

A Heavily Bearded Philosopher in Women's Underwear

Deconstructing and Reconstructing the Identity of the So-called Hippolytus Statue

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Abstract. — Strictly speaking, the so-called Hippolytus statue should not exist. This free-standing, full-size sculpture of a bearded philosopher, supplied with Christian inscriptions, is not only one of the very few of its kind, it was also created in a period when Christian authors such as Tertullian (ca. 200 CE) fulminated against statues. But the origins of the statue are not the only mysterious thing about it. Roughly 500 years after its discovery, scholars still dispute who the statue is meant to represent and in what context it was displayed. By offering a chronological review of scholarship, this essay sheds light on the various attempts to construct a suitable identity for the statue out of widely scattered evidence. The combination of two distinct but intertwined lines of research, namely, analysis of the statue on the one hand and discussions about the person and oeuvre of Hippolytus on the other, reveals how shifting interpretations of Hippolytus and his oeuvre have altered the identity of the figure depicted by this static object several times. And conversely, how the changing identity of the figure has challenged the discussions about person and oeuvre of Hippolytus. The present contribution concludes by pointing out several problems with past attempts and offering suggestions for avenues of future research.

* An earlier version of this paper was presented as the opening lecture at the Hippolytus Workshop held at KU Leuven, 2–3 September 2021. For their thoughtful questions and comments, I would like to express my gratitude to the audience and especially to Ine Jacobs, Sacha Stern, Ginette Vangenheim, and Bryan Ward-Perkins. The multidisciplinary KU Leuven research project on the Hippolytus statue has received generous funding from the Research Foundation – Flanders (FWO), grant agreement no. 1509819N, awarded to the author. I am also deeply indebted to Anthony Dupont, Stefan Schorn, and Patrick Degryse, members of this research project, for sharing their invaluable expertise in order to reveal the statue's well-kept secrets. Finally, this research would not have been possible without the support of the Vatican Apostolic Library (BAV). I am particularly grateful to Mons. Dr. Cesare Pasini, prefect of the BAV, for his generosity in providing access to this enigmatic object and for his interest in the project.

At first glance, the so-called Hippolytus statue is hardly more than one of the countless Roman antiquities to decorate a hallway (Figure 1).¹ It is also far from the most aesthetically appealing Roman statue. Installed in a distinguished setting at the entrance to the Vatican Apostolic Library (BAV), that statue has been ignored by generations of scholars. Yet this particular piece of marble is full of mysteries. For instance, Hippolytus, the erudite church father whom the statue supposedly represents, is here dressed in Greek-style underwear that is normally worn by women. A less mysterious but no less striking fact was acknowledged by the German Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), the founder of modern archaeology, in his posthumously published *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*. He described the statue with charming simplicity as “the oldest Christian figure in stone.”² Adding some precision to Winckelmann’s statement, one can claim that the Hippolytus statue is the earliest known, extant, Christian (or rather Christianised), free-standing, and full-size sculpture in history.³ Remarkably, this object was supposedly created at a time when contemporary Christian writers such as Tertullian were not hesitant to launch rhetorical broadsides against three-dimensional figures of all sorts. If Tertullian railed exclusively against “pagan” free-standing representations, it is only because a Christian(ised) sculpture was beyond his wildest imagination.⁴

1. Vatican City, Vatican Apostolic Library, BAVOA.240. The early Christian collection of the Vatican Museums, the Pius-Christian Museum, holds a plaster cast copy of the statue made in 1959, before the original was moved to its current location in the BAV (Vatican Museums, inv. 31579).

2. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Alterthums*, vol. 2 (Vienna: Akademischer Verlag, 1776), 862: “[Es ist d]ie älteste christliche Figur in Stein.” Even though Winckelmann noted that “der Kopf neu ist,” he had probably never seen the statue with his own eyes.

3. Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) argued convincingly that Christians, like Jews, in (late) antiquity were neither aniconic nor iconophobic. Nevertheless examples of Christian-made statues are utterly rare. Apart from a handful of smaller-size examples, no full-size, free-standing Christian sculpture has survived. There are, however, a good number of Christianised sculptures and of statues which were reused *spolia*, that is, repurposed decorative building material. Cf. Troels Myrup Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods: Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Late Antiquity*, Aarhus Studies in Mediterranean Antiquity 12 (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013); Paolo Liverani, “The End of 3D,” in *The Afterlife of Greek and Roman Sculpture: Late Antique Responses and Practices*, ed. Troels Myrup Kristensen and Lea Margaret Stirling (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 310-329.

4. E.g. Tertullianus, *De idolatria* 4; 18; *Apologeticum* 19. The strong aversion to statues and other hand-made representations has its roots in Tertullian’s radical rejection of any form of idolatry. Cf. Guy G. Stroumsa, “Tertullian on Idolatry and the Limits of Tolerance,” in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. Graham Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 173-184.

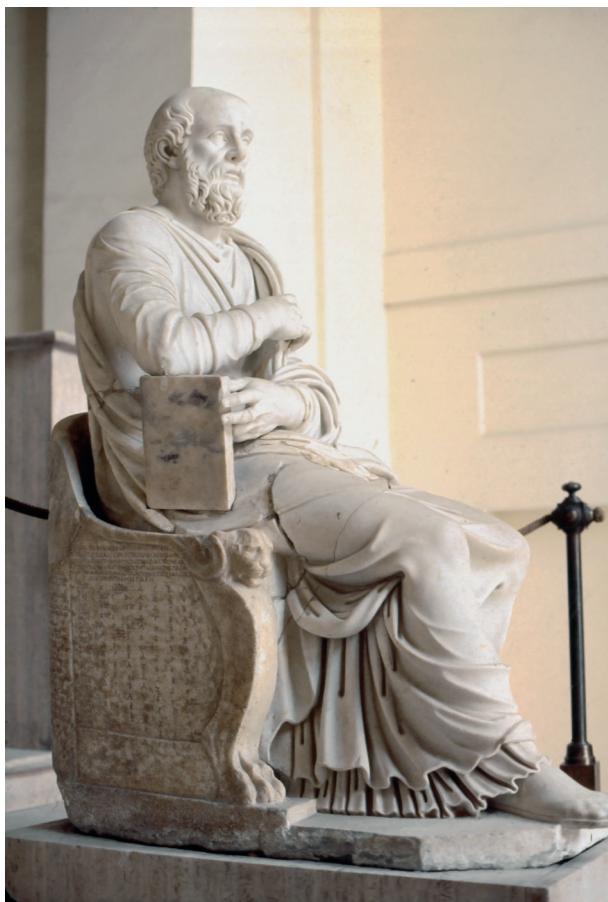


Figure 1. Hippolytus statue. Abilene Christian University, Everett Ferguson Photo Collection 9446, (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Yet, here it is, the Hippolytus statue. This piece of marble poses many questions, and it challenges conventional knowledge about early Christianity and early Christian communities based on literary sources. The present contribution reveals the intriguing history of the struggle to find a reasonable explanation for an object which cannot or should not

Other contemporaries, such as Clement of Alexandria, were similarly reluctant when it came to figurative representations, even if only two-dimensional. In his *Paedagogus*, for example, when accepting the necessity of signet rings for public business, Clement instructed Christians to use what he regarded as neutral symbols such as a dove, fish, or ship. Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3,59,2–3,60,1.

exist. The chronological review of that struggle sheds light on the normative force and versatile interplay of the discovery of lost writings, the development of new methodologies, the professionalization of disciplines, and the progress of scholarship. In the present case, scholarship has repeatedly triggered the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of various identities that have been asserted for this piece of marble at different times. In other words, this essay combines two distinct but intertwined perspectives by bringing into conversation research on the statue and research on the person and *oeuvre* of Hippolytus, which is known as the “Hippolytus question.” The essay not only shows how these two lines of research are related, it also demonstrates that material evidence and literary sources ought to be analysed in close interaction with each other.

1. The Construction of “Hippolytus”

It all began in the spring of 1551. One day, the antiquarian, painter, and architect Pirro Ligorio (ca. 1512-1583)⁵ discovered an “image” in the *ager Veranus* near the *Castro Pretorio* in Rome. Roughly two years later, he described this image as “broken and badly treated.”⁶ Today, this figure looks surprisingly shiny, polished, and above all complete. The life-size marble statue is of a heavily bearded man dressed in a toga and seated on a throne. His arms are folded in front of his upper body. His left hand holds a book, while the elbow of his right arm rests on the book. The garments, gesture, and book are typical attributes of a philosopher, or more generally, of an erudite person depicted in Hellenistic or Roman art.

