

## Bishop Callistus I. of Rome (217?-222?): A Martyr or a Confessor?<sup>1</sup>

The biography of Callistus, ex-slave and bishop of the City of Rome at the beginning of the AD 3<sup>rd</sup> century, contains an unresolved puzzle concerning his death. Since his name appears in the *Depositio Martyrum* as well as *Liber Pontificalis*<sup>2</sup> and additionally his death was described as violent in the *Acta Martyrii Sancti Callisti*, the majority of scholars<sup>3</sup> seems to agree: Callistus died a violent death due to his Christian confession, as narrated in the *Acta*. This is at least

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- 1 I would like to express my special thanks to Rev. Nicolas Howe for his questions, reflections and invaluable help.
  - 2 *Liber Pontificalis* XVII (ed. L. Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis* 1 [Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome; Paris: de Boccard, 1886] 141,2f): *Hic martyrio coronatur*. Although the *Liber Pontificalis* notes only that "this had been crowned with martyrdom" it implies that the "crowning ceremony" had taken place at the very end of his life. The importance and the high reputation which the Book of the Roman Pontiffs still enjoys among many scholars despite doubts, especially about the pre-constantinian period, increases significantly the trustworthiness of a violent ending of Callistus.
  - 3 Some examples should illustrate the tendency mentioned above. For instance, E. Prizivalli emphasizes in her otherwise excellent article in the *Enciclopedia dei Papi*: "Il martirio di C. [allisto] è fra i pochissimi riguardanti vescovi romani a potersi considerare sicuro", in the *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico* B. Studer assures: "È ben probabile invece ch' egli [Callisto] sia morto come martire." D. H. Farmer praises Callistus in the 5<sup>th</sup>, revised Edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* as a "rare example of a pope who had been born a slave, had served a sentence as a convict, was the champion of forgiveness, and died for the Christian faith". R. Lyman states succinctly in the *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*: "Callistus died a violent death." Although only the cited part of this sentence is essential for this examination, it is nevertheless worthwhile to have a quick glance at the remaining part as well: „Callistus died a violent death –perhaps in a riot– approx. 222 and was the only bishop, apart from Peter, in the *Depositio martyrum*, the early Roman martyrology". A quick look at the *Depositio martyrum* suffices to show that this assertion cannot be correct. There are other roman bishops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century who are listed in the calendar, apart from Peter and Callistus. Already the second entry is a martyr bishop of Rome, Fabian (†250), who had died during the persecutions of Emperor Decius: *XIII kal. Feb. Fabiani in Callisti*. Bishop Sixtus II, who was killed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August AD 258 by Emperor Valerian, is noted as *VIII idus Aug. Xysti in Callisti*. Also Pontian (†235) is listed there together with Hippolytus Presbyter. Both died in consequence of being sentenced to the mines of Sardinia under Emperor Maximinus Thrax: *idus Aug. Ypoliti in Tiburtina. et Pontiani in Callisti*. Therefore, the sentence would be correctly rendered as follows: "[...] and was the first bishop after Peter, (mentioned) in the *Depositio martyrum*". *Depositio martyrum* (MGH.AA 9, 71,4; 71,26; 72,2-3 Mommsen); E. Prinzivalli, "Callisto I, santo," *Enciclopedia dei Papi* 1, (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000): (237-246), 244; R. Lyman, "Callistus," *Encyclopedia of the early Christianity* 1, (2. Ed.; New York: Garland, 1997): (204-205), 205; B. Studer, "Callisto I," *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane* 1, (Genova: Marietti, 2006): (col. 841). D.-H. Farmer, "Callistus," *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (5. Ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): (74).

the impression left by a consultation of the recent literature.<sup>4</sup> Such a conviction is, however, slightly surprising. There have long been doubts among scholars with respect to the reliability of the *Acta*. Already J. P. Kirsch raised concerns over its trustworthiness and described it as an “erbaulicher Roman”<sup>5</sup>. Later, in the 60s H. Gültzow proposed in an extended footnote that the account of Callistus' violent death is highly likely to be based on a legend: “Auch Kallist hat man aus naheliegenden Gründen in die Ehrenliste der Blutzugeen aufgenommen. Doch das beruht auf eine Legende.”<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, those critical considerations

