (2013). See Taylor, Rinne, and Kostof (2016) 160–9.

<sup>13</sup> Krautheimer (2000) 133–4; Wickham (2015) 271–2; Modigliani (2019) 17–21 and 30–2 (on Campo de' Fiori as a chaotic, crowded market).

<sup>14</sup> Gadeyne (2013) 78; Muecke (2018) figs. 1 and 2.

<sup>15</sup> See Stenhouse (2015) and Triff (2015).

<sup>16</sup> Richardson (1992) 385.

<sup>17</sup> On this point see Sear (2006) 57, 62. It was the largest in diameter, not in seating capacity.

<sup>18</sup> Kuttner (1999); Cadario (2011); Russell (2016) 153–86.

<sup>19</sup> Feeny (1986). On *fama* in Lucan see Hardie (2012) 178–96.

aequato non modo Alexandri Magni rerum fulgore, sed etiam Herculis prope ac Liberi patris.<sup>20</sup>

Plin. *HN* 7.95

Indeed, it relates to the glory of the Roman empire, not only to that of a single man, to specify in this place all the titles and triumphs of Pompey the Great's victories, since they equalled not only the brilliance of Alexander the Great's exploits, but also almost those of Hercules and Father Liber.

Pompey inaugurated the theatre in 55 BCE, probably on the date of his birthday.<sup>21</sup> Sometime later, it needed restoration. The work was carried out by Caesar's heir, who, as Augustus in the *Res Gestae*, states that he restored the theatre at great expense but left Pompey's name on the building.<sup>22</sup> He removed Pompey's statue from the curia in which Julius Caesar had been assassinated and placed it prominently on an arch opposite the main door of the *scaenae frons* (Suet. *Aug.* 31.5). The next restoration was undertaken by Tiberius, after a fire in 21 CE (Jer. *Ab Abr.* 2037, Suet. *Tib.* 47). He intended the name to remain (Tac. *Ann.* 3.72). Restoration was carried on by Caligula (Suet. *Calig.* 21) and Claudius, who kept Pompey's name but added that of Tiberius and his own (Suet. *Claud.* 21). Another fire in 80 CE destroyed the *scaenae frons* (Cass. Dio 66.24.2).

In the later second century CE, Aulus Gellius (10.1.7) saw on the *scaena* an inscription referring to Pompey's third consulship in 52 BCE. Septimius Severus carried out more restorations (*CIL* 8.1439, 14.154). We hear of another fire in 247 in the time of Philip (Jer. *Ab Abr.* 2263), and possibly in the time of the emperor Carinus (late third century, SHA *Car.* 19), for there were restorations under Diocletian and Maximian (*The Chronicle of 354*, p. 148M). About a century later, in Ammianus Marcellinus' description of the triumphal imperial entry into Rome of Constantius II on 28 April 357 (16.10.14), the theatre is named as one of the city's glories. Even if the picture of the *adventus* is a literary construct, Ammianus had been to Rome. A few years before the sack of Rome in 410 the theatre was restored by the emperors Arcadius and Honorius (*CIL* 6.1191). The last textual trace is Cassiodorus's letter on behalf of Theoderic to Symmachus, also to do with repair. It is necessary to pause on our last sight ever of the (almost) intact Theatre of Pompey:

quid non solvas, senectus, quae tam robusta quassasti? montes facilius cedere putarentur, quam soliditas illa quateretur: quando et moles ipsa sic tota de cautibus fuit, ut praeter artem additam et ipsa quoque naturalis esse crederetur. [4] Haec potuissemus forte neglegere, si nos contigisset talia non videre: caveas illas saxis pendentibus apsidatas ita iuncturis

<sup>20</sup> See Laehn (2013) 59.

<sup>21</sup> As suggested by Coarelli (2014) 283.

<sup>22</sup> *Res Gestae* 20. Alexander Thein in Haselberger (2002: 243) has challenged the conventional dating (32 BCE) on the grounds of lack of evidence.

absconditis in formas pulcherrimas convenisse, ut cryptas magis excelsi montis crederes quam aliquid fabricatum esse iudicares. fecerunt antiqui locum tantis populis parem, ut haberent singulare spectaculum, qui mundi videbantur obtinere dominatum.<sup>23</sup>

Cassiod. *Var.* 4.51.3–4

What can you not disintegrate, old age, when you have shaken so strong a work? You might think it would be easier for mountains to fall than for that solidity to be shaken. For that very mass is so entirely formed from vast blocks that, but for the added craftsmanship, it too might be thought the work of nature. I might perhaps have neglected the building, if I had not happened to see it: those arched vaults, with their overhanging stonework and invisible jointing, are so beautifully shaped that you would suppose them the caverns of a lofty mountain, rather than anything made by hand. The ancients made the site equal to so great a population, intending those who hold the lordship of the world to enjoy a unique building for entertainment.

Trans. Barnish (1992), with modifications

Cassiodorus rightly likened it to a hill. The tip of the temple at the top reached the height of the arx of the Capitol, forty-five metres above the surrounding ground level.<sup>24</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, the popular *Murray's Handbook of Rome and its Environs* declared early in its section on the Theatre of Pompey: 'There are few monuments with which so many historical associations are connected as with this theatre.'<sup>25</sup> One that it highlights by an apposite quotation from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (Act 3 sc. 2, 183–4) is the assassination of Caesar in a meeting room of the *porticus* attached to the theatre, in which there was a statue of Pompey erected in his honour by the city. Plutarch records the conspirators' opinion that, by this location of the senate meeting, providence was favouring their cause and leading Caesar to Pompey's vengeance (*Brut.* 14). From later on, several stories are connected with Nero's Theatre of Pompey, where he is even recorded as performing (Plin. *HN* 37.19): the visit of Tiridates of Armenia in whose honour the *scaena* and the exterior were covered with gold (Plin. *HN* 33.54), and the embarrassing Frisian envoys who, sent to be impressed not by the spectacle, which they could not appreciate, but by the size of the crowds present (*quo magnitudinem populi viserent*), did not know their place and went down to sit among the senators (Tac. *Ann.* 13.54).