5. While Ligorio is rightly celebrated for his architectural achievements, such as the Villa d'Este in Tivoli, his reputation as an antiquarian, which is hardly spotless to say the least, is subject to recurring scholarly debates. For instance, Christian Hülsen (1858-1935), a student of the famous classical scholar Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903) and collaborator on the latter's monumental epigraphical project *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, noted rather dryly that Ligorio “is famous for being the greatest forger in the field of epigraphy.” See Christian Hülsen, “Falsificazioni lapidarie ligoriane,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts. Römische Abteilung* 10 (1895): 289-298, at 289. It is particularly revealing that the preface to the recent anthology by Fernando Loffredo and Ginette Vagenheim, eds., *Pirro Ligorio's Worlds: Antiquarianism, Classical Erudition and the Visual Arts in the Late Renaissance*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History 293; Brill's Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History 34 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1, places Ligorio's forgeries on the first page as a subject of discussion.

6. National Library Naples, ms. XIII.B.7, fol. 424: “[I]n certe ruine fil trovata questa imagine che siede rossa et mal trattata.” Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

Three groups of inscriptions make what might appear to be a rather ordinary object truly unique. The right-hand side of the chair or throne displays a paschal full-moon calendar arranged in seven periods of sixteen years each (Figure 2).⁷ A supposedly perpetual Easter table of 112 years is engraved on the left-hand side of the same piece of furniture (Figure 3).⁸ Remarkably, the Easter table explicitly mentions that Easter must be observed on the Sunday following Pascha, which is reinforced by the redundant repetition of “KY,” that is, Κυριακῇ ἡμέρᾳ (the Lord’s day, Sunday), for each individual entry. According to two elaborate superscriptions, the first year of Severus Alexander’s rule (222) is the starting point for the calculations of each calendar. This year is also considered a *terminus post quem* for the date of the calendars and their inscription on the chair.⁹

7. ICUR VII, 19934: ἔτους α' βασιλείας Ἀλεξάνδρου αὐτοκράτορος ἐγέ / νετο ἡ δι' τοῦ πάσχα εἰδοῖς ἀπρεμλαιας σαββάτῳ ἐμ / βολίμου μηνὸς γενομένου ἔσται τοῖς ἔτης ἔτεσιν καθ / ὡς ὑποτέτακται ἐν τῷ πίνακι ἐγένετο δὲ ἐν τοῖς παρῷ / χηρόσιν καθὼς σεσημείωται ἀπονητικέσθαι δὲ / δεῖ οὖ ἐνπέσῃ κυριακή. “In the first year of the Roman emperor Alexander Severus, the 14th of the Paschal moon fell on Saturday, the Ides of April, during an embolismic month. For the succeeding years it will be as indicated in the table below. Events of the past were as noted. One must break the fast when Sunday comes.” Translation is from Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus*, 117. For the calendars, see further George Salmon, “Some Notes on the Chronology of Hippolytus,” *Hermathena* 1, no. 1 (1873): 82-128; Eduard Schwartz, *Christliche und jüdische Oster-tafeln*, Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse 6 (Berlin: Weidmann, 1905), 29-40; Leofranc Holford-Strevens, “Paschal Lunar Calendars up to Bede,” *Peritia* 20 (2008): 165-208; Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus*, 116-125; Sacha Stern, *Calendars in Antiquity: Empires, States, and Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 387-391.

8. ICUR VII, 19935: ἔτει Ἀλεξάνδρου καίσαρος / τῷ α' ἀρχὴ / αἱ κυριακαὶ τοῦ πάσχα κατὰ ἔτος / αἱ δὲ παρακεντήσεις δηλοῦσι τὴν διά πρὸ ἔξ. “First year of Alexander Caesar: the Sundays of the Pascha year by year: points indicate the bissextum.” Translation is from Alden A. Mosshammer, *The Easter Computus and the Origins of the Christian Era*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117.

9. Salmon, “Chronology,” 84, had already called attention to the poor implementation of the Jewish lunar calendar into the Roman solar calendar, which resulted in an increasing imprecision of the calculations. With the completion of every sixteen-year circle, the calendar falls behind an additional 1.5 days. Thus scholars argue that the calendar was of very limited practical use after the completion of the first sixteen-year circle. Accordingly the inscription of the calendars must have taken place after the first year of Alexander Severus in 222 but before 238. Similarly, Adolf Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius*. Vol. II: *Die Chronologie* (Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1904), 234; Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop*, Vigiliae Christianae Supplements 31 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 4; Emanuele Castelli, “La cattedra della Chiesa e il trono del vescovo tra II e III secolo a Roma: Ricerche sul contesto storico della ‘statua d’Ippolito’,” *Annali di storia dell’esegesi* 27 (2010): 35-50, at 41, n. 17; Markus Vinzent, *Writing the History of Early Christianity: From Reception to Retrospection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 180-181.



Figure 2. Hippolytus statue, paschal table and the list of works. Abilene Christian University, Everett Ferguson Photo Collection 2977, (CC BY-SA 4.0).

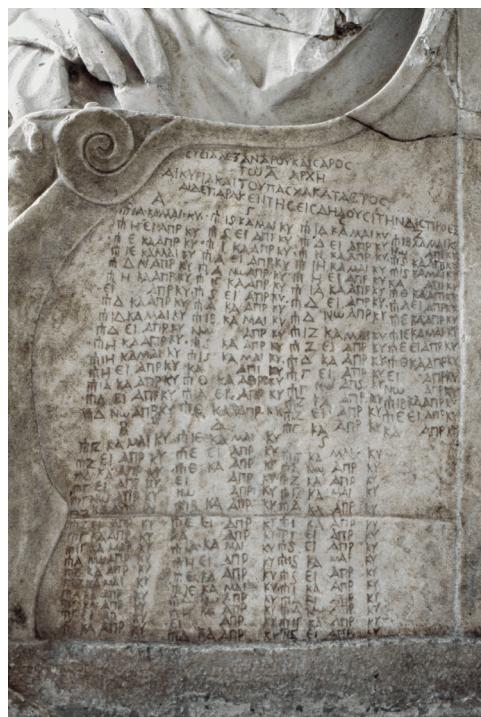


Figure 3. Hippolytus statue, Easter calendar. Abilene Christian University, Everett Ferguson Photo Collection 2966, (CC BY-SA 4.0).

Somewhat unexpectedly, the third group of inscriptions was placed near the upper right edge of the chair's backrest in a far less representative space (Figure 2). While the first two lines are illegible, and a good number of lines might be missing due to physical damage to the chair, the surviving part lists a corpus of works of different genres.¹⁰ Several attempts have been made to determine the exact number of works listed and their precise titles.¹¹ These attempts remain to a certain extent hypothetical because in a few instances it is unclear whether consecutive lines refer to a single work or to two separate works.¹² It is also challenging to link the titles to a single author since no extant late antique or Byzantine catalogue of titles matches this list. A few of the titles from the statue's inscription, however, correspond to Eusebius of Caesarea's (ca. 260-339/340) account of a certain "Hippolytus, [...] the leader ($\pi\tau\omega\sigma\tau\omega\zeta$) of another church somewhere."¹³ One of the writings from this catalogue, *On the Pascha* ($\Pi\epsilon\tau\iota\tau\omega\pi\alpha\sigma\chi\alpha$) correlates with a similar title inscribed on the chair, the *Exposition of the Times of Passover also on the Table* ($\alpha\pi\delta\epsilon\iota\zeta\chi\tau\omega\tau\omega\pi\alpha\sigma\chi\alpha$ [x]αι τὰ ἐν τῷ πίνακι, lines 18-20). More importantly, the church historian provided a few but very specific details about the content of this work: "[H]e, (i.e., Hippolytus) presents a chronological table and sets forth a certain paschal canon of sixteen years, defining the time up to the first year of the Emperor Alexander."¹⁴ The paschal table of sixteen years that Eusebius describes

10. Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 184, suggested that "in addition to the remaining fragmented first two lines, potentially two more lines above may have existed, as this would parallel the text of the Easter table that is inscribed adjacent to the list on its left." Yet given the paleographic characteristics of the inscription and the dimensions of the missing part – which can be estimated by the height of the intact back part of the chair – that missing part could have easily accommodated at least twelve additional lines.