4 Cf. Enrico Dal Covolo, *I Severi e il Cristianesimo: ricerche sull'ambiente storico-istituzionale delle origini cristiane tra il secondo e il terzo secolo* (Biblioteca di scienze religiose 87; Roma: LAS, 1989) 64-69, 88-90; G. Ferretto, “Callisto I,” *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 3 (Roma: Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1963): (col. 681-689). 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), 289 suggests that the „author of the group of works [...] by this time would have died, as had Callistus his rival, perhaps in the same local riot“. Similar suggestions are presented in Allen Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order: Concepts and Images of Authority in Paganism and Early Christianity before the Age of Cyprian* (Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements 45; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 325-328 and repeated in Allen Brent, *A political history of early Christianity* (London/New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 239-240. Michel-Yves Perrin, “Rom und das westliche Abendland bis zur Mitte des 3. Jahrhunderts,” in *Die Geschichte des Christentums. Die Zeit des Anfangs (bis 250)* 1 (ed. Jean-Marie Mayeur, Luce Pietri, and Norbert Brox; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2003), 666-716, here 708-709; Hélène Ménard, *Maintenir l'ordre à Rome: Ile-IVe siècles ap. J.-C.* (Epoques; Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2004), 155-159; G. N. Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia),” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae. Suburbium* 2 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2004) 44-50. The summary of C. Moreschini and E. Norelli, however, must not be considered an alternative solution to the death of Callistus but rather a (certainly not singular) mistake in the “Hippolytus” section: “Secondo Brent, [...] Callisto deportato in Sardegna nel 222, l'autore dell'*Elenchos* non sappiamo come”. Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, *Manuale di letteratura cristiana antica greca e latina* (Letteratura cristiana antica, Strumenti; Brescia: Morcelliana, 1999), 112.

5 Johann Peter Kirsch, *Die römischen Titelkirchen im Altertum* (Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums 9; Paderborn: Schöningh, 1918), 159.

6 Although the final conclusions of H. Gültzow are in my opinion correct, the proposed approach is not unproblematic. His reasoning is based on two preliminaries. First, he claims that the following part of the Callistus *curriculum* is easiest to recall into the memory: when the slave Callistus casts himself into the sea after he recognizes his master approaching on the shore. Second, that the kind of punishment which Callistus received thereafter is the key moment of the making of the legend. According to the *Refutatio*, he was lodged in a πιστρῖνος, in a pounding-mill, usually operated by horses—but badly behaved slaves were also forced to perform there. Although πιστρῖνος is a Latin word's Greek transliteration and obviously derived from *pistrinum*, Gültzow “returns” it into Latin when he proposes, that “πιστρῖνον [hat] im Lateinischen u. a. puteum als Äquivalent”. This word means not only a well, points out Gültzow, but is also commonly used for a pit or a dungeon for slaves. Based on these two observations he concludes that the description of the violent death in the *Acta* is in fact a corrupted condensation of the whole episode into one sentence: Callistus not was cast, but had been cast, and not into the sea, but into a well (*puteus*). Because the motifs as well as the exact terms of the *Refutatio* and the *Acta* refer to each other, therefore are “beinahe alle Gesetze legendarischen Weiterlebens und Ausgestaltens eines Ereignisses nachweisbar”. Though he is assuming it clearly, he is not proposing a close(r) connection between the *Refutatio* and the *Acta* at all. On the contrary, he attests rather a distinct break in the tradition about the life and death of Callistus: the *Refutatio* had been forgotten in the West soon after its Author had passed away. Apart from the remarkable “interpretation” of πιστρῖνος, and the problem about the continuity and discontinuity of the tradition, it

about the death of Callistus attracted only marginal attention.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, a study by G. N. Verrando<sup>8</sup> focusing on archaeological evidence in order to examine the reliability of the *Acta* and the *Liber Pontificalis*, not only concludes the exact opposite but is frequently quoted, too.

In the light of this distinct discrepancy the issue is obvious: There is a puzzle to be solved to establish from the fragments a homogeneous and persuasive picture. Therefore, in the following pages I want not only compile all the relevant literary sources and archaeological evidence on the “martyrdom” of Callistus. They will also be examined concerning reliability as well as possible correlations – or possible contradictions.