The strongest historical associations, however, are with Pompey himself. This is why I have emphasised the matter of the survival of his name on the building and for the building. Indeed, as I have mentioned, Cassiodorus

<sup>23</sup> See Mastroso (2012). When discussing the Mausoleum of Augustus Biondo says of Cassiodorus *omnium ultimus qui de rebus Romanis scripserunt, dum adhuc starent* (*RI* 2.74).

<sup>24</sup> Gros (1999) 38.

<sup>25</sup> Murray (1864) 45. The first edition came out in 1843.

says in his letter to Symmachus: ‘Pompey is believed with justification to have been called Magnus rather from the theatre’.<sup>26</sup> In some accounts of Pompey’s life applause in his theatre becomes an emblem of the highpoint of his success, recalled just before his downfall. The night before his decisive defeat at the battle of Pharsalus Pompey had a dream. In Plutarch: ‘That night Pompey dreamed that as he entered his theatre the people clapped their hands, and that he decorated a temple of Venus Victrix with many spoils’ (*Pomp.* 68.2). In Florus 2.13.45 (as emended by Mommsen) the applause sounded like lamentation: *Dux ipse in nocturna imagine theatri sui audiens plausum in modum planctus circumsonantem...* (‘the general himself in a dream of his theatre hearing applause echoing round like lamentation...’). Most powerfully and poignantly in Lucan 7.9–19 the applause in the theatre recalls that given to him in his youth for the conquest of Spain:

nam Pompeiani visus sibi sede theatri  
innumeram effigiem Romanae cernere plebis             10  
attollique suum laetis ad sidera nomen  
vocibus et plausu cuneos certare sonantes;  
qualis erat populi facies clamorque faventis  
olim, cum iuvenis primique aetate triumphi...

...plaudente senatu             18  
sedit adhuc Romanus eques;<sup>27</sup>

Luc. 7.9–14, 18–19

For he seemed, in his seat in Pompey’s theatre, to distinguish the innumerable faces of the Roman plebs, and his own name raised to the stars by happy voices and the echoing blocks of seats contending in applause. Just so were once the faces and shouts of the admiring people, when, a young man, at the time of his first triumph... he sat, with the Senate applauding, still a Roman knight.

That was more honourable than the popular favour courted in the theatre by the *famae petitor* of Book 1, who is defined by his desire for public approval:

famaeque petitor  
multa dare in volgus, totus popularibus auris

<sup>26</sup> Cassiod. *Var.* 4.51.12: *unde non inmerito creditur Pompeius hinc potius Magnus fuisse vocitatus*. It is an indication of Biondo’s intellectual doggedness that, when quoting this rhetorical flourish (*RI* 2.103), he feels obliged to correct it by referring to Livy’s explanation of how Pompey acquired his cognomen (30.45.6). Bjornlie (2012: 170–1) reads Cassiodorus’ letter as being satirical, and the reference to Pompey as potentially derogative of Symmachus, but humanist readers would not have seen it that way.

<sup>27</sup> On this passage see Jenkyns (2013) 11: Pompey’s complex was the ‘most visible evidence of his greatness in the fabric of the city’. In Claudian’s panegyric of Stilicho’s consulship of 400 (*Cons. Stil.* 2. 437) personified Roma promises him applause from the Theatre of Pompey (*Pompeiana dabunt quantos proscaenia plausus!*).

inpelli plausuque sui gaudere theatri...<sup>28</sup>

Luc. 1.131–3

A seeker after fame, and giving lavishly to the common people, he was entirely swayed by the breath of popularity and rejoiced in the applause of his own theatre...

Florus sees the theatrical celebration as a tipping point. Excessive good fortune causes calamities:

cum Romana maiestas toto urbe polleret recentesque victorias, Ponticos et Armenios triumphos, in Pompeianis theatris Roma cantaret, nimia Pompei potentia apud otiosos, ut solet, cives movit invidiam.

Flor. 2.13.8

When the majesty of Rome held sway throughout the world and Rome was celebrating in Pompey's theatre her recent victories over the peoples of Pontus and Armenia, the excessive power enjoyed by Pompey excited, as so often happens, a feeling of envy among the ease-loving citizens.

Forster's Loeb translation

For Plutarch the theatre and the celebrations associated with its opening 'won him admiration and affection' (*Pomp.* 53.1).

But the theatre was controversial too. Cicero (*Off.* 2.60, 63) and, later, Pliny express philosophical and moralizing disapproval of extravagant expenditure on public entertainments (*HN* 36.114). For Cicero the purveyors of the latter are like flatterers using the lure of pleasure to appeal to the crowd's fickleness (*illa quasi assentatorum populi multitudinis levitatem voluptate quasi titillantium*), though out of respect for Pompey's memory he feels he should avoid criticism of 'theatres, colonnades, and new temples'. Tacitus, in presenting a debate about entertainments in Nero's principate, refers to men of the past opposing Pompey's theatre and its provision of permanent seats at the time when it was built, presumably on moralistic grounds. In its context, the grumble is about the corruption of traditional mores (*Ann.* 14.20). The whole question of opposition to permanent theatres is not one I can go into here.<sup>29</sup> What is important is the Tacitean testimony of moral opposition, combined with Imperial-era condemnation of luxury, to which Pliny the Elder also subscribed.<sup>30</sup>

So far, I have traced several pathways through the written sources, especially those available before and in the fourteenth century. Pompey's name never died, and fifteenth-century readers were aware of his historical importance from the compendious narrative histories of Florus, Orosius, Eutropius,

<sup>28</sup> See Roche (2009) 182–3. On mid-fifteenth century knowledge of Pompey that went beyond Lucan, see Botley (2004) 142–3.

<sup>29</sup> It may well be that the moral opposition was more relevant to the later period: see Brown (2002) 225. For more on the topic of stone theatres, see Frézouls (1984) and Tan (2016).