11. Cf. Harnack, *Geschichte*, II: *Die Chronologie*, 209-256; Margherita Guarducci, *Epigrafia greca*. Vol. 4: *Epigrafi sacre pagane e cristiane* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato, 1978); Caroline P. Hammond Bammel, "The State of Play with Regard to Hippolytus and the Contra Noetum," *Heythrop Journal* 31 (1990): 195-199; Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 182-187.

12. Cf. *infra*, n. 16.

13. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6,20: ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ Ἰππόλυτος, ἐτέρας που καὶ αὐτὸς $\pi\tau\omega\sigma\tau\omega\zeta$ ἐκκλησίας. It is important to note that Eusebius does not use a precise ecclesiastical title such as bishop or presbyter but instead describes Hippolytus as the "leader," "patron," or person "in charge" of a church. Although it is tempting to think that $\pi\tau\omega\sigma\tau\omega\zeta$ is used synonymously with $\epsilon\pi\alpha\kappa\omega\pi\zeta$ here, Eusebius also uses the word $\pi\tau\omega\sigma\tau\omega\zeta$ to describe the role of Philo within the Jewish community of Alexandria, or that of Paul of Samosata after he was removed from episcopal office and excluded from the church. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2,5,4 and 7,29,2.

14. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6,22,1: τὸ Περὶ τοῦ πάσχα πεποίηται σύγγραμμα, ἐν ᾧ τῶν χρόνων ἀναγραφὴν ἔχθεμενος καὶ τινὰ κανόνα ἐκκαίδεκατηρίδος περὶ τοῦ πάσχα $\pi\tau\omega\sigma\tau\omega\zeta$, ἐπὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἔτος αὐτοκράτορος Ἀλεξάνδρου τοὺς χρόνους περιγράφει.

is highly likely identical to the paschal table of the chair.¹⁵ A further title, the *Apostolic Tradition* (ἀποστολικὴ παράδοσις, lines 10-11¹⁶), correlates to another work often attributed to Hippolytus.¹⁷

Since Ligorio's skill in classical languages was limited¹⁸ – he did not read Greek – members of his humanistic circle linked the torso with the

Translation is taken from Eusebius Caesariensis, *Ecclesiastical History: Books 6–10*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, 3rd ed., vol. 2, The Fathers of the Church 29 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 43.

15. There is, however, a notable difference between the calendars on the one hand and the Eusebian description of the paschal table on the other. While the superscriptions on the chair indicate the first year of Severus Alexander as the starting point for the calculations, Eusebius interprets the first year of Severus Alexander as the concluding date for the calculations. It has been proposed that Hippolytus' *On the Pasha* contained two distinct parts. The first ended in 222, and the second began on the same date. Cf. Osvalda Andrei, "Dalle 'Chronographia' di Giulio Africano alla 'Synagoge' di Ippolito: Un dibattito sulla scrittura cristiana del tempo," in *Julius Africanus und die christliche Weltchronik*, ed. Martin Wallraff, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 157 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 117, n. 15.

16. In a few instances it is unclear whether consecutive lines refer to one or two works. Such is the case here. Line 9 can be read as the title of an individual work, *On Charismatic Gifts* (περὶ χαρισμάτων), and lines 10-11 as the title of another, namely, *Apostolic Tradition* (ἀποστολικὴ παράδοσις). Lines 9-11, however, could also refer to one single work. Cf. Harnack, *Geschichte. II: Die Chronologie*, 501-514; Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 184.

17. The author of the *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, traditionally attributed to Hippolytus [Romanus], claims to have written "other books" (ἔτεραι βίβλοι) on the genealogies of the Jews and another "On the Universe" (περὶ τῆς τοῦ παντός οὐσίας). See *Refutatio* 10,30,1-5, and 10,32,4, and see further pp. 349-359 for the attribution. In his *Bibliotheca* 48, Patriarch Photius I (ca. 810/820-893) attributed a work entitled *On the Universe* to Hippolytus. These two works of the author are usually identified with two (partly matching) titles listed on the statue: *Chronicles* (χρονικῶν, line 12) and *To/Against the Greeks and Plato also Named On the Universe* (πρὸς Ἐλλήνας καὶ πρὸς Πλάτωνα ἡ καὶ περὶ τοῦ παντός, lines 13-15). While scholars rightly question a closer relationship between the "other [genealogical] books" (ἔτεραι βίβλοι) and *Chronicles* (χρονικῶν), it was particularly Castelli who, in a series of articles, advocated identifying the two instances of *On the Universe*. Osvalda Andrei, "Spazio geografico, etnografia ed evangelizzazione nella Synagoge di Ippolito," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 11 (2008): 221-278; Emanuele Castelli, "The Author of the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* and the Attribution of the *De Universo* to Flavius Josephus," *Vetera Christianorum* 46 (2009): 17-30; Emanuele Castelli, *Un falso letterario sotto il nome di Flavio Giuseppe: Ricerche sulla tradizione del Περὶ τοῦ παντός e sulla produzione letteraria cristiana a Roma nei primi decenni del III secolo*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband*, Kleine Reihe 7 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2011), 51-59.

18. That Ligorio did not have a particularly good command of classical languages was not unknown to his contemporaries. For instance, Bishop Antonio Augustín of Tarragona (1517-1586), who considered himself a good friend of Ligorio, referred to him in the following way: "Pirro Ligorio, a Neapolitan friend of mine, a great antiquarian and painter, who, without knowing the Latin language, has written more than forty books on medals, buildings, and other things." Antonio Agustín, *Dialoghi di don Antonio Agostini arcivescovo di Tarracona intorno alle medaglie inscrittiōnī...*, ed. Dionigi Ottaviano Sada (Rome: Fei, 1625), 117: "Pirro Ligorio napoletano amico mio, grande antiquario, e pittore, il quale senza sapere la lingua latina, ha scritto più di quaranta libri di medaglie, e di edifici, e d'altre cose." This statement, however, should be taken with a

author of the paschal tables described by Eusebius. Yet this attribution did not solve the issue entirely, because the church historian could not locate Hippolytus' episcopal see, let alone provide any personal information about him. Fortunately for Ligorio and his associates, Hippolytus was a well-known figure in the Roman hagiographical tradition. Bishop Damasus of Rome (366-384), inventor and patron of Roman martyrs not only refurbished the subterranean tomb of a martyr named Hippolytus but also devoted an epigram to that martyr's memory. This poem offers hardy more than hagiographical commonplaces, apart from the schismatic's final call, before his martyrdom, "to follow the universal faith." Thus the penitent Hippolytus "won the right to be our martyr," and "Christ confirms it all."¹⁹ Prudentius (348-after 405), the famous Christian poet, dedicated a lengthy poem to a martyr named Hippolytus as well. According to Prudentius, this Hippolytus, a schismatic, was buried in Rome, in the eponymous cemetery near the extramural basilica of San Lorenzo. Yet Prudentius' Hippolytus served as bishop of Portus/Ostia, where he was also martyred.²⁰ The antiquarian Ligorio and his friends quickly combined the Eusebian Hippolytus with the martyr-bishop of Portus known from Damasus and Prudentius.²¹ The image of

pinch of salt, as Agustín was, generally speaking, ambiguous towards Ligorio's scholarship. Nevertheless, it does seem that Ligorio had to rely on the support of his Flemish friend, the Leuven-trained Martinus Smetius (Martijn de Smet, 1525-1567), the "father of epigraphy," who was also the secretary of Cardinal Rodolfo Pio da Carpi (1500-1564), in order to read the inscriptions on the statue. Cf. Brent, *Hippolytus*, 9-17; 41-49; Paul Van De Woestijne, "De Oostwinkelse humanist Martijn De Smet (ca. 1520-1567) vader van de epigrafie," *Appeltjes van het Meetjesland: Jaarboek van het Heemkundig Genootschap van het Meetjesland* 60 (2009): 215-295. Instructive with regard to Ligorio's linguistic skills is Robert W. Gaston, "Pirro Ligorio's Antiquarian Philology," in *Pirro Ligorio's Worlds*, ed. Loffredo and Vagenheim, 25-38.

