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## **TOPPLING ROME'S OBELISKS AND AQUEDUCTS:**

### **A Comment on Trevor Palmer's Review of Gunnar Heinsohn's New 1st Millennium CE Chronology**

by Ewald Ernst (construction engineer)<sup>1</sup>

#### **I Historiography and Stratigraphy**

Trevor Palmer – referring to ancient historians such as Eutropius or Aurelius Victor - offers us a line of Roman and Byzantine emperors from Septimus Severus to Maurice, whose chronological sequence is not once put into doubt. In 2014, for Palmer, Augustus has been dead for exactly 2000 years. Palmer does acknowledge local earthquakes and floods in various towns such as Rome and Antioch, but is not inclined to accept a global catastrophe.

Trevor Palmer's 71 pages include what Theodor Mommsen, in his *Römische Geschichte*, did not muster the courage to publish: the sequence of emperors from Septimus Severus to Diocletian. Mommsen received, in 1902, the Nobel-prize (in Literature) for his unfinished *opus magnum*. Volumes 1 to 3 were published in 1854, 1855 and 1856. Volume 5 followed three decades later in 1885 (vols. 1 to 3 were later numbered 1-5; vol. 5 turned into vol. 8).

Volume 4 (later foreseen as vols. 6 and 7), dealing with the Roman *Kaisergeschichte* from Augustus to Diocletian, never reached Mommsen's high standard for publication. (Trevor palmer mentions Alexander Enmann and his so-called *Verlorene Kaisergeschichte* [lost history of emperors] which is NOT a fictive history of Roman emperors, but only an attempt at proving the existence of such a work of Roman historiography by invoking circumstantial evidence. Enmann, therefore, pointed out (in *PHILOLOGUS*, suppl. volume 4, 1884, pp. 335-501/347):

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“Hier genügt es uns, an der hand der etwa 40 aufgeführten parallelstellen, die behauptung aufzustellen, dass Eutrop und Aurelius Victor für die geschichte der jahre 235 – 284 eine uns verlorene kaisergeschichte excerptirt haben. (sic !!)”

“Here we are satisfied with regard to about 40 documented parallel text passages to make the assumption, that Eutrop and Aurelius Victor used a lost history of emperors and excerpted it for the years 235 – 284” (translation E. Ernst).

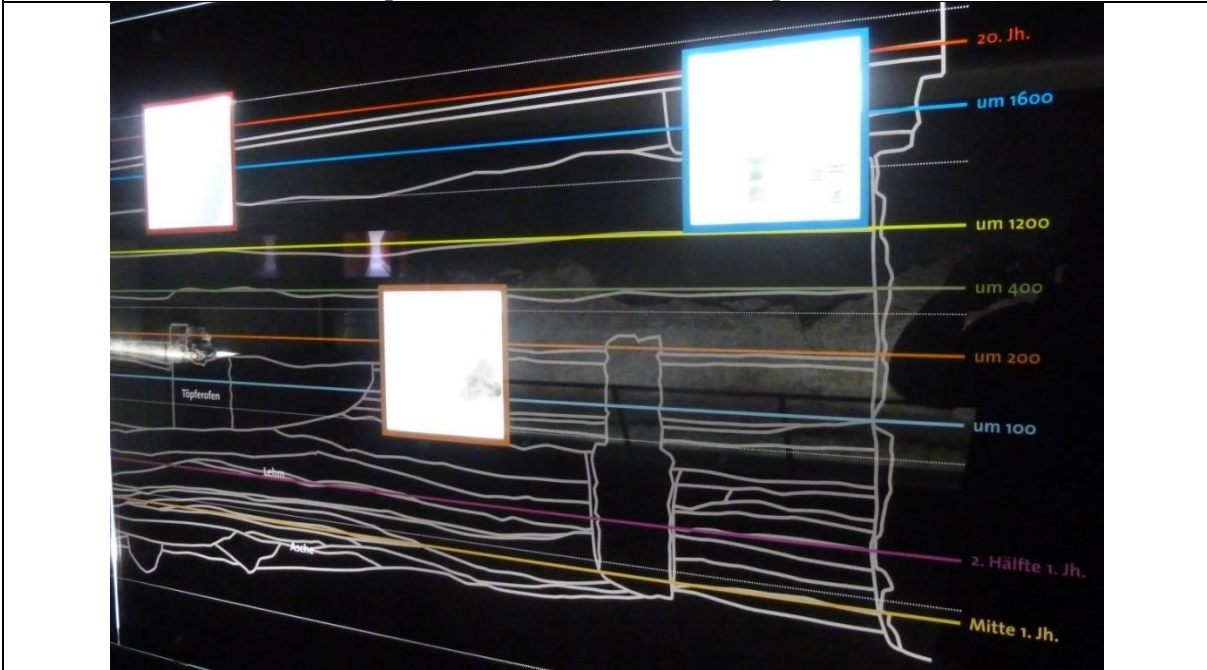
Enmann tried to make sense of the 50 years of the so called *Soldatenkaiser* (barracks emperors) placed between 235 CE (the year of Alexander Severus’ death), and 284 (the beginning of Diocletian’s reign).