<sup>30</sup> Fane-Saunders (2015) 18–19, 34–40.



and Paul the Deacon, and from discussion of Rome's civil wars in Augustine's *City of God* (3.30). Lucan's epic on the civil war between Pompey and Caesar was popular throughout the Western Middle Ages and fed into vernacular literature. Suetonius' *Lives* were known to Petrarch and Boccaccio, and manuscript production of them took off after 1375. Cicero was a medieval school author and more of his works became available and were read from the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. His *De officiis* formed part of Leon Battista Alberti's schooling. Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* could be read in Latin translation from 1411 though in fact no topographer used it for the theatre until Andrea Fulvio in 1527.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Velleius Paterculus, Tacitus *Annals* 1–6 and some Greek sources were not yet known. Nevertheless, almost the same materials for a skeleton history of the theatre could have been assembled by a particularly diligent scholar in the mid-fifteenth century as can now be found in the footnotes of modern accounts.

### Biondo's Theatre

After its almost complete disappearance as an independent structure, the Theatre of Pompey maintained its reputation as the Roman theatre *par excellence*. Memory of its name was never completely lost, as did happen with those of the other two theatres built after it in the Campus Martius in the following half-century.<sup>32</sup> But what was the referent of the name? When in the late eighth century the *Einsiedeln Itinerary* sent the pilgrim past San Lorenzo in Damaso and *Theatrum Pompei* (1, 8), there probably was a ruined structure to which he could attach the name.<sup>33</sup> But when in the twelfth century Canon Benedict has the pope return from the Vatican to the Lateran in the Easter Monday procession *prosilien per Parrionem inter circum Alexandri et theatrum Pompeii* ('going forward through Parione between Alexander's circus [Piazza Navona] and Pompey's theatre'), we cannot be so sure.<sup>34</sup> *Theatrum Pompei*

<sup>31</sup> Fulvio (1527: fol. Llv) is the first topographer to cite Plutarch's *Life of Pompey* (in the translation by Antonio Pacini) in connection with the theatre: *pulchrum deinde Theatrum, longe a Romanis diffam[i]atum, cum struxisset. Diffam[i]atum* is a mistranslation of the 'did not arouse envy' applied to the new house built near the theatre (Plut. *Pomp.* 40.5). However, Polydore Vergil had earlier used the *Life*, as well as the *Life of Theseus* (16.3), in his sections on theatre in *De inventoribus rerum* (Venice, 1499: 3.13), where he has a little on Pompey's theatre (Copenhaver (2002) 46–53).

<sup>32</sup> Monterroso Checa (2010) 36 n. 3. The three theatres (Balbi, Pompei, Marcelli) are named in the Regional Catalogues ('Curiosum' and 'Notitia') in Regio 9 Circus Flaminius: Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53) 1, 122–3, 176. In the *Einsiedeln Itinerary* the Theatre of Marcellus does not appear by name (Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53) 2, 170 with n. 4). By the Middle Ages it had turned into a mountain (Sear (2006) 63). Poggio Bracciolini in *De varietate Fortunae* puts an unnamed second theatre in the location of the Theatre of Marcellus (cf. Suet. *Iul.* 44.2): *portio rotunda novis aedificiis [...] occupatur* (Merisalo (1993) 97, line 200, see p. 186 for comments). Biondo mentions the *aedes* of the Savelli but not the theatre (*RI* 3.71–2). See Spring (1972) 267–8.

<sup>33</sup> Monterroso Checa (2010) 36. See Pentiricci (1996). Taylor, Winne, and Kostof (2016: 209, 212) call attention to the ways in which the *Itinerary* refers to the ancient monuments that survived.

<sup>34</sup> *Ordo Romanae Ecclesiae*, Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53) 3, 219. For the route see Kinney (2007) with fig. 10.1.

may have become a designation for the area of Campo de' Fiori in general.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, the fact that the ancient literary sources and some vernacular translations of them kept Pompey's memory alive may have contributed to the survival of the toponym.

By the time of Innocent II (1130–43), the Theatre of Pompey was known from words alone; the actual structure, reduced to a *trullo*, a kind of mound or tower, was just beginning to be swallowed up by the predecessors of the medieval Orsini stronghold.<sup>36</sup> Triff argues that the fact that the *trullo* contained 'eight potentially separate properties [...] suggests that by 1150 the Theater had lost its structural and functional integrity'.<sup>37</sup> None the less, the *Mirabilia urbis Romae* (c. 1140), 'the oldest attempt at learned topography', shows a consciousness of the presence of Pompeian buildings among the classical monuments of Rome and gives an indication of the location of Pompey's theatre.<sup>38</sup> The theatre is listed as itself, with other less easily recognisable *theatra*, most of which are circuses or stadia:

Theatra sunt ista: theatrum Titi et Vespasiani ad Catacumbas, theatrum Tarquini et imperatorum ad Septem Solia, theatrum Pompeii ad Sanctum Laurentium in Damaso, theatrum Antonini iuxta pontem Antonini, theatrum Alexandri iuxta Sanctam Mariam Rotundam, theatrum Neronis iuxta Castellum Crescentii et theatrum Flamineum.<sup>39</sup>

*Mirabilia urbis Romae* 3

These are the theatres: the theatre of Titus and Vespasian at the Catacombs; the theatre of Tarquinius and the emperors at Septem Solia, the theatre of Pompey at San Lorenzo in Damaso, the theatre of Antoninus beside the Antonine bridge, the theatre of Alexander beside S. Maria Rotunda, the theatre of Nero beside the fort of the Crescentii and the Flaminian theatre.

This passage contains the fact about the theatre that persisted through the Middle Ages in Latin sources: the Theatre of Pompey was in the region of, or near, San Lorenzo in Damaso. This ancient basilica was built in the later fourth century by Pope Damasus (366–84), *iuxta theatrum*, as the *Liber Pontificalis* says,<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> A parallel example is the term *in Naumachia* or *Naumachiae* which survived during the Middle Ages as the designation of the area from the Vatican Hill to the Castel Sant'Angelo when the structure of the *Naumachia Vaticana/Traiani* had vanished and exact knowledge of its location had been lost (Richardson (1992) 266).

<sup>36</sup> Marchetti-Longhi (1936) 298–319; Capoferro Cencetti (1979); Wickham (2015) 240–1.