19. Damasus, *Epigramma* 35: [...] *catholicam dixisse fidem sequerentur ut omnes / sic noster meruit confessus martyr ut esset / Haec audita refert Damasus, probat omnia Christus*. The translation, slightly modified, is from Dennis E. Trout, ed., *Damasus of Rome: The Epigraphic Poetry: Introduction, Texts, Translations, and Commentary*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 145. For the Damasian inventions, see Marianne Sághy, "Renovatio memoriae: Pope Damasus and the Martyrs of Rome," in *Rom in der Spätantike: Historische Erinnerung im städtischen Raum*, ed. Ralf Behrwald and Christian Witschel, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien 51 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2012), 251-266.

20. Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 11. Prudentius probably merged hagiographic traditions about two different Hippolyti, namely, Hippolytus the martyr buried in Rome and another Hippolytus of Ostia/Portus.

21. In his 1553 sketchbook, Ligorio explicitly noted that he had combined Eusebius' account with that of what he took to be Theophanes Abbot (760-818) in order to determine Hippolytus' episcopal see: "On the two sides of the chair these copied letters have been placed in Greek; of that bishop who made a commentary on the Apocalypse, and composed other very beautiful works, as the writers say; and it is thought that he is

an erudite, repentant and thus particularly holy martyr-bishop of the early Roman church was born, for which the marble statue served as a tangible and impressive manifestation. With this image in mind, Ligorio “restored” the torso. The Medici pope Pius IV (1559-1565) was apparently quickly convinced, as he had the restored statue placed in the Cortile del Belvedere of the Apostolic Palace in 1564 and attached the following inscription, now lost, to its plinth: “Statue of Hippolytus, bishop of Portus, who lived under Emperor Alexander Pius, was excavated from the ruins of the City and restored by Pius III Medici Pontifex Maximus.”²² The freestanding portrait of the erudite martyr-bishop of Portus overlooked the Cortile for centuries.

The rediscovery of a large portion of the notorious *Refutatio omnium haeresium*, or the *Refutation of All Heresies*, however, marked a significant shift in identity for Hippolytus. Although this monumental heresiological compendium was attributed to Origen in the *editio princeps*, scarcely two years went by before Johann Joseph Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890) argued in his famous *Hippolytus und Kallistus* for an attribution to Hippolytus. Indeed, two striking features exclude Origen as the composer of this work: the anonymous author’s claim to be a bishop, and the bold denunciation of his personal adversary, bishop Calixtus (?217-?222), as a magician and heretic.²³ More importantly, the clash between Calixtus and the author described in the work conveniently matched the scattered and confusing evidence. The conflict provided important

that Saint Hippolytus of whom Eusebius made honourable mention; but he does not say of which diocese he was. But only Theophanes writes that he was a Roman; and that he was a bishop.” Naples, XIII B.7, fol. 424V: “Nelli dui lati dell[!]a sedia sono poste questi esemplari in greco; di questo Vescovo il quale commento l’Apocalypsis, et … quel santo Hippolito di cui fa mentione honoratamente Eusebio; ma non dice di cui diocese fusse. Ma solamente scrive Thephane, che egli fu Romano; et che fu vescovo.” For the translation and for Ligorio’s misattribution, see Brent, *Hippolytus*, 10, n. 13 and 14; 174-176.

22. Vatican City, Vatican Apostolic Library, Barb. lat. 2733, fol. 462r: *Statua Hippolyti Portuensis episcopi, qui vixit Alexandro Pio Imperatore ex Vrbis ruinis effossa à Pio III medice Pont. Max. restituta.*

23. Ignaz von Döllinger, *Hippolytus und Kallistus: oder die römische Kirche in der ersten Hälfte des dritten Jahrhunderts; mit Rücksicht auf die Schriften und Abhandlungen der HH. Bunsen, Wordsworth, Baur und Gieseler* (Regensburg: Manz, 1853). Although it is very popular to interpret the author’s rather cryptic introductory statement in the *Prooemium* as a claim of episcopal succession, such a reading is not the only plausible one, let alone imperative. See András Handl, *Calixtus I, der Bischof von Rom und der Konflikt um seine Person in der Refutatio omnium haeresium, Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); Sebastian Hanstein, *Studien zur redaktionellen Gestaltung des Sonderguts in der Schrift ‘Widerlegung aller Häresien’ unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Darstellung der sog. ‘Peraten’* (PhD diss., Bonn, Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 2020), 25-30, here 25.

insights into the reasons, process, and not least the localization of Hippolytus's episcopal see. The conflict also neatly explained how and why the erudite Hippolytus became a schismatic according to Damasus and the hagiographic tradition. Once identified with the bishop of Portus, Hippolytus was now considered the first and only canonised anti-pope in history.²⁴ Suddenly, the silence of later authors such as Eusebius or Jerome made perfect sense. They had intentionally refrained from sharing their knowledge about the see of Hippolytus because they were embarrassed by the highly learned schismatic anti-pope who was also a canonised martyr.²⁵ In the coming decades, Döllinger's reconstruction, which is now referred to as the single-author hypothesis because it attributes the entire corpus to a single author, became universally accepted. This process was fuelled both by the positivist-encyclopedic (German) scholarship of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and by the struggle over the dogma of papal infallibility.²⁶ The invention of the

24. Hippolytus is recorded together with Bishop Pontianus (230-235) in the earliest known Roman calendar of martyrs, the *Depositio martyrum*, as follows: "August 13, Hippolytus in Tiburtina, and Pontianus in Callixtus" (*idus Aug. Ypoliti in Tiburtina. et Pontiani in Callisti*). Even though it was preserved as part of the famous Chronograph of 354 created by Furius Dionysius Filocalus, who was a calligrapher and Bishop Damasus' stone engraver, the calendar goes back to an earlier collection that probably dates to 336. See Michele Renée Salzman, *On Roman Time: The Codex-Calendar of 354 and the Rhythms of Urban Life in Late Antiquity*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage 17 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 43-44; Johannes Divjak and Wolfgang Wischmeyer, *Das Kalenderhandbuch von 354*. Bd. II: *Der Textteil – Listen der Verwaltung* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2014), 499. Hippolytus' inclusion in the official Roman calendar of martyrs suggests that he was recognised long before Damasus' "canonisation" of him as an authentic, that is, non-heretical martyr, and that the name Hippolytus was part of the annual liturgical commemoration at his cult centre on the via Tiburtina. The *Catalogus Liberianus*, another famous part of the Chronograph of 354, not only confirms the impression of the *Depositio martyrum*, but also provides some additional, though not particularly revolutionary information about Hippolytus' end: "In that time the exiled bishop Pontianus and the presbyter Hippolytus were deported to Sardinia on the island of Vocina, Severus and Quintianus being consuls." *Eo tempore Pontianus episcopus et Yppolitus presbiter exoles sunt deportati in Sardinia in insula uocina Severo et Quintiano cons.*

25. Josef Frickel, *Das Dunkel um Hippolyt von Rom: Ein Lösungsversuch: Die Schriften Elenchos und Contra Noëtum*, Grazer theologische Studien 13 (Graz: Eigenverlag des Institutes für Ökumenische Theologie und Patrologie, 1988), 5; and cf. Brent, *Hippolytus*, 390-397.