Those 49/50 years posed a nearly insurmountable problem to Enmann and Mommsen alike. To them, Diocletian’s first regnal year in 284 was an unassailable axiom. They never doubted this date. Gunnar Heinsohn's new chronology, distilled out of stratigraphy of ruined Roman cities, and a survey of the archaeological substance for the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE from Japan to Indonesia, forced him to think the unimaginable. For him Augustus died only some 1300 years ago. There is no sequential archaeological evidence between Alexander Severus and Diocletian anywhere. Diocletian is, according to Heinsohn, a contemporary of Augustus and Tiberius. Thus, Mommsen and Enmann tried to make sense of half a century of history that was construed to meet a pre-conceived chronology.

I am convinced that Gunnar Heinsohn is working on a view of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium CE that will not only revolutionize Roman history but also our understanding of the Christian world of the post-1000 CE Middle Ages. At the core we have **a worldwide catastrophe, and some 700 years of phantom-time between 234 and 934** (Heinsohn prefers a somewhat less specific dating from 230s to 930s).

From the numerous remarks I have prepared to challenge Palmer’s views, I will focus here on the mysterious felling of Rome’s obelisks, columns, and aqueducts. Yet, as an exemplary illustration of the enormous material gaps in 1<sup>st</sup> millennium history, I want to shed some light on one of the best established European stratigraphies north of the Alps. It can be admired in Salzburg in Austria (Roman *Iuvavum*). The most recent excavations under Salzburg’s New Residence (led by Dr. Kovacovics), are excellently documented by an archaeological cut accessible in the underground connection between the *New Residence* and Salzburg’s *Panorama Museum*. Above virgin soil (actually a rock formation) several Roman strata for the 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> c. period have been identified. Above them is a lacuna, i.e. no archaeological evidence whatsoever, for some eight centuries between ca. 400 and ca. 1200 CE.

**Salzburg's stratigraphy with the, so far, inexplicable lacuna from ca. 400 to ca. 1200 CE ["um 400" to "um 1200"] (Foto E. Ernst)**



**II Obelisks and Aqueducts**

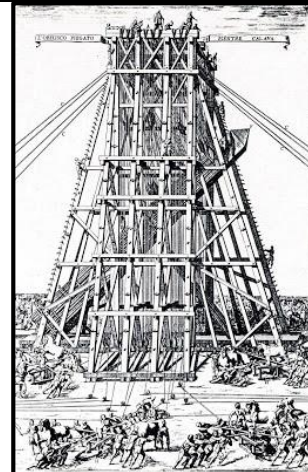
More than 10 Obelisks from Egypt were erected in Rome. They all were toppled in 234. Only the obelisk close to Old St. Peter's kept its vertical position. To move it from

**Obelisk (25 m; 350 tons) in St. Peter's Square (brought to Rome in 37 CE).**

[<http://quizlet.com/5236546/italy-and-spain-1600-to-1700-flash-cards/>]

**Transportation of the obelisk to its present location in 1586.**

(<http://counterlightsrantsandblather1.blogspot.com/2009/12/counter-reformation-saint-peters.html>)