<sup>37</sup> Triff (2015) 135. During the thirteenth century the Orsinis acquired more property around the site of the *trullo* and consolidated it into a new fortified palazzo after damage in an attack (Capoferro Cencetti (1979) 75). For more detail see Bianchi, Coppola, Mutarelli and Piacentini (1998) 326–34.

<sup>38</sup> Louis Duchesne quoted by Kinney (2007) 235.

<sup>39</sup> Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53) 3, 22–3.

<sup>40</sup> Duchesne (1886–92) 1, 234. For full discussion of the ancient basilica see Frommel and Pentiricci (2009).

at a time, we remember, when the theatre was still standing and functioning. San Lorenzo in Damaso became one of the most important churches of medieval Rome, with a cardinal's palace standing beside it.<sup>41</sup> Whereas in late antiquity the basilica was near the theatre, by the time of the *Mirabilia* the relationship had been reversed: the pagan monument was near the church.<sup>42</sup>

Apart from the *palatium Pompeii*, mentioned just before the theatre, there was also a *templum Pompeii* and a *Maiorentum*, but little more can be said about these:

Ad conc[h]am Parrionis fuit templum Gnei Pompeii, mire magnitudinis et pulchritudinis; monumentum vero illius quod dicitur Maiorentum, decenter ornatum, fuit oraculum Apollinis...<sup>43</sup>

*Mirabilia* 23

Near the basin of Parione there was the temple of Gnaeus Pompeius, of wondrous size and beauty; and his monument, called Maiorentum, beautifully adorned, was an oracle of Apollo.

Nevertheless, it was the *Mirabilia*, explicitly written *ad posterum memoriam*, with its enormous, multiform, and long-lasting diffusion, that kept Pompey's theatre on the virtual map up to the fifteenth century, when humanist study of Roman topography began.

Petrarch used it along with his ancient authors, for, as Roberto Weiss asked, where else could he have turned for guidance on Roman topography?<sup>44</sup> In the next century, when in December 1424 or 1425 the merchant traveller and enthusiast for antiquities, Ciriaco d'Ancona (or Pizzicolti, 1391–1452), rode out daily on his white horse during his stay with Cardinal Gabriele Condulmer in the latter's residence at San Lorenzo in Damaso, he was 'diligently inspecting, examining and taking note of whatever venerable antiquities survived in that great city – temples, theaters, vast palaces, marvelous baths, obelisks, and arches, aqueducts, bridges, statues, columns, bases, and historical inscriptions.'<sup>45</sup> The list of things he had in his mind to see is at least partly determined by the categories of the *Mirabilia*. Unfortunately, the notes he took then were lost, so we will never know if he saw signs of the theatre just a few minutes' walk away.

Ciriaco was not the only one given the opportunity to study ancient remains by the return of the papacy to Rome in 1420 under Martin V (1417–31).<sup>46</sup> Did

<sup>41</sup> Krautheimer and Pentricci (1966).

<sup>42</sup> Taylor, Winne, and Kostof (2016) 212.

<sup>43</sup> Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53) 3, 49. At p. 49 n. 1 they suggest that the *Maiorentum* is part of the remains of Pompey's theatre complex. Capoferro Cencetti (1979: 75) advances some interpretations of *templum*, but the designation is fairly standardly applied in the *Mirabilia* to large ancient buildings.

<sup>44</sup> Especially Francesco Petrarca, *Fam.* 6.2, in Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53) 4, 6–10. Weiss (1964) 202–4; Accame Lanzillotta (1994). For Boccaccio similarly see Guérin (2005) 18.

<sup>45</sup> Mitchell, Bodnar, and Foss (2015) 49.

<sup>46</sup> See McCahill (2013).

he meet there Gian Francesco Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), the papal secretary and humanist manuscript hunter, who had returned to Rome with the Curia in 1423? Some years earlier, as a young man, Poggio had begun to transcribe inscriptions at Rome, and this laid the foundation for his collection compiled in about 1430 (the *Sylloge*), some items of which were incorporated into his topographical/epigraphical description of Rome in Book 1 of *De varietate Fortunae*, begun in 1431.<sup>47</sup> The year 1432 saw Ciriaco again in Rome. Gabriele Condulmer was now Eugene IV (1431–47). The Roman part of Ciriaco d’Ancona’s epigraphical sylloge was compiled between 1432 and 1434. After the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund was crowned in Rome (31 May 1433), Ciriaco ‘also made a tour of the city with the emperor to view its mighty ruins everywhere thrown to the ground’.<sup>48</sup>

These initiatives were curtailed when a popular uprising forced Eugene IV to leave Rome in 1434. It was not until the Curia moved back to Rome in 1443 after a long period in Florence and Ferrara that concerted and systematic efforts were made to revive knowledge of the ancient city. Among the members of the returning Curia were Poggio Bracciolini, Biondo Flavio (1392–1463), and Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72), all of whom were spurred to their studies by observation of the ruins of Rome. In *De re aedificatoria* Alberti says he never ceased scrutinising, pondering, measuring, and sketching whatever he could find (6.1). Poggio returned to his old interest in inscriptions and gave his description of Rome its final form in the published version of *De varietate Fortunae* (1448), and Biondo trawled a wide range of sources for historical evidence on which to base his written reconstruction of the city in *Roma instaurata* (1446). Both of these latter works were of decisive importance for the development of historical study of the city of Rome and were accomplished by methods of research that represented a decisive break with the medieval tradition.<sup>49</sup> It was in this context that Pompey’s theatre became an object of interest and study, above all for Biondo Flavio in *Roma instaurata*. In what follows I focus on two aspects: Biondo’s restoration of the theatre to cultural memory and the nature and reception history of his ‘theatre-made-of-words’, his brief generic description of the theatre.<sup>50</sup>

It appears that by the early fifteenth century the exact location of Pompey’s theatre was not obvious.<sup>51</sup> At least, this much is implied by the fact Biondo went searching for it in a large area that stretched from San Lorenzo in Damaso to the Piazza Giudea, ending up placing it nearer the basilica (*RI* 2.108–10). A recent discovery (*proximis diebus*) of an inscription mentioning the theatre found on one of the large blocks of a foundation when Angelo Ponziano was excavating for a wine cellar convinced him that this (now unknown) spot was where the work for the theatre had begun (*RI* 2.109).