26. Several renowned scholars have contributed to the *Hippolytfrage* (Hippolytus question), which has slowly lost its character as question and inched closer to a consensus. Cf. e.g. Hans Achelis, *Hippolytstudien*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 16/4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897); Adhémar d'Alès, *La Théologie de Saint Hippolyte*, Bibliothèque de Théologie Historique (Paris: Beauchesne, 1906); Harnack, *Geschichte*. II: *Die Chronologie*, 209-256; Adolf Hamel, *Der Kirchenbegriff Hippolyts* (Borna and Leipzig: Noske, 1929). Döllinger published his *Hippolytus und Kallistus* in the early 1850s. A couple of years later, he became increasingly critical of

first repentant anti-pope and martyr in history was so successful and the image apparently so overpowering that it still casts a remarkably long and resilient shadow.²⁷

2. The Deconstruction of “Hippolytus”

The French scholar and long-time director of the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris, Pierre Nautin (1914-1997), is responsible for the first and so far deepest crack in the shiny glaze of the positivistically constructed Hippolytus. In his iconic and controversial work *Hippolyte et Josipe*, published in 1947, Nautin pointed out a good number of striking discrepancies in the *oeuvre* of Hippolytus, which had become massively

papal authority, which culminated in his excommunication in 1871 after he publicly refused to accept the dogma of papal infallibility. Remarkably, the basic pattern of his personal struggle underlies his interpretation of the conflict between Hippolytus and Callixtus. For Döllinger, the rivalry between the two for episcopal power and authority could not but trigger a conflict of such dimensions. Admittedly, the recent 150 years have not changed much concerning the interpretation of this conflict. For Döllinger's opposition to increasing papal authority, see Manfred Weitlauff, *Das Erste Vatikanum (1869-70) wurde ihnen zum Schicksal : Der Münchner Kirchenhistoriker Ignaz von Döllinger (1799-1890) und sein englischer Schüler John Lord Acton (1834-1902) : Ein Beitrag zum 150-Jahr-Jubiläum dieses Konzils*, 2 vols., Abhandlung der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 144 (Munich: Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2018). The rediscovery of the Hippolytus-Callixtus controversy had quite a ripple effect, reaching far beyond issues pertaining to authority. The rediscovery triggered, for instance, anti-Catholic and anti-papal sentiments, as in Bunsen's widely cherished book on the same topic. Cf. Christian Karl Josias von Bunsen, *Hippolytus und seine Zeit: Anfänge und Aussichten des Christenthums und der Menschheit*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1852-53) and see Pierre Sfendules, “An Ancient Church Father and His Victorian Audience: Christian von Bunsen's Unusual Work on Hippolytus of Rome and Its Influence on Nineteenth-Century Debates,” German Historical Institute London Blog, accessed 22 October 2021, <https://ghil.hypotheses.org/290>.

27. For instance, the *Annuario pontificio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020), 8* records Hippolytus as an anti-pope. It is important to note, however, that this succession list is based on Duchesne's edition of the *Liber pontificalis*. Cf. Louis Duchesne, ed., *Le liber pontificalis: Texte, introduction et commentaire*, vol. 1, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome II/3 (Paris: de Boccard, 1886). The entry for Hippolytus in the online edition of the renowned *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is also revealing: “Saint Hippolytus of Rome, antipope,” Encyclopaedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Hippolytus-of-Rome> (accessed 22 October 2021). Finally, many library catalogues and authority databases such as WorldCat or the Library of Congress still list Hippolytus as an anti-pope. Cf. e.g. “Hippolytus Antipope approximately 170-235 or 236,” WorldCat Identities, <http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n50-66851/> (accessed 22 October 2021); and Library of Congress Name Authority File (LCNAF), <http://id.loc.gov/authorities/names/n50066851> (accessed 22 October 2021).

inflated with over forty attributions.²⁸ In order to mitigate these discrepancies, he suggested attributing Hippolytus' works to two distinct authors: a Josipe from Rome and an authentic Hippolytus from the East. This suggestion is known today as the two-author hypothesis. The ensuing, surprisingly fierce debates turned out to be academic exercises in finding needles, in the form of tit-for-tat arguments, in a haystack.²⁹

Thus when Pope John XXIII decided to move the statue from the Lateran Museum (see Figure 4) to the entrance of the Vatican Apostolic Library in 1959, the image of the intellectual saint and anti-pope was still dominant. It is difficult to decide what is more intriguing: the pope's decision to let a schismatic anti-pope oversee the entrance to what used to be his private library, or the pious ignorance of the monumental inscription, which praises Hippolytus as "the most learned churchman."³⁰

While patristic scholars were still recovering from Nautin's fundamental critique of the single-author hypothesis, the Italian classicist, archaeologist, and epigrapher Margherita Guarducci (1902-1999) put another nail in the coffin of the anti-pope Hippolytus with a lecture she delivered at the Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia in 1973. Studying the sculpture, Guarducci made two important observations. First, in the light of a good number of fractures, she suggested that the sculpture was not made from a single block of marble, but that it had been assembled from several parts (*pasticcio*). Second, the upper part of the statue is mantled in toga, or more precisely in a *ἱμάτιον*, while a finely crafted tunic (*χιτών*) covers the ankles (Figure 1). The ankle length tunic, however, belongs classically to a woman's wardrobe, and displaying it in this manner is a typical feature of female representations

28. Pierre Nautin, *Hippolyte et Josipe: À l'histoire de la littérature chrétienne du troisième siècle*, Études et textes pour l'histoire du dogme de la Trinité 1 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1947).

29. Marcel Richard, "Encore le problème d'Hippolyte," *Mélanges de science religieuse* 10 (1953): 13-52; 145-180; idem, "Dernières remarques sur S. Hippolyte et le soi-disant Josipe," *Recherches de science religieuse* 43 (1955): 379-394; Jean Michel Hanssens, *La liturgie d'Hippolyte: Ses documents – son titulaire – ses origines et son caractère*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 155 (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1959); Marcel Richard, "Hippolyte de Rome (saint)," in *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1968), 7.1: 531-571.

30. "On 16th of August in the year 1959, in the first year of his pontificate, John XXIII, Pont[ifex] Max[imus], ordered the statue of Hippolytus, a most learned churchman, to be placed in the entrance to the Vatican Library." IOANNES XXIII / PONT MAX / STATVAM / HIPPOLYTI / ECCLESIASTICI VIRI DOCTISSIMI / IN ADITV / VATICANAE BIBLIOTHECAE / COLLOCARI IVSSIT / XVI KAL AVGSTI A-D MCMXLIX / PONT-SVI ANNO I. See Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 163, for the translation (here modified).



Figure 4. Robert Macpherson, Hippolytus statue in the Lateran Museum, between 1858 and 1871, Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA), Montréal, PH1982:0425:011. Reproduced with permission from the CCA.

in Greek sculpture. Guarducci condensed the essence of her conclusions in one iconic sentence: “*il ‘santo dottore’ è invece una dottoressa!*”³¹

While Guarducci rightly declared the upper part of the statue to be a modern completion created by the antiquarian Ligorio, she claimed that an antique patina covers both the throne and the legs, which suggests the unity of the lower part. According to her, Ligorio’s sketch of

31. It is difficult to translate the original wordplay into English: “The ‘holy doctor’ is in fact a woman!” Margherita Guarducci, “La statua di ‘Sant’Ippolito’ in Vaticano,” *Rendiconti della Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 47 (1974-1975): 163-190, here 171.

the statue, a sketch which is approximately 5 cm high and was made in 1553 (Figure 5),³² confirms the unity of the lower part, which should be considered a Roman copy of a Greek statue. Guarducci used the decorative elements of the chair, namely, the lion paws and the lion protomes, to reconstruct the identity of the originally female figure. For Guarducci, these features pointed to Themista of Lampsacus, an Epicurean philosopher from the beginning of the third century BC, the wife of the somewhat better-known philosopher Leonteus. The representation of Themista was reused and interpreted as a personification of Wisdom or Philosophy. According to Guarducci, the statue had its *Sitz im Leben* in the syncretistic and supposedly tolerant milieu of Alexander Severus and served as a library catalogue for the newly erected public library at the Pantheon designed by the emperor's architect, the Christian Sextus Julius Africanus (ca. 160 – ca. 240).³³

As expected, not everyone welcomed Guarducci's revolutionary reinterpretation with a standing ovation. For instance, Pasquale Testini (1924-1989), rector of the influential Pontificio Instituto di Archeologia Cristiana, rejected Guarducci's thesis by arguing that the statue had already been mutilated in antiquity. According to him, Ligorio discovered little more than a piece of "rock" (*sasso*), as had been noted in a catalogue of deliveries to the Vatican Library,³⁴ which corresponds to Ligorio's own description of the statue as "broken and badly treated." Moreover, there is no evidence, and therefore Testini declared that it must have been impossible that Christians ever commissioned or set up a free-standing object in a sacral context. If the Christians used any part of this statue, it was only the chair, which may have served as a funerary

32. Naples, ms. XIII.B.7, fol. 424.

33. Margherita Guarducci, "La statua di 'Sant'Ippolito,'" in *Ricerche su Ippolito*, ed. Manlio Simonetti and Vincenzo Loi, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 13 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1977), 17-30; eadem, "La 'Statua di Sant'Ippolito' e la sua provenienza," in *Nuove ricerche su Ippolito*, ed. Manlio Simonetti, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 30 (Rome: Institutum Patristicum "Augustinianum," 1989), 61-74; eadem, "La cosiddetta statua di Sant'Ippolito e gli ornamenti di Biblioteche antiche," *Rendiconti. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Classe di Scienze Morali* 4 (1993): 31-38.