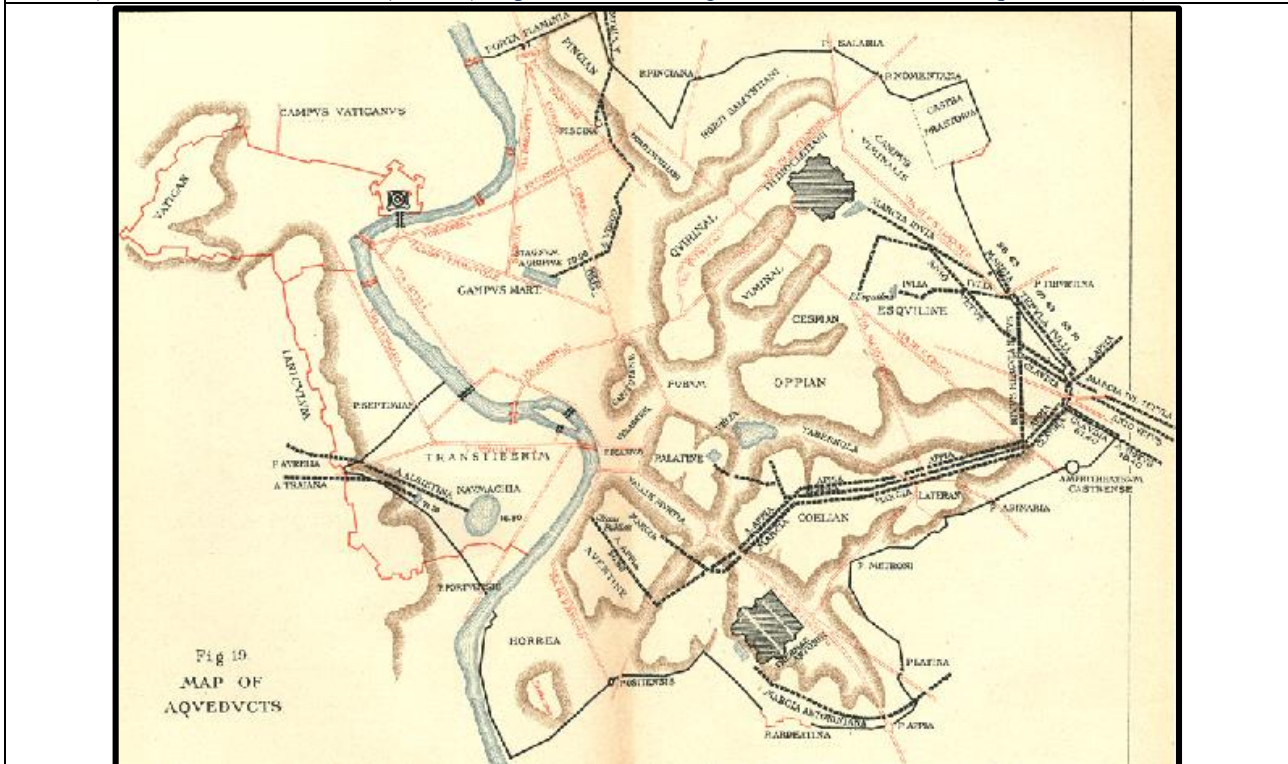


Egypt to Rome (in 37 CE), according to Pliny, a special ship had to be built. The 25 m high monolith had survived the collapse of Rome's other obelisks not only because its elevated location but also because of its shear weight of some 350 tons. Around 1586, Domenico Fontana (1543-1607) had its transferred to the center of St. Peter's Square.

Ammianus Marcellinus had described, in the time of Constantius II and Julian (conv. 4<sup>th</sup> c.; stratigraphically 1<sup>st</sup>=8<sup>th</sup> c.), the transport of a second Obelisk for Rome's *Circus Maximus*. He even provided a Greek translation of its hieroglyphs. This, too, speaks for a 1<sup>st</sup> against a 4<sup>th</sup> c. date.

A look at Rome's aqueducts reveals no less enigmatic destructions than suffered by its fabulous collection of obelisks. Fresh water was so widely available for Romans that even many *villae rusticae* (agricultural estates) received spring water via aqueducts. The empire's more than 5000 municipia and civitates (surrounded by a minimum of ten *villae rusticae* each) cannot be listed here. But a helpful overview of 75 major aqueducts and qanats is easily accessible here: <http://www.romanaqueducts.info/>.