<sup>47</sup> On the work’s ‘patchy genesis’ see Kajanto (1987) 36–8.

<sup>48</sup> Mitchell, Bodnar, and Foss (2015) 49.

<sup>49</sup> Described by Coarelli (Boriaud (1999) xlviii) as ‘une rupture épistémologique’; see pp. lv–x.

<sup>50</sup> Fane-Saunders (2015: 38–40) discusses Biondo’s treatment of the theatre and I have examined it at more length than is possible here in Muecke (2018).

<sup>51</sup> See Capoferro Cencetti (1979) 76; ‘bis zur Unkenntlichkeit zerstört’, Günther (1981) 359.

Poggio, similarly basing himself on inscriptions recently (*nuper*) found in *eius collapsa porticu columnis immixta* ('mixed in with the columns in its fallen porticus'), says: *pars theatri Pompei haud procul ab eo quem Campum Florum appellant superextat et ipsa privatis aedificiis occupata* ('Part of Pompey's theatre, it too taken over by private housing, survives not far from what they call Campo de' Fiori').<sup>52</sup> Poggio's main interest is in the two inscriptions he records and their value as evidence for the location; for Biondo the question of where it was is only one aspect of his extensive historical reconstruction of the theatre-complex and its significance, in which many other sources are drawn upon, mainly literary, collected together for the first time.<sup>53</sup>

In *Roma instaurata* the major topic of 'matters relating to games and shows' (*RI* 2.39) runs from the end of Book 2 to well into Book 3 (2.102–3.40). The theatre is highlighted as a discrete category at the end of Book 2, taking up twenty-two sub-sections (103–24), Biondo's explicit aim being a rich exposition (*theatrum copiose volumus exponere*, 2.113). Pompey's theatre, the prime example, is one of the main threads that runs through the section, as the best documented and most impressive of theatres at Rome; in fact, it is the only one of the three he mentions. In his first section Biondo highlights the grandeur and the boldness of its conception, connected by Cassiodorus (*Var.* 4.51.12) with the greatness of its founder (2.103). Later, Biondo emphasises its significance by focusing on its long history and its great size (2.108). Setting up Cassiodorus as a straw man to rebut the claim that Pompey's theatre was the first ever built in Rome, Biondo nevertheless concedes that it was the first permanent stone theatre. Almost brought to completion by Pompey, it was finished off by Caligula, and lasted intact for nearly four hundred years, at which point Theoderic wished to have it restored.

Cassiodorus's description from this time (quoted above) demonstrates its great size as does the anecdote from Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.54), according to which Nero, in Biondo's account, had 'noble Germans' taken into the theatre in order to show them the huge number of people it held when full. The theatre is a place where Roman dynasts and emperors displayed the power and wealth of the Roman empire. Nero, again, had it covered in gold for one day to impress Tiridates, the king of the Armenians (*Plin. HN* 33.54).<sup>54</sup> But in Biondo's treatment the political function, as we may call it, does not eclipse the cultural. Following the topographical/historical part comes a potted generic description of the types of spectacle (pantomime, tragedy, comedy, and mime), borrowed from the Cassiodorus letter, but adapted to Rome of the late Republic and early Empire (*RI* 2.113–23). Together, the striking length and multifacetedness of

<sup>52</sup> Merisalo (1993) 97, lines 210–13. Note that here Poggio says nothing of a *portio rotunda* as he does for the Theatre of Marcellus (line 200). I do not think that much can be concluded from another fragmentary inscription recorded in Mazzocchi (1521: f. 96v) as being in San Lorenzo in Damaso (OMPEIUS GN. MAGNI HAEIC SITUS).

<sup>53</sup> The relationship of these two works is an unsettled and much-debated question. Spring (1972: 344–5) argues that their accounts of the inscriptions connected with the site of the Theatre of Pompey are independent.

<sup>54</sup> See *RI* 2.124 where there are further examples.

Biondo's treatment give it a special place at the beginning of verbal and visual recreations of Pompey's theatre.

From Biondo's rich compilation I shall now foreground one small, but interesting, snippet that does not appear to rely on an obvious precedent.<sup>55</sup> This is his attempt to provide a guide to the architectural design of the theatre building at Rome – convincing as far as it goes:

Ea machina ad hemicycli formam facta, frontem qua inter cornua patebat scenam appellatam, binis pluribusve contignationibus constratam habebat. Semiotundum autem id aedificium nullo obtectum fornice sedilia habebat quorum pars interior orchestra appellata est. Dumque spectacula ederentur, magistratus honoratioresque ex orchestra, populus ex gradibus pariter quid diceretur fieretque intelligebant .... Diximus scenam locum fuisse qui hemicycli theatralis cornua per diametrum coniungebant.<sup>56</sup>

Biondo *RI* 2.104–5, 118

This construction, made in the shape of a semicircle, had a façade where it lay open between the two wings, called the *scaena*, which was built up with two or more floors. This semicircular building, without a vaulted roof, had seats, the inner part of which was called the *orchestra*. While the spectacles were being performed, from the orchestra the magistrates and the more distinguished men, and from the steps the people would follow at the same time what was being said and done .... I have said that the *scaena* was the place which joined the two wings of the semicircle of the theatre by the diameter.

The important details are the semi-circular shape, the position and height of the *frons scaenae*, and the facts that the auditorium is unroofed, that the *cavea* (seat-bank) is made of stepped rows, and that the more important spectators sit in the orchestra. Most of this information could be gleaned by Biondo's reading of his usual sources.<sup>57</sup> Yet these passages do not account for the use of the technical terms: while *scaena* was frequent in medieval sources, it is worth pausing on the less common terms, *orchestra*, *hemicycl(i)um*, *cornua*, and *diametrum*. It just so happens that all have Vitruvian authority.<sup>58</sup> Whether or not Biondo's theatre

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Isid. *Etym.* 18.42, *theatrum est, quo scena includitur, semicirculi figuram habens, in quo stantes omnes inspiciunt*. See Jones (1982) 33–6.