### 1. The *Depositio martyrum*

It is worth beginning with the oldest objective witness to the martyrdom of Callistus. Even though the *Depositio martyrum* can not be considered as the first account of him, because of its trustworthiness it plays, as G. N. Verrando<sup>9</sup> pointed out, a key role in the controversy. The *Depositio martyrum* is the earliest known Roman martyrology, preserved in the Chronography of 354. Unfortunately, an accurate dating of the list is not possible, but the present form was probably compiled around AD 336.<sup>10</sup> However, most of the entries, including

remains unclear how the making of the legend is supposed to have happened. Furthermore, he omits to include a determination of both works, including their relation to each other, as well as a closer examination of the *Acta*. Cf. Henneke Gültow, “Kallist von Rom. Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie der römischen Gemeinde,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 58 (1967): (102–121) 117 and see especially note 63.

- 7 It is remarkable that concerns about the violent death of Callistus are shared almost exclusively by German-speaking scholars. While few of them reject a fulfilled martyrdom of Callistus completely, eg. F. W. Bautz, “Calixt I. (Kallistos), Papst, Heiliger, † 222,” *Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* 1 (Hamm, Westf.): (cols. 858–859); R. M. Hübner, “Kallist von Rom,” *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur* (3. Ed.; Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2002): (420–422), others express serious doubts about his final sufferings, like G. S. Hall, “Calixtus I. (Bischof von Rom, reg. 218–222),” *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 7 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981): (559–563) or C. Scholten, “Calixtus I,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 2 (3. Ed.; Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1994): (col. 891).
- 8 G. N. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti e il santuario della via Aurelia,” *Mélanges de l'Ecole Française de Rome. Antiquité* 96 (1984), 1039–1083. He had repeated his results without any major modifications in his article in the “*Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae. Suburbium*”. Cf. Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)” (see note 4), 44–50.
- 9 Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1039.
- 10 Cf. 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: University of California Press, 1990), 42–44. For further information on the Christian texts of the Codex-Calendar see: Wolfgang Wischmeyer, “Die christlichen Texte im sogenannten Filocalus-Kalender”, in *Textsorten und Textkritik. Tagungsbeiträge* (ed. Adolf Primmer and Kurt Smolak; Veröffentlichungen der Kommission zur Herausgabe des Corpus der Lateinischen Kirchenväter 21; Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2002),

that of Callistus may reflect a state of veneration in a relatively early, presumably pre-constantinian period. The us relevant entry reads as follows:

*pri. idus Octob. Callisti in via Aurelia. miliario III.*<sup>11</sup>

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, Callistus [was buried] at the 3<sup>rd</sup> mile of the Aurelian way.

The fact, that Bishop Callistus has been added to the martyr-calendar, reflects an active annual liturgical remembrance on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October and demonstrates the importance of his cult in Rome. It indicates, too, that he was recognized officially by the Roman church as an authentic martyr. However, the *Depositio martyrum* in its function as a calendar reveals hardly any more information. It does not provide any clues as to the reasons for listing, nor contains any additional material on the circumstances of his martyrdom. Therefore -and this is essential- the testimony of the *Depositio martyrum* confirms only the fact that Callistus was venerated as a martyr. But it does not offer any indication whether he had to suffer a violent death for that or not.

## 2. The Refutatio omnium haeresium

While the relevance of the *Depositio martyrum* is limited by its nature as well as by its “archaic” brevity, other problems are raised by the consultation of the only contemporary source on the life of Callistus: the *Refutatio omnium haeresium*<sup>12</sup>. There is the questionable authorship<sup>13</sup> and the controversial discussion

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45–58.

<sup>11</sup> *Depositio Martyrum* (72,14 M.).

<sup>12</sup> The text for this examination is based on the edition of P. Wendland. Hippolytos, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (ed. P. Wendland, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* [GCS 26,3; Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1916]). For this decision see further Manlio Simonetti, Review of Miroslav Marcovich, *Hippolytus: Refutatio omnium haeresium*, *Augustinianum* 27 (1987): 631–634 and Dieter Hagedorn, Review of Miroslav Marcovich, *Hippolytus: Refutatio omnium haeresium*, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 32 (1989): 210–214.