34. For "the transport of the stone inscribed with the Greek Calendar from the Loggia of the Pope to the Library," a payment was approved on 16 April 1551. Vat. lat. 3965 fol. 24v: "far portare dalla Loggia del Papa alla libraria il sasso dove è inscritto il Calendario greco." Translation is taken from Brent, *Hippolytus*, 11. Cesare D'Onofrio, *Un popolo di statue racconta: Storie, fatti, leggende della città di Roma antica, medievale, moderna*, Collana di studi e testi per la storia della città di Roma 10 (Rome: Romana Società Editrice, 1990), 94, likewise interpreted this note as a reference to a "stone" or a "rock."



Figure 5. Hippolytus statue, sketch by Pirro Ligorio. National Library Naples, ms. XIII.B7, 424. In: Erna Mandowsky and Charles Mitchell, eds.,

Pirro Ligorio's Roman Antiquities: The Drawings in MS XIII. B. 7 in the National Library in Naples, Studies of the Warburg Institute 28 (London: Warburg Institute, 1963), Plate 60a, detail. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero della Cultura © Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli.

monument for a teacher.³⁵ Josef Frickel did not react significantly differently when he claimed that a Christian patron would never have dared to donate such an object for any room used by Christians.³⁶ Likewise, he questioned the value of Ligorio's sketch for determining the sex of the represented figure and argued that inscribed lists of works are typical of Roman representations of male philosophers.

Two conferences held at Rome's *Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum*, in 1976 and 1988, fostered the formation of a consensus, mainly among Italian and French scholars.³⁷ By taking Nautin's two-author hypothesis as a point of departure, Vincenzo Loi (1927-1982) and Manlio Simonetti (1926-2017) put forward criteria for the division of the corpus,

35. Pasquale Testini, "Di alcune testimonianze relative a Ippolito," in *Ricerche su Ippolito*, ed. Simonetti and Loi, 45-65, especially 46-48; and repeated in idem, "Vetera et nova su Ippolito," in *Nuove ricerche su Ippolito*, ed. Simonetti, 7-22.

36. Frickel, *Das Dunkel*, 88-89.

37. The proceedings were subsequently published in Simonetti and Loi, eds., *Ricerche su Ippolito*; Simonetti, ed., *Nuove ricerche su Ippolito*.

re-attributed a few of the works in it, and outlined two distinct author profiles. Loi and Simonetti identified a *bishop* Hippolytus from an unknown oriental see, who is known to us from Eusebius and who authored most of the exegetical and pastoral works. In contrast, the *presbyter* Hippolytus resided at Rome and was mainly interested in philosophy and scholarly debates. He penned the works recorded on the statue, as well as *On the Pascha*, *Apostolic tradition*, the *Refutatio*, and two exegetical treatises.³⁸ This partial consensus, however, was immediately contested, especially in German-speaking scholarship. Probably the most impressive example of the conservative reaction is Clemens Scholten's article, nearly sixty columns in length, which appeared in 1991 in the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*. Scholten offered not only a comprehensive summary of the *Hippolytfrage*, but also extensively advocated the traditional single-author hypothesis. He drew attention to methodological issues, pointed out that the major discrepancies identified by scholars do not touch core arguments of the works in question, and argued that there are plausible explanations for the observed inconsistencies.³⁹ Concerning the statue, he rejected the results of Guarducci, Testini, and Frickel as (highly) speculative and insisted on a thorough epigraphic analysis as a *sine qua non* for any future attempt at interpreting the statue. Due to the rather problematic ties to Hippolytus and to Rome, Scholten excluded the *Apostolic tradition* from the Hippolytan corpus and concluded that the paschal calendar is the only link between the statue and the catalogue of Eusebius.⁴⁰

A few years later, in 1995, Allen Brent presented what is the most comprehensive investigation to date regarding the statue in his monumental work *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century*.

38. While Emanuela Prinzivalli, "Ippolito, antipapa, santo," in *Enciclopedia dei Papi*, ed. Sara Esposito and Giulia Barone (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000), 1: 246-258 offered a good overview, Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Ippolito, Contro Noeto*, Biblioteca patristica 35 (Bologna: EDB, 2000) presented detailed argumentation for the two-author hypothesis.

39. Clemens Scholten, "Hippolytos II (von Rom)," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 15 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1991), here 502-503. A good number of scholars agreed with Scholten and advocated the unity of the corpus. See, e.g. Miroslav Marcovich, "Hippolyt von Rom," in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 15, ed. Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Müller (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), 381-387; idem, ed., *Hippolytus, Refutatio omnium haeresium*, Patristische Texte und Studien 25 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986); Frickel, *Das Dunkel*; Beate R. Suchla, "Hippolyt," in *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, ed. Siegmar Döpp (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 336-339. Recently Katharina Bracht, *Hippolyts Schrift In Danielem: Kommunikative Strategien eines frühchristlichen Kommentars*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 85 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 26, has claimed that "[this] conservative position is increasingly advocated in patristic research."

40. Scholten, "Hippolytos," 542.

Brent began his exploration of the *Hippolytfrage* at a point where other scholars usually finish: analysis of the statue. Although he accepted Guarducci's observations regarding the female characteristics of the lower portion of the figure, he rejected both the identification with Themista and the localisation in the Pantheon library. Brent rightly pointed out that a chair decorated with a lion paw and protome is unique neither to the Epicurean Themista nor to the Epicureans at large.⁴¹ In his opinion, Christians reused a pagan female figure and interpreted it as an allegorical representation of Sophia or Logos, the latter particularly in line with the Hippolytan Logos-Christology. Despite the syncretistic and supposedly tolerant era of Alexander Severus, Brent expressed severe doubts about the possibility of Christian inscriptions on a pagan statue in the context of a public library, because such an interpretation largely ignores Ligorio's account of the area of discovery.⁴² For Brent, the statue was situated in the cult centre of Hippolytan "school-community," located along the via Tiburtina near the *Castro Pretorio*, where Ligorio discovered the statue. The Hippolytan "house-school" was independent of the bishop and was organised like a Christian school of philosophy à la Justin Martyr's. The list of works on the statue, like the catalogues of Eusebius, Jerome, or Photius, therefore referred to the literary production of an entire school, including bishop Hippolytus and his predecessor, the author of the *Refutatio*. In this context, the *Apostolic tradition* served as the community's church order (*Kirchenordnung*).⁴³

In the early 2000s, John Cerrato bolstered the two-author hypothesis by analysing external evidence and characteristic theological *topoi* from the Hippolytan exegetical works with a view to the localisation of Hippolytus' see. Cerrato concluded that all the evidence points to the East as the place where Bishop Hippolytus must have lived and worked.⁴⁴ Katharina Bracht reshuffled the cards in her monograph on Hippolytus' *In Danielem*. While emphasising the unity of the exegetical writings and their attribution to Hippolytus according to the two-author hypothesis, she argued that communicative strategies of the commentary point to teaching activities of a Christian-oriented school, which is similar to

41. Brent, *Hippolytus*, 55-56; 59.

42. Ibid., 11-150.

43. Ibid., 458-540. Church orders are a specific type of early Christian document outlining the organisation and arrangement of a church community or local church. In addition to containing liturgical texts such as prayers, descriptions of rites including the Eucharist, baptism, and ordination, a church order might also provide disciplinary rules.