<sup>56</sup> Raffarin's (2012) text has *inferior* but I read *interior* with the printed editions because in *Roma triumphans* 2.59 (see below) Biondo writes *pars intima orchestra est dicta*.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., the semicircle: Cassiod. *Var.* 5.42, quoted by Biondo *theatrum hemispherium graece* (*RI* 3.1). Cf. Isid. *Etym.* 18.42, *semicirculi figuram habens*; *contignationes*: Plin. *HN* 36.114 (quoted in *RI* 2.106) has lower, middle, and upper levels of the *scaena*; the use of awnings (Plin. *HN* 33.23, 53, 1.124), showing that there was no roof; *orchestra*: Suet. *Nero* 12.3 (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.54, 2.108); *gradus*: steps for seats often referred to in the context of the *lex Roscia* (e.g., Livy, *Per.* 99).

<sup>58</sup> *Orchestra*: Vitruvius 5.6.2, *in orchestra ... senatorum sunt sedibus loca designata*; *hemicyclium*, Vitruvius 5.7.1; *cornua*: Vitruvius 5.5.2, 7.1 etc., Plin. *HN* 36.117; *diametrum* is the Latin version of Vitruvius' *diametron* (5.6.5 etc.).

description has anything to do with Vitruvius', his terminology suggests technical expertise.

In *De re aedificatoria*, which seems to have remained unknown until after the author's death in 1472,<sup>59</sup> Alberti in the section in Book 8 on *spectacula* provides a far more detailed and technical guide to the parts, measurement, and articulation of the theatre building, abstracted from any acknowledged existing example. On the other hand, his cultural and historical introduction to the ancient shows and games in general is brief, and information about the theatres and amphitheatres built in Rome is reduced to a minimum. Even so, Pompey's theatre cannot be overlooked:

Sed ex vetere more lignea tum primum fiebant theatra. Quin et ea re incusarunt Pompeium, quod spectacula sedem posuisset non, ut antea, subitarii gradibus, sed mansuris. [Tac. *Ann.* 14.20–21] Postea ad id devenere, ut intra urbem theatra maxima haberentur tria [Strabo 5.3.8?], et amphitheatra cum alia plura tum id, quod hominum milia caperet plus cc, et circum omnium maximum: cuncta haec quadrato lapide et marmoris columnis insignia.<sup>60</sup>

Alberti *DRA* 8.7 [148v]

According to the old ways at first theatres were built of wood. Indeed, for that reason they accused Pompey because he had put the spectators' seats not, as before, on makeshift steps, but on steps made to last. Later they came to the point of having three very large theatres within the city and amphitheatres, very many but also the one that held more than 200,000, and the Circus Greatest of All. All these in squared stone and decorated with marble columns.

For his account of the theatre's structure Alberti had engaged with Vitruvius, but, in contrast to Biondo, he avoids Grecisms and choses meaningful terms for the sake of clarity and consistency.<sup>61</sup>

Spectacula ferme omnia structam cornibus ad bellum aciem imitantur... Sed ex his id quidem, cuius forma senescenti lunae simile est, theatrum nuncupatur.... Theatri partes hae sunt: expeditus sinus areae medianae subdivalis, circumque aream hanc subselliorum gradationes, et pro faucibus exaggeratum opus pulpiti, ubi quae ad fabulam pertineant coaptentur, et in supremo ambitu porticus et tecta, quibus vox diffusa contineatur fiatque sonior. Sed theatra Graeca ab Latinis differebant ea re, quod illi choros et scaenicos saltatores media in area perducentes pulpito

<sup>59</sup> Modigliani (2019) 162 with n. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Orlandi (1966) 2, 727–8. Orlandi's references to the folio numbers of the *editio princeps* have been put in square brackets.

<sup>61</sup> See Günther (1999) 34.

indigebant minore; nostri, quod totis ludionibus fabulam agerent in pul-  
pito, id ea de re habere laxius voluere.<sup>62</sup>

Alberti DRA 8.7 [149–149v]

Nearly all the buildings for shows follow the model of a battle line drawn up for war, with wings... The one whose shape is like the waning moon is called 'theatre'... These are the parts of the theatre: the unencumbered curve of the central space, open to the air, around this space the steps of the seats, and at the mouth the piled-up construction of the stage, where the things pertaining to the play are fitted together, and on the circuit at the top a portico and its roof, by which the spreading sound may be kept in and made more resonant. Greek theatres differed from Roman in this respect: they needed a smaller stage because they brought on the choruses and stage dancers in the space in the middle, whereas our Romans, because they acted the play on the stage with all the performers, for that reason wanted it more spacious.

Alberti uses the Vitruvian *hemicyclium* and *cornua* but not the Greek term *orchestra* (Vitr. 5.6.2), describing this part as the place where the *patres* and *magistratus* sat apart from the people in a place of greater honour, i.e., in a central place with special chairs. His stage (*exaggerata spatia*) is a *pulpitum*, but not a *proscenium* (Vitr. 5.6.1, 5.7.2). He avoids the terms *scaena* or *scaenae/theatri frons*, merely indicating the façade/stage building by *haec pars* when he wants to decorate it with columns and a number of superimposed stories (*contignationes*).<sup>63</sup>

Biondo's *Roma instaurata* dominated study of the Roman monuments well into the sixteenth century, even as its deficiencies were repaired. In 1510, Francesco Albertini took advantage of the advances in scholarship in the circle of Pomponio Leto for his *Opusculum de mirabilibus novae & veteris urbis Romae*, dedicated to Julius II and published in 1510.<sup>64</sup> In his section *De Theatris et Amphiteatris* (sic) he treats all three permanent theatres.<sup>65</sup> Beginning with Pompey's, he first emphasises its size, drawing on the two Nero anecdotes already united in Biondo *RI* 2.108, and quoting Alberti's *dignum opus et Pompeio et victrice Roma* (2.2). For the parts of Pompey's theatre itself he has some new material:

in quo erant orchestra et subgestum Scena hystrionum et Hyposcenium  
columnis marmoreis et statuīs exornatum.

Albertini (1510) sig. Fivv

<sup>62</sup> Orlandi (1966) 2, 728–9, 731. Cf. Vitr. 5.7.1.