<sup>13</sup> The discussion about the identity and personal integrity of the Author is for this examination irrelevant. For further information on the problem see M. Marcovich, “Hippolyt von Rom,” *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 15 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986): (381–387); C. Scholten, “Hippolytos II (von Rom),” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 15 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1991): (cols. 492–551); Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman church* (see note 4); Manlio Simonetti, “Introduzione,” in *Ippolito, Contro Noeto* (ed. Manlio Simonetti; Biblioteca patristica 35; Bologna: EDB, 2000), 7–146; Gabriella Aragione and Enrico Norelli (eds.), *Des*

on its reliability<sup>14</sup> –especially that of the *curriculum*<sup>15</sup> of Callistus–, yet the *Refutatio* remains the most important document about the life –and I would like to add, also the death<sup>16</sup>– of the bishop.

Due to the fact that the *Refutatio* is biased and polemic against Callistus, it is important to consider briefly the “Sitz im Leben” of this work. The exact purpose of this monumental heresiography has been much discussed in the last

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*évêques, des écoles et des hérétiques: actes du colloque international sur la 'réfutation de toutes les hérésies', Genève, 13-14 juin 2008* (Prahins: Éditions du Zèbre, 2011) and recently with an systematical summary to the discussion 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, here 34-45.

- 14 The majority of the scholars agree with M. Marcovich, that the historical value of Callistus' *curriculum* is limited, other than it is written “with a pen dipped in gall, not in ink”. The main reason for questioning the reliability is the obvious tendentiousness of the narrative. Some common anti-heretical topics had been discerned by K. Beyschlag within the text, too. This second one is at least a documented objection. However, neither the existence of such parallels nor the evident bias necessarily means that the story is just a product of a rich imagination. Even more problematic are “hyper-critical” judgements based on unexplained generalizations, as when S. Gerber states: “Gülzows [...] Aufsatz zu Hippolyts Calixt-Biographie schätzt die historische Glaubwürdigkeit von Hippolyts Bericht zu hoch ein.” Such a statement is legitimate of course, but neither helps to outline the resilient historic frame of the *curriculum* nor serves to establish a constructive discussion. Even the most excessive hyperboles of the *Refutatio* –so far it is possible– have to be tested against other, rather reliable external sources. Sometimes, the results might be surprising, as this example demonstrates: The attempted suicide of Callistus, when he realised that his attempt to escape could not succeed, is disposed usually as an extreme hyperbole with no historical value. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,2-4 (GCS 26,3, 246,21-247,2 Wendland). However, it is well documented that the phenomenon of slaves running away was a common problem of Roman antiquity. Accordingly, the manner of dealing with the situation was quite elaborated: A *fugitivus* was usually traced either by his master or by a professional slave-catcher (*fugitivarius* – cf. *Dig.* 19, 5, 18 Ulpian) preferably *in primo stadio* (Ausonius, *Epigrammata* 36,2). If the pursuit succeeded, a wide range of punishments were waiting for the fugitive, like *verbero*, *vinculo*, *ergastulum*, *crux* (Lactantius, *Divinae institutiones* 5,18,14 [CSEL 19, 460,21f Brandt]) or *stigmata* (στίγματα – Clemens von Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 3,2,10,4 [GCS 12, 242,12-14 Stählin]). The cruelty of these punishments justifies such an act of desperation as plausible. For instance, a runaway slave Primitivus accused himself of murder(!) at Q. Voconius Saxa Fidus (CIL 8, 22691 = 8, 11029), *proconsul Africae* (ca. AD 161/162) in order to escape his master and the impending punishment (*Dig.* 48,18,1,27 Ulpian). The attempted suicide of Callistus therefore appears less hyperbolic and rather reasonable in the light of common Roman practice. To the handling of fugitives see further: Heinz Bellen, *Studien zur Sklavenflucht im römischen Kaiserreich* (Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei 4; Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1971), 5-31. Cf. Karlmann Beyschlag, “Kallist und Hippolyt,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 20 (1964): (103–124); Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 6); Henneke Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1969); Miroslav Marcovich, “Introduction,” in Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (ed. Miroslav Marcovich; PTS 25; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 1-51, 40; Simon Gerber, “Calixt von Rom und der monarchianische Streit,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 5 (2001): (213–239), 214 (note 3).