44. John A. Cerrato, *Hippolytus between East and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Brent's suggestion. She described Hippolytus as a teacher (but not a bishop) of a popular Christian philosophical school in Rome who originated from Asia Minor.⁴⁵

In a series of articles, Emanuele Castelli offered a refreshing interpretation of the statue. By contesting Guarducci's claim of the unity of the lower part, he argued that the legs did not originally belong to the throne but are a modern addition, like the upper part. In order to contextualise the throne as the only remaining part of what the Christians once used,⁴⁶ Castelli referred to the Shepherd of Hermas, an extremely popular prophetic text written in mid-second-century Rome. In this work, the visionary Hermas employed the symbolic image of the pre-existent church sitting on a throne, in order to substantiate the authority and leadership claims of charismatic prophets and martyrs vis-à-vis the slowly emerging institutionalised hierarchy, composed predominantly of presbyters. According to Castelli, the segregated author of the *Refutatio* and his community refurbished the very same symbol "in order to demand his rights to practice a certain doctrine – and with it the exercise of his teaching within the Church – even though it did not match or was inconsistent with that of the bishop."⁴⁷ For Castelli, the author of the Shepherd used the enthroned female figure of the personified church to send a reminder to his adversary Callixtus, who abused the power of the bishop's throne by expelling the author of the *Refutatio* and his circle from the church of Rome.

In his recently published book *Writing the History of Early Christianity*, Markus Vinzent revamped the hypothesis he had proposed more than two decades ago⁴⁸ for defining a reliable point of identification independent of the inscriptions and past traditions. His point of departure was again Guarducci's observation of the female representation. In the light of Ligorio's massive reconstruction of the statue, however, Vinzent claimed that Ligorio's tiny sketch from 1553 is the only reliable witness of what the antiquarian found in 1551 near the via Tiburtina (Figure 5).⁴⁹

45. Bracht, *Hippolyts Schrift In Danielem*, especially 28-33.

46. "Anche la parte anteriore è quindi opera moderna." Emanuele Castelli, "La Chiesa, la cattedra, il rotolo: L'identità della statua d'Ippolito alla luce del Pastore di Erma," *Augustinianum* 48 (2008): 305-322, at 309.

47. Castelli, "La cattedra," 46-47; the translation is taken from Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 171 with some modification.

48. Markus Vinzent, "Philobiblie' im frühen Christentum," *Das Altertum* 45 (1999): 115-144; Markus Vinzent, "Hippolyt von Rom und seine Statue," in "... zur Zeit oder Unzeit": *Studien zur spätantiken Theologie-, Geistes- und Kunstgeschichte und ihrer Nachwirkung: Hans Georg Thümmel zu Ehren*, ed. Adolf Martin Ritter, Wolfgang Wischmeyer, and Wolfram Kinzig, *Texts and Studies in the History of Theology* 9 (Mandelbachtal: edition cicero, 2004), 125-134.

49. Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 171.

According to Vinzent, the sketch displays a seated female figure with bared breast, which is an iconographic feature typical of Amazons in antique Greek and Roman art. Subsequently Vinzent argued that the name Hippolytus and the mythical female warriors were closely connected not only in antique mythology but also in the Renaissance world of Ligorio. Hippolyte, for instance, the legendary queen of the Amazons, named her son Hippolytus, which was part of the Theseus saga. Similarly, Ligorio alluded to the legends of the Amazons when he designed the Fountain of the Dragons (*Fontana dei draghi*) for his patron's estate in Tivoli,⁵⁰ who also happened to be a Hippolytus, Cardinal Ippolito d'Este (1509-1572). For Vinzent, an additional interpretative layer enriched the bare breasted figure of an Amazon in antique Rome. Amazon representations were not only popular and spread across the city, but due to their common virtues such as beauty, chastity, and wisdom, they were often identified with Dea Roma, the goddess of the city of Rome. Spectators, both antique and Renaissance, would not have failed to associate the statue of an Amazon and Hippolytus with Dea Roma. For Christians, according to Vinzent, Dea Roma was acceptable, and thus her statue, now decorated with "the book titles and the Paschal/Easter calendars [...] points to personified Wisdom and the defeat of death by eternal life."⁵¹ Christians, who knew the stories about the Amazons and thus were acquainted with the name Hippolytus, identified the bare breasted female representation of an Amazon with the author of the list of works and the calendar tables. Consequently, this Amazon-Hippolytus statue provides a positive identification regardless of the work titles, which are in turn used by Vinzent to confirm the Hippolytan authorship of works listed on the chair.⁵²

50. Ligorio and some of his contemporaries, such as his close friend the Genovese historian Uberto Foglietta (1518-1581) or the French humanist Marc-Antoine Muret (1526-1585), who was likewise in service of Ippolito d'Este, endeavoured in their works to magnify "the glory of their common patron and Maecenas of Tivoli, the 'Herculean' Hippolytus-Virbius and Aesculapius that was Ippolito II d'Este." Cf. George Hugo Tucker, "The Villa d'Este at Tivoli and Its Gardens in Marc-Antoine Muret's Tivoli Cycle of Poems and Uberto Foglietta's *Tyburtinum*," in *Pirro Ligorio's Worlds* ed. Loffredo and Vagenheim, 218-251, here 242. In this constellation, the Amazons were one point of reference among many others.

51. According to Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 178, "[Dea] Roma was also acceptable to Christians; because she did not belong to the Olympian divinities but remained a city goddess, during the Christian Roman Empire she survived, amongst others, as an Amazon."

52. Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 179-185. Castelli, "La Chiesa, la cattedra, il rotolo," 309, expressed fundamental reservations about Vinzent's early Amazon hypothesis, which is indeed – even in its present form – a remarkable piece of argumentation: "This hypothesis has no basis in either literary or material sources and is completely unsupported."

3. Problems and Prospectives

After centuries of firm belief that the statue represents Hippolytus, Guarducci's fundamental observation concerning the fragmented statue dressed in female underwear marked the beginning of the deconstruction and reconstruction of this statue's many identities. Highly original attempts have been made to unravel the well-kept secrets of an object that has turned out to be far more enigmatic than was ever thought before. The *communis opinio*, or lack thereof, attests to the fragmented landscape of interpretations, none of which are, at least at this juncture, entirely satisfactory. Even so, there are several more or less accepted elements that can be considered common ground. This common ground includes some very basic coordinates, such as dating the Christianisation of the statue between 222 and 235, the female representation of the legs, and the existence of a link between the inscriptions and someone named Hippolytus, however that figure is defined. Likewise, some elements of Ligorio's accounts, particularly concerning the discovery and reconstruction of the statue, are not contested, most importantly Ligorio's completion of the upper part. Some recent developments regarding the *corpus Hippolyticum* may also be slowly approaching a consensus. An increasing majority of scholars agree, for instance, that church orders are living literature, consisting of several layers of redaction rather than being the coherent work of a single author. Therefore the *Apostolic tradition* is most likely not the work of someone named Hippolytus, even if later traditions linked that name to this particular piece of writing.⁵³ Similarly, scholars increasingly consider the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* to be the work of an anonymous, Greek-speaking, Christian intellectual living in Rome at the turn of the third century, who is to be distinguished from Hippolytus Romanus, the presbyter-martyr who died in 235.⁵⁴

53. Cf. the short summary in András Handl, "From Slave to Bishop: Callixtus' Early Ecclesial Career and Mechanisms of Clerical Promotion," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 25 (2021): 53-73, at 61-62 and the literature cited in n. 37 there.

54. Manlio Simonetti, "Per un profilo dell'autore dell'Elenchos," *Vetera Christianorum* 46 (2009): 157-173; Clemens Scholten, "Autor, Anliegen und Publikum der *Refutatio*," in *Des évêques, des écoles et des hérétiques: Actes du colloque international sur la "Réfutation de toutes les hérésies"*, ed. Gabriella Aragione and Enrico Norelli (Prahins: Éditions du Zèbre, 2011), 135-166; Emanuele Castelli, "L'Elenchos, ovvero una 'biblioteca' contro le eresie," in *Confutazione di tutte le eresie*, ed. Aldo Magris, Letteratura cristiana antica. Nuova serie 25 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2012), 21-56; Bracht, *Hippolytus Schrift In Danielen*; Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, ed. M. David Litwa, Writings from the Greco-Roman World 40 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016); Hanstein, "Studien zur redaktionellen Gestaltung"; Handl, *Callixtus, der Bischof*.