<sup>63</sup> Orlandi (1966) 2, 737–8. Biondo (in Blondus Flavius (1531) 417) uses *hemicyclum* and *cornua* when describing a battle in *Decades* 4.2.

<sup>64</sup> Richardson (1992: xxxiii) says he is of 'little scholarly proficiency', but he is a good guide to the reception of Biondo and the subsequent expansion of available sources.

<sup>65</sup> Albertini (1510) Fivv–Gii.



in which there were the orchestra and the platform, the scaena of the actors and the hyposcenen decorated with pillars and statues.

The *orchestra* and *suggestum* probably come from Suet. *Iul.* 76.1 where among the honours voted to Caesar are ‘a raised couch in the orchestra’. The source of the information about the *hyposcenium*, a word not found in classical Latin dictionaries, looks as if it is the *Onomasticon* of Julius Pollux (4.123), printed by Aldus in Greek in 1502, but known earlier. Pollux says ‘The hyposcenen below the stage was decorated with pillars and reliefs facing the audience.’<sup>66</sup>

Albertini is the first topographer to refer in print to Gellius’ important information on the relationship between the theatre and the temple of Venus Victrix at its top (10.1.7).<sup>67</sup> On the theatre’s location Albertini follows Biondo but adds an important detail:

Vestigia praedicti Theatri ex (s)tabulo aedium Car. in camp Flor. adhuc visuntur. Nam tempore Blondi litterae in marmore fracto repertae fuere de Genio Pompei et Theatro ibidem effossae. Et quicquid a platea eidem campi et Iudaeorum ad Rosae monasterium continet, aedificia Pompei fuisse constat.<sup>68</sup>

Albertini (1510) sig. G

Traces of the aforementioned theatre are still seen in the stable of the Cardinal’s house in the Campo de’ Fiori. For in Biondo’s time an inscription found on broken marble concerning Pompey’s Genius and Theatre was dug up in the same place. And whatever is encompassed from the square of the same campus and that of Piazza Giudea to the Monastery of the Rose is agreed to have been the buildings of Pompey.

If the Cardinal’s palace referred to is the Palazzo dell’Orologio (renamed Pio-Righetti in the seventeenth century), now thought to have been built on the platform of the temple behind the theatre’s *cavea*, Albertini’s opinion coheres with Andrea Fulvio’s. The latter says clearly: *Extant adhuc vestigia iuxta campum quem Floreum appellant.... ubi nunc palatium dominorum Ursinorum* (‘There are still traces beside the Campus that they call ‘of flowers’ .... where the palace of the Orsini lords now is’).<sup>69</sup> The identification with the Orsini property is earlier than this and may even underlie Poggio’s *privata aedificia*. A few years after the publication of *De varietate Fortunae* Poggio was to play a leading, if ignominious, role in an incident recorded as having taken place on 4 May 1452 in the palace of Cardinal Francesco Condulmer, who was Pope Eugenius IV’s nephew and vice-chancellor. Condulmer’s new palace was built, according to Biondo in *Roma triumphans* 2.19, ‘in Pompey’s theatre’ on

<sup>66</sup> Csapo and Slater (1995) 396.

<sup>67</sup> Though Bernardo Rucellai (1448–1514) referred to it in his late-fifteenth-century *De urbe Roma*, which remained unpublished until 1770; see Valentini and Zucchetti (1940–53) 4, 437–56.

<sup>68</sup> See Schmarsow (1886: 23) on the *Domus reverendissimi Card. S. Georgii*.

<sup>69</sup> See Muecke (2018) 259–61.

Orsini property, and the fist fight between the feuding Poggio and George of Trebizond described by Lorenzo Valla occurred in Condulmer's palace *quod vere fuit olim Pompeianum theatrum* ('which once upon a time actually was Pompey's theatre').<sup>70</sup>

Andrea Fulvio, the last topographer we will consider, separates his general formal/historical introduction *De Theatris et Amphitheatris et eorum forma* from his treatments of the three theatres: those of Pompey, Marcellus, and Balbus. On the theatre's shape and parts he puts down the bare minimum:

Theatrum graecam habet originem, et significat spectaculum [Isid. *Etym.* 15.2.34–5], formam habens hemicycli, sicut Amphitheatrum circularem. Theatri partes ponit Iulius Pollux graecus auctor.

Fulvio (1527) fol. Lv–Ll

Theatre is Greek in origin and means 'spectacle', semicircular in shape, just as the amphitheatre is circular. Julius Pollux, a Greek author, sets out the parts of the theatre.

Pollux's section on the 'Parts of the Theatre' (4.123) is far too long and intricate for Fulvio to do any more than refer to it. He moves quickly on to a shortened version of Pliny on the temporary theatres (Plin. *HN* 36.113–17, cf. Biondo, *RI* 2.106–7). On the Theatre of Pompey itself he collects several important 'new' sources and gives a precise indication of its location: *ubi nunc palatium dominorum Ursinorum, a cuius tergo erat theatri cavea versus auroram* ('where the palace of the Orsini lords now is, at the back of which was the cavea of the theatre towards the east', fol. Llv).

Now Pompey's theatre itself was firmly back on the map and remained the province of topographers, archaeologists, architects, and image-makers. By the middle of the sixteenth century, antiquarians' accounts had generated a hunger for the visual reconstructions that advances in printing techniques now made possible.<sup>71</sup> They began with Pirro Ligorio in 1561<sup>72</sup> and Etienne Du Pérac in 1574.<sup>73</sup> What we might call modern paper reconstructions were originated in the nineteenth century by the neo-classical architect and archaeologist Luigi Canina (1795–1856).<sup>74</sup> Recently the torch has passed to digitalisation projects.<sup>75</sup> Even before these visual representations, however, Biondo's word picture of the theatre lost traction. After Alberti's became known, it could

<sup>70</sup> Lorenzo Valla, *Antidotum primum* 1.187 (Wesseling (1978) 126). See Monfasani (1976) 110–11; Borsi (2004) 99–100; Borsi (2006) 52. Pincelli (2016) 210–11. The property was ceded temporarily and later reverted to the Orsini.