- 15 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,1-16 (246,14-248,21 W.).

- 16 G. Verrando especially is suspicious on the testimony of the *Refutatio* regarding the death of Callistus. In his opinion the complete(!) Callistus-chapter is in doubt, because of “il silenzio di questa fonte con il martirio del vescovo romano [=Callistus].” Nevertheless, he had made no effort at all to find an answer for the silence. This disqualifying presupposition excuses

decades.<sup>17</sup> The explanations offered are more or less convincing, but in my opinion there is just one certain conclusion: a plausible explanation cannot be mono-causal. On the one hand, the Callistus controversy cannot exclusively explain the huge effort to compose such a voluminous and elaborately encyclopedic work of ten books, or more precisely, ten scrolls. On the other hand, the chapter on Callistus is clearly the culmination of all the introduced heresies, which undoubtedly indicates an intended and well thought out composition. Hence, the purpose of the testimony as well as the appointed audience seems to be polyvalent from the outset.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the Callistus controversy holds a place of considerable importance, but not the key position for the understanding and interpretation of the work.

The reason for the conflict has been discussed often enough, with different, and partly highly hypothetical outcomes. The situation is in some respects similar when it comes to the question of purpose. It is highly unlikely that a “simple” theological disagreement, mainly in the field of Christology<sup>19</sup>, was the exclusive reason for such a hostile tone. It has to be assumed that behind the theological differences and disciplinary issues, other motives are hidden. However, the Author does not seem to be eager to reveal his real motivation. Rather, he tries to focus attention on doctrinal-disciplinary issues – with great success. The literary character, the objects of critique, as well as the methodological approach of the Callistus-chapter suggest that the Author exploits the *Refutatio* for a sort of “(final) payoff” against the “Callistians” and especially against the slave-bishop. In order to achieve his aim, the Author leads the attention towards the obnoxiousness and danger of the doctrines as well as the

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him from having to deal with the witness of the *Refutatio*. Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1039.

17 Klaus Koschorke, *Hippolyts Ketzerbekämpfung und Polemik gegen die Gnostiker. Eine tendenzkritische Untersuchung seiner ‘Refutatio omnium haeresium’* (Göttinger Orientforschungen 6, Hellenistica 4; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 69-73; Josef Frickel, *Hellenistische Erlösung in christlicher Deutung: die gnostische Naassenerschrift; quellenkritische Studien, Strukturanalyse, Schichtenscheidung, Rekonstruktion der Anthropos-Lehrschrift* (Nag Hammadi studies 19; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 8-9; Luise Abramowski, “Ein gnostischer Logos-theologe. Umfang und Redaktor des gnostischen Sonderguts in Hippolyts ‘Wiederlegung aller Häresien’,” in *Drei christologische Untersuchungen* (ed. Luise Abramowski; Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, Beihefte 45; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981), 18-62, 19 (note 9); Marcovich, “Hippolyt von Rom” (see note 13), 383; Scholten, “Hippolytos II (von Rom)” (see note 13), col. 511-512; Ronald E. Heine, “The Christology of Callistus,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 49 (1998): (56-91), 56-57; Castelli, “L’Elenchos” (see note 13), 26-29.

18 Clemens Scholten, “Autor, Anliegen und Publikum der *Refutatio*,” in Aragione/Norelli, *Des évêques* (see note 13): (135-166), 135-138.

19 Cf. Heine, “The Christology of Callistus” (see note 17); Gerber, “Calixt von Rom” (see note 14).

practice<sup>20</sup> implemented as a consequence of those doctrines by Callistus and his διδασκαλεῖον. In order to increase the persuasiveness of the essential critique of his opponents, the Author declares it as an elementary necessity<sup>21</sup> to relate his version to the *curriculum*<sup>22</sup> of his antagonist soon after the beginning of Book IX of the *Refutatio*.