A few other, though less consistent developments can also be observed. Characteristic is, for example, the growing challenge to the statue's unity. While Guarducci, and following her Brent and Vinzent, considered the upper part of the body a modern addition, Testini and later Castelli further claimed that the chair is the only original surviving part of the original statue. Concerning the interpretation of the figure, most scholars agree that one has to differentiate between the initially intended representation and the re-identification of the statue after it was Christianised. According to Guarducci, the statue originally represented a concrete person, namely, Themista of Lampsacus, while Vinzent opted for an Amazon. Brent, however, questioned the identification with Themista but like Castelli made no attempt to determine the initially intended attribution. By contrast, almost all scholars agree that Christians re-identified the statue after the inscriptions were engraved. The majority of scholars have moved away from a figural identification and plead instead for an allegorical interpretation. Guarducci opted for Wisdom or Philosophy, Brent for Sophia or Logos, Castelli proposed the pre-existent church and Vinzent suggested *inter alia* the allegorical personification of Dea Roma. Yet Vinzent went further by arguing that since ancient and Renaissance spectators associated Amazon-Dea Roma representations with the name Hippolytus, the female Amazon statue represented Hippolytus for Christians. In this context, Vinzent also suggested understanding this artefact as "ambiguous art, or '*ars polivalente*'," an accumulation of several cultural layers. While I agree with Vinzent that the Hippolytus statue has accumulated several cultural meanings, the question is whether all these cultural layers and interpretations must be taken into account for a synthetic reconstruction of the statue's *Sitz im Leben*. Or, alternatively, is it sufficient to acknowledge that an object can have different interpretations and thus a different identity in each context without necessarily concluding that those interpretations or layers interfere with or even correspond to each other?

Despite the heterogeneity of the approaches and interpretations presented above, as well as the lack of a broader *communis opinio*, all the attempts have two remarkable features in common. First, each results from the diligence and often impressive efforts of a single person. Second, previous research has tended to make *a priori* assumptions. Some scholars, for instance, declare *ex cathedra* the unity of the lower part,⁵⁵

55. Guarducci, "La statua di 'Sant'Ippolito' in Vaticano"; Margherita Guarducci, *San Pietro e Sant'Ippolito storia di statue famose in Vaticano* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1991), 146-147.

others reject that unity *ex cathedra*.⁵⁶ Supporting evidence often suffers from the same syndrome, and if any arguments are presented beyond the accounts of Ligorio, those arguments are usually not supported by detailed evidence and therefore cannot be regarded as conclusive.⁵⁷ A further *ex cathedra* declaration claims that all the inscriptions were carved by the same hand, at the same time.⁵⁸ So far, no supporting (paleographic) evidence has been presented to substantiate this claim. In addition, it has often and rightly been noted that due to the poor implementation of the lunar into the solar calendar, the paschal table becomes imprecise after a few decades. Consequently, so the argument goes, the calendar must have been added to the throne soon after 222, which is the starting point for its calculations.⁵⁹ But what evidence supports the idea that the statue or torso or inscriptions had any practical use? Even though such use is a possibility, it is far from the only possibility, let alone imperative.

No less problematic is the common assumption that the current state of the statue more or less directly corresponds to the state of the statue as the Christians used it in the third century.⁶⁰ Similar observations

56. E.g. Testini, "Di alcune testimonianze relative a Ippolito."

57. For instance, based on a written correspondence with Giuseppe de Spirito, Vinzent, "Hippolyt von Rom und seine Statue," 125 (repeated in Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 168), claimed that "[t]he only original part is the 'cathedra' (90%) and just a little bit of the cloth over the abdomen (maybe 15%). All the other parts are totally restored by Ligorio (thesis confirmed by the petrography: Carrara marble [sic] for the arms and the legs)." Yet to the best of my knowledge the results of these petrographical examinations have never been published. Likewise, Castelli, "La Chiesa, la cattedra, il rotolo," 308-309, reported a "recent inspection of the statue" carried out by "Prof. Dario Del Bufalo, lecturer at the Faculty of Cultural Heritage, University of Lecce" in the presence of "vice-prefect of the Vatican Apostolic Library, Ambrogio Piazzoni and the director of the manuscript room Paolo Vian." After "a meticulous examination," Del Bufalo concluded that the legs are not ancient but instead modern additions made by Ligorio. While there are a good number of observations, such as the different colouring of the stone, the almost perfect condition of the legs compared to the chair, or the differing height of the bases, all of which support Castelli's suggestion, he did not present a single argument in favour of his claim.

58. Guarducci, *Epigrafia greca*. Vol. 4: *Epigrafi sacre pagane e cristiane*, 536: "There are three inscriptions concerning Hippolytus, and all three were engraved by the same hand (I am sure)."

59. Cf. supra, n. 9. Likewise, Guarducci, "La cosiddetta statua di Sant'Ippolito e gli ornamenti di Biblioteche antiche," dated the inscriptions without any further substantiation for her decision: "The presence of Christian epigraphs on the ancient pagan statue certainly date to the first half of the third century."

60. For instance, Castelli, "La Chiesa, la cattedra, il rotolo," 307-308, on the one hand rejects the unity of the lower part and claims that only the chair belongs to the surviving ensemble; on the other hand, he still assumes, based on Ligorio's sketch, that the sculpture was nevertheless a female representation.

apply to Ligorio's accounts of the discovery and subsequent restoration of the statue. It is, for example, often taken for granted that the sketch from 1553 shows the original, unchanged, and pre-restoration condition of statue, as Ligorio recovered it from the dirt of the *ager Veranus*.⁶¹ This apparently universal assumption correlates with another axiom that is never questioned, namely, that the antiquarian carried out only a single restoration of the statue. This belief has yet to be problematized.

The frequent reliance on assumptions is, on the one hand, likely due to the limited accessibility of the statue. On the other hand, the complexity of this enigmatic object sooner or later confronts one with the limits of one's own expertise. No single scholar can – with the same high level of competence – cover the highly specialised fields necessary to decode the statue's significance; these fields include the style and material of antique statues, Greek epigraphy, calendars, the history of Christianity in general and of the *Hippolytfrage* in particular, Renaissance Rome, and Ligorio's literary, antiquarian, and artistic *oeuvre*. The variety of challenges demands a new approach. The Hippolytus Workshop which took place 2-3 September 2021 in Leuven represents precisely that. Highly specialised scholars from the aforementioned fields came together to share their expertise and to engage in a constructive dialogue with the aim of setting new standards for the study and interpretation of the statue. It probably does not come as a surprise that the workshop could neither fully endorse one of the existing hypotheses nor provide a definitive answer to the statue's identity. Nevertheless a few misconceptions, particularly the (im)possibility of an early Christian statue, were reconsidered, and some *ex catedra* claims were substantiated, while others were further problematized. The discussions indicated that additional in-depth research is needed on the initial, that is, pre-Christian identity of the statue as well as on Ligorio's reconstruction.

It is not unlikely that we are never going to solve all the riddles and mysteries surrounding this remarkable object of the Christian past, unless additional evidence comes to light. Nevertheless the existence of the statue serves as a valuable reminder. Sometimes well-established

61. Cf. Gabriel Bertonière, *The Cult Center of the Martyr Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina*, BAR International Series 260 (Oxford: BAR, 1985), 5: "the sketch made by Ligorio before his work of restoration shows that he found this lower frontal area largely intact." Brent, *Hippolytus*, 53: "Guarducci correctly, I believe, maintains that the drawings and notebooks do not depict what Ligorio envisaged as a reconstruction, but what he saw in the ruined Statue that stood before him." Castelli, "La Chiesa, la cattedra, il rotolo," 306: "In 1553, he drew the statue (still unrestored) in one of his books on antiquities." Vinzent, *Writing the History*, 168: "Fortunately, we have Ligorio's above note with his early sketch that shows the pre-restoration status of the statue."

frameworks need reconsideration rather than further attempts to squeeze the evidence into their restrictive space. The whole question also shows the importance of taking both material and literary evidence into account, even if this expanded approach further complicates the already complex subject matter. Finally, this review illustrates how some cherished ideas, despite being long outdated, continue to lurk and sometimes even a decisive role in interpretation and thus shape our conception of past and present.

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