<sup>71</sup> For early architects' sketches see Günther (1981) figs. 5 and 6.

<sup>72</sup> Ligorio (1561) (see Monterroso Checa (2010) fig. 192a).

<sup>73</sup> Du Pérac (1574) (see Monterroso Checa (2010) fig. 12).

<sup>74</sup> See Packer (2007) and (2014).

<sup>75</sup> See Madeleine (2014).

not hold the attention of architectural theorists.<sup>76</sup> Fittingly, it endured in books of words – lexica and dictionaries.

One of the earliest readers of *Roma instaurata*, Giovanni Tortelli (1400–66), included the terms *orchestra*, *scaena*, and *theatrum* in his *De orthographia* (dated 1449–50), an encyclopaedic dictionary of Greek words used in Latin.<sup>77</sup> The voce ‘theatrum’ is almost completely based on Biondo’s *Roma instaurata* and includes the ‘naming of parts’ right at the beginning. Even more influential was Niccolo Perotti’s *Cornucopiae linguae latinae*, a commentary on Martial’s *Liber Spectaculorum* (1468–79, published Venice 1489).<sup>78</sup> His notes on Martial 1.8, *Caesareo ... amphitheatro*, drawing on Tortelli, besides *amphitheatrum* discuss *theatrum*, *scaena*, and its cognates, *proscenium* (= *pulpitum*), *orchestra*, *cavea*, and *cunei* and include many snippets of historical information.

Surprisingly, it was not through Tortelli and Perotti that Biondo’s theatre description was carried into the new Latin dictionaries that began to appear in the sixteenth century. Two of the best-selling and often reprinted lexicons, those of Ambrogio Calepino (c. 1440–1510) and Robert Estienne (Robertus Stephanus) (1503–59), transmitted Biondo’s ‘naming of parts’ in the humanist’s own words, but not from *Roma instaurata*. For his entries on *scaena* and *theatrum* in his *Dictionarium Latinum*, first published in 1502, Calepino turned to Biondo’s *Roma triumphans*, which he must have used in the Brescia 1482 edition. Calepino divided the following passage from Biondo’s *Roma triumphans* between his two entries, naturally leaving out Biondo’s reference back to *Roma instaurata*:

Nosque a Cassiodoro in *Roma ostendimus instaurata* theatrum graeca appellatione visorium interpretari, quod turba conveniens eminus videatur et videat, et scaenam theatri frontem binis pluribusve contignationibus constratam, in quibus histriones recitabant, mimique mirmilliones (*sic*) et ceteri ludii varios de quibus supra est dictum ludos gesticulationesque edebant. In scaena autem, cum emicicli formam haberet, gradus sediliaque fuere, de quibus primarii magistratus honoratioresque spectarent eorumque sedilium pars intima orchestra est dicta.

Biondo RT 2.59

I have shown in *Roma instaurata* from Cassiodorus [Var. 4.51.5] that ‘theatre’ is a Greek term meaning ‘a seeing place’ (*visorium*) because the assembled crowd is watched and watches at a distance [2.103].<sup>79</sup> The *scaena*, the forepart of the theatre, was made with two or more floors [2.105]. The actors performed on it, and the mimes, and *murmillones* and all the other stage-players displayed the various games and movements

<sup>76</sup> E.g., Pellegrino Prisciani in his *Spectacula* (1486–1501) (Aguzzi Barbagli (1992)) while making use of Biondo on the theatre prefers Alberti’s account of its parts.

<sup>77</sup> I have used the Venice edition of Tortelli (1471).

<sup>78</sup> Charlet and Furno (1989–95), 1, 134–6 (§§376–84).

<sup>79</sup> The citation of Cassiodorus ends with *videatur*; here Biondo has added *videat* and omitted *astantibus* (=the audience), thus changing the meaning.

described above. Since the *scaena* had the shape of a hemicycle, in it there were tiers and seats, from which the chief magistrates and the more distinguished people watched, and the innermost part of these seats was called the ‘orchestra’.<sup>80</sup>

Calepino’s *scaena* travelled almost verbatim into Robert Estienne’s *Dictionarium; seu, Latinae linguae Thesaurus, ... cum gallica fere interpretatione* (Paris: Robertus Stephanus, 1531) and from there to the *Thesaurus linguae latinae, sive forum Romanum* (Basel: Hieronymus Froben und Nikolaus Episcopius, 1561), all frequently reissued. Biondo’s brevity suited the dictionary format but not the more expansive or more specialised antiquarian treatises, and in them Pollux became the main source for the parts of the theatre.<sup>81</sup>

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At the time of the *Mirabilia*, as we have seen, there was no clear understanding of what a Roman theatre was. It was not a theatre of Pompey that had to be rediscovered but the very notion of the theatre as a building. McGregor has shown that, when Boccaccio described a theatre in his *Teseida* (c. 1340), the word *teatro* itself was a rarity that had to be explained to his contemporaries. Boccaccio’s Athenian theatre (7.108.1–109.3) ‘must have appeared to them as a startling historical recreation’. This theatre, however, was an amphitheatre, inspired by autopsy of the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus as well as by his reading.<sup>82</sup> About a hundred years later the humanists in Rome had completely changed the picture.

Pompey’s theatre is an extreme case of a ‘monument made of words’. It is so thoroughly documented in modern scholarship that it is hard to remember that there is next to nothing of it to be seen in Rome today. I have traced its remarkable perpetuation in memory and its recuperation through two sets of texts, focusing first on the records of antiquity itself, and secondly on the written reconstructions of fifteenth-century topography, architectural theory, and lexicography. At the beginning of the modern rediscovery of the ancient theatre stands Biondo Flavio’s project of *litteris facta ... instauratio* ‘restoration through writing’ (*RI, Praefatio*).

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<sup>80</sup> The text and translation are taken from Pincelli (2016) 292–3, with adaptations. Note that Biondo’s error in saying the *scaena* (rather than the *theatrum* or *cavea*) was semicircular passed unnoticed.

<sup>81</sup> For example, an extraordinary range of Greek and Roman sources is assembled in Bulengerus (1603).

<sup>82</sup> McGregor (1984) 9 with n. 31, 17, 19.

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