Callistus, a Christian slave of the Christian imperial freedman Carpophorus carries out a small banking business for his master. When Callistus becomes bankrupt, he tries to escape on a ship from Portus, the port of Rome. But this undertaking, as well as his attempt to commit suicide by casting himself into the sea, fails. After he had been forced to work in a pounding-mill (πιστρίνος), his Jewish debtors accuse him before the *Praefectus urbi*, Fuscianus<sup>23</sup> (AD 187?-189?) with a remarkably unusual charge: the disturbance of their worship in the synagogue. Fuscianus decides in favour of the Jews and he condemns Callistus to work as a *servus poenae* in the mines of Sardinia. Through a liberation mission initiated by Marcia, concubine of Emperor Commodus (AD 180-192) and led by her *cubiculus* and eunuch Hyachintus, Callistus, among other Christian prisoners, regains his freedom. He returns to Rome, but bishop Victor I. (AD 189?-199?) of Rome “exiles” him to Antium with a monthly allowance. A few years later, bishop Zephyrinus (AD 199?-217?) entrusts him with organizing the

20 It is a declared aim of the Author, to demonstrate the godlessness and agnosticism of the heretics on three different levels: “in purpose, character and deed”. However, the intended methodology has been applied only in the case of the Callistians. With all the other discussed heresies the Author had limited his approach to their “purpose and character.” Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 1, prooem. 8 (3,15-16 W.): ἀθέους αὐτοὺς ἐπιδείξωμεν καὶ κατὰ γνώμην καὶ κατὰ τρόπον καὶ κατὰ ἔργον.

21 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,11,4 (246,8-13, W.).

22 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,1-16 (246,14-248,21 W.).

23 P.(?) Seius Fuscianus was a consul and *Praefectus urbi* in AD 188-189. According to *Historia Augusta*, he was a fellow-pupil and friend to the later Emperor Marcus Aurelius (AD 161-180). *Historia Augusta*, Marci 3,8-9, cf. PIR<sup>2</sup> S 317.

κοιμητήριον<sup>24</sup> of the community. After the death of Zephyrin, Callistus obtained, what he had “eagerly pursued”<sup>25</sup>: the bishop's see of Rome.

The Author of the *Refutatio* begins this relevant narrative with a brief but, for our understanding and interpretation, essential preface:

οὗτος ἐμαρτύρησεν ἐπὶ Φουσκιανοῦ ἐπάρχου ὄντος Ῥώμης· ὁ δὲ τρόπος τῆς αὐτοῦ μαρτυρίας τοιόσδε ἦν.<sup>26</sup>  
This [Callistus] became a “martyr” in the time when Fuscianus was the prefect of Rome, and the mode of his “martyrdom” was as follows.

This doubtlessly sarcastic<sup>27</sup> introduction is remarkable in two major aspects. In the first place, the existence of this remark indicates that Callistus claims to be a martyr. Or, perhaps that there is at least one group, school or community, which recognizes him as a martyr. Since the Author labels the majority church led by Callistus as his (heretical) “school”, it is highly likely that the majority of the Christianities of Rome recognized the slave-bishop a martyr. This general observation is supported by additional evidence mentioned in the *curriculum*. For instance, Callistus is clearly accused before the *Praefectus urbi* by the Jews because of his Christianity:

φάσκων εἶναι Χριστιανός<sup>28</sup>  
[The Jews] stated, he is a Christian.

24 Traditionally, this refers to the place that is nowadays called the Catacomb of San Callisto. Cf. L. Spera, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Appia),” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae. Suburbium 2* (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2004): (32-44). E. Rebillard, however, questions the traditional equation of κοιμητήριον with cemetery and argues that “the word *koimeterion*, in both the singular and plural, does not designate a place of communal burial but a martyr's tomb, or a group of them”. Éric Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity* (Cornell studies in classical philology 59; Ithaca/London: Cornell Univ. Press, 2009), 6. Although, in many of his examples, his reasoning is plausible, it is especially in the case of the *Refutatio* hardly convincing. See hereto further: Éric Rebillard, “Koimetérion et Coemeterium. Tombe, tombe sainte, nécropole,” *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité* 105 (1993): (975-1001); Eric Rebillard, “L'Église de Rome et le développement des catacombes. À propos de l'origine des cimetières chrétiens,” *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Antiquité* 109 (1997): (741-764); Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai and Jean Guyon, “Relire Styger: les origines de l'Area I du cimetière de Calliste et la crypte des papes,” in *Origine delle catacombe romane* (ed. Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai and Jean Guyon; Sussidi allo studio delle antichità cristiane 18; Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2006), 121-161.