**Rome's pre-230 aqueducts (from: R. Lanciani, *The Ruins and Excavations of Ancient Rome*, Boston & New York, 1897; <http://www3.iath.virginia.edu/waters/lanciani/aqueducts.html>).**



None of these marvelous constructions – erected and working for over half a millennium – was still functioning in the 4th c. CE. Here is a list of Rome's most

important installations (from Christopher Hibbert, *Rome: The Biography of a City*, Harmondsworth, 1985):

- The *Aqua Appia*, completed 312 BCE by Consul Appius Claudius.
- The *Aqua Anius Vetus* (272 BCE).
- The *Aqua Marcia* (144 BCE), on top the arcades of this aqueduct, later on, *Aqua Tepula* (137 BCE) and *Aqua Julia* (33 BCE) have been built.
- The ***Aqua Virgo*** (19 BCE), built by Agrippa for his *Thermae*, went over long distances underground, and transported spring-water from the estate of Lucullus. Pope Niklas V. ordered, in 1453, the repair of *Aqua Virgo* after (even in conventional 1<sup>st</sup> millennium chronology) **800 years is disrepair**. It feeds Rome's *Fontana di Trevi*. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Aqua Virgo* was the only aqueduct, that brought running water into the city.
- The *Aqua Claudia* and the *Aqua Anius Novus* were begun under Caligula in 38 CE, and completed by Claudius in 52 CE.
- The *Aqua Neronia* was built by Nero (54-68). It was employed to divert parts of the *Aqua Claudia* waters right into his palace on the Palatine hill.
- The *Aqua Traiana* was built by Trajan 109 CE.
- The *Aqua Alexandriana*, commissioned by Alexander Severus was completed in **226 CE; it was the last aqueduct ever to be built in Rome**.

Besides the installations listed above there existed ten additional aqueducts in Rome. Combined they could transport 1.6 million m<sup>3</sup> of water per day into the metropolis. Sextus Julius Frontinus, in his *De aquaeductu*, provides the most complete ancient description of ancient Rome's water infrastructure (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frontinus>).

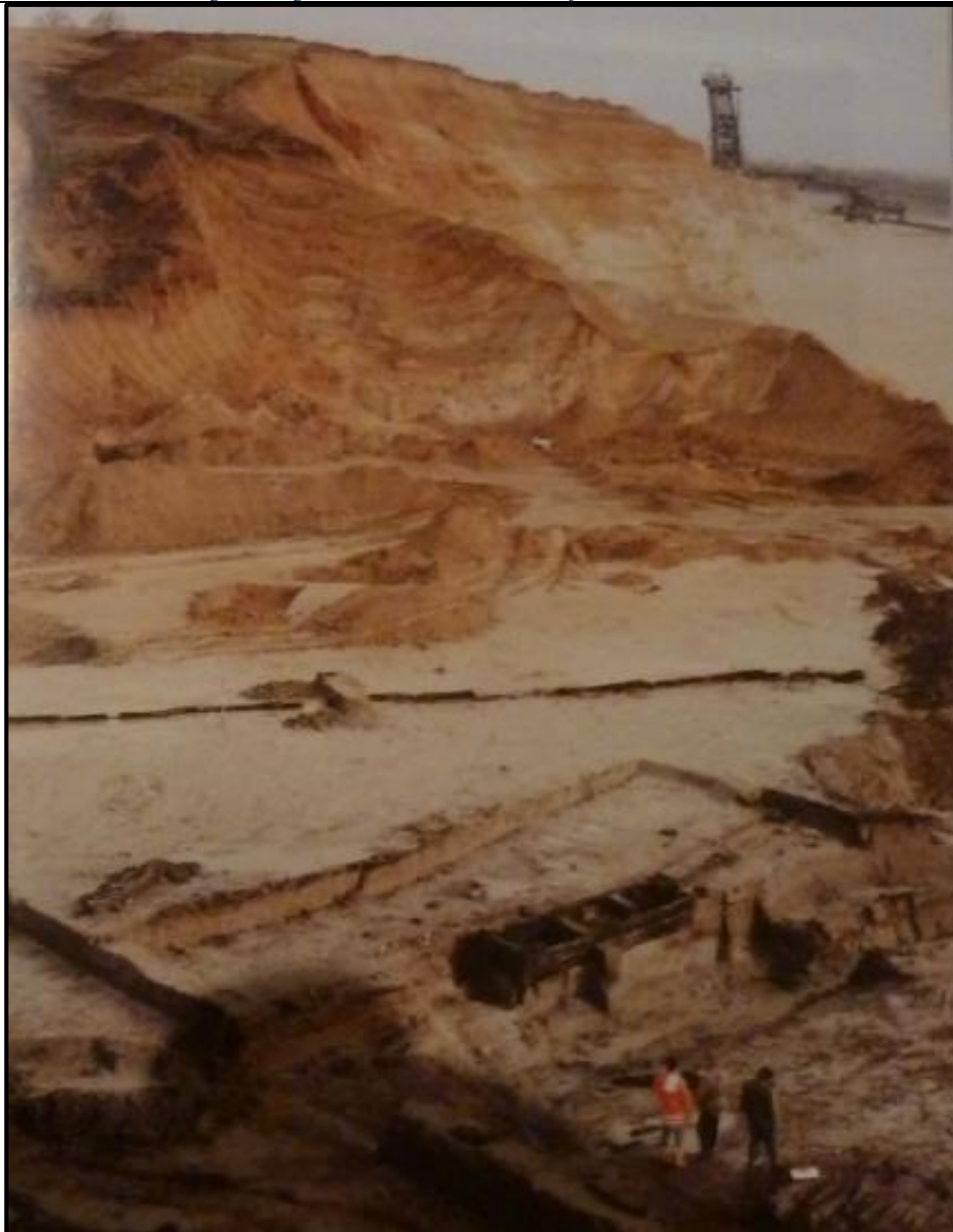
It is believed that all these aqueducts were demolished by barbarians. Yet, it is not understood what could have driven conquerors – not only of Rome but of hundreds of other cities within the empire – to cut themselves off from the supply of water, the most important ingredient for survival. Moreover, after every former attack on Rome the aqueducts, if damaged at all, were immediately repaired. Therefore, this wonderwork of civil engineering was kept intact over more than five centuries. In reality, the destruction of the aqueducts happened swiftly, and with a power no humans had at their disposal. This happened, in 234 CE, only eight years after the last system had been completed under Alexander Severus in 226 CE.

Stratigraphically, as Heinsohn can show, this early 3rd c. date really belongs to the early 10th c. CE. That explains why the very few aqueducts destroyed in 234 CE that were ever repaired did not see such damage correction before the 10th century, i.e.,

after 934 CE (the stratigraphical date of 234 CE). An example is provided by the Roman aqueduct at the bus station in Cordoba (Spain).

At the same time (234=934), Rome's population was reduced from nearly one million to no more than 50,000. From 934 to 1453, Rome's remaining pockets of simple housing had to get along without running water. The cataclysm had struck with such force that more than half a millennium passed before Europeans could begin to slowly regain the technological competence of imperial Rome.

**Cut through 7 m of sand and gravel to reach lignite ("Braunkohle") in the vicinity of Cologne that revealed a totally unexpected Roman aqueduct (horizontal black line)** [From W.G. Horn, ed., *Ein Land macht Geschichte: Archäologische Ausgrabungen in Nord-Rhein-Westfalen*, Mainz 1995.]



There is another way to test the assumption that bands of barbarians were capable of tearing down all these magnificent (often sub-terranean) structures. A look at aqueducts outside the cities may provide a step forward.

Near Cologne (Rhineland), to give an example, in the lignite area of the *Elsbachtal*, the gigantic mechanical diggers used to clear away the debris covering the precious coal, a small Roman aqueduct, dated to 224 CE, was brought to light after 7 m of sand and gravel had been removed. So far, one does not understand the geological mechanism that could have laid down such an immense volume of material strangling a once fertile Roman region. At least, nobody dares to point to barbarians as the culprits.

The catastrophe that befell Rome soon after the completion of the *Aqua Alexandriana* in 226 CE, also devastated the *Elsbachtal* 1,100 km further north. It will require expertise from many fields to untangle this global, and, possibly, cosmic event. *Q-mag* provides a most welcome venue to further such research. I am confident that a geologist of Trevor Palmer's distinction is well suited to be of considerable help in this endeavour.

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