25 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,15 (248,17 W.).

26 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,11,4 (246,12-13, W.).

27 With every sentence of the *curriculum*, the expression “martyrdom” becomes more and more ironical: According to the announcement of the preface, the reader should expect an edifying and touching narrative with a focus on a witnessing of Christian faith “before kings and rulers” (Lk 21,12). Instead of that, the audience has to face exactly the opposite: a story full of ignoble deeds, fraud, lies and suicide.

28 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,8 (247,18 W.).



Furthermore, Callistus had personally witnessed to his Christian faith before Fuscianus and the court, even if the Author of the *Refutatio* makes considerable efforts to conceal this. However, his attempt to gloss over the profession of faith is not that successful as it could be. It emerges between the lines, when Carpophorus tries to intervene in order to rescue his slave and to decrease his already considerable financial losses. Carpophorus enters the scene with following words on his lips:

κύριε Φουσκιανέ, μὴ σὺ αὐτῷ πιστεῦε· οὐ γάρ ἐστι Χριστιανός, ἀφορμὴν δὲ  
ζητεῖ θανάτου [...].<sup>29</sup>  
Lord Fuscianus! Do not believe him: he is not [a] Christian but merely seeks an  
opportunity for death!

The appeal of the master, “do not believe him: he is not a Christian” suggests, that Callistus behaved firmly at the crucial moment and showed himself prepared to die for his faith. Therefore, the trial of Callistus has to be considered as a trial that includes an explicit accusation that Callistus is a Christian. This behavior in others is also described as “(to be a) witness”, as when the Author speaks of the Christian co-prisoners of Callistus in the mines of Sardinia, using the expression μάρτυς<sup>30</sup>. Furthermore, after Callistus returns from Sardinia as a freedman, bishop Victor “bans” him to Antium with “a certain monthly allowance”<sup>31</sup>. This regular payment by the church has to be interpreted as an acknowledgment of witness<sup>32</sup> on the part of Victor and his fellow Christianities of Rome, rather than as an expression of a “forced exile”<sup>33</sup>. That means, that the contemporaries of Callistus, like Victor, and in fact the Author of the *Refutatio* himself, recognize him as a martyr based on his sentencing in

29 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,9 (247,21-23 W.).

30 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,10 (247,30-31 W.): ἐπηρώτα, τίνες εἶεν ἐν Σαρδονίᾳ μάρτυρες. See also 9,12,11 (248,2 W.) and Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 6), 113 (note 49).

31 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,13 (248,10-11 W.): πέμπει αὐτὸν καταμένειν ἐν Ἀνθείῳ, ὁρίσας αὐτῷ μηνιαῖόν τι εἰς τροφάς.

32 A *confessor* –but it was common that the charismatic-pneumatical office holders from the AD 2<sup>nd</sup> century on too– was not *per se* entitled to receive a *honorarium*. However, according to the testimony of the *Traditio Apostolica* 9 (which, in the light of the current state of research, should neither be considered a work of Hippolytus [Romanus], one of the Author of the *Refutatio* nor an order for a/the church in the *urbs*) a confessor could express his wish to be accepted into the clergy as a presbyter: *Habet enim honorem presbyteratus*. As a member of the clergy, a *confessor* had the privilege to receive a monthly allowance, too. Cf. Hippolytus, *Traditio Apostolica* 9 (FC 1, 238,1-21 Geerlings), Cyprian, *Epistulae* 39,5,2 (= CChr.SL 3B, 192,90-96 Diercks); See also Bernhard Kötting, “Die Stellung des Konfessors in der Alten Kirche,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 19 (1976): (7-23) 18-19; Georg Schöllgen, “Sportulae,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 101 (1990): (1-20) 2-4 and Bernhard Domagalski, “Der Diakonat als Vorstufe zum Episkopat,” *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): (17-24), 17-20.

33 Cf. Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 6), 111-113.

Sardinia.<sup>34</sup> Otherwise the *curriculum* of Callistus would not begin with a corresponding remark in its preface. Moreover, it would not be necessary to attack the “martyrdom” of Callistus at all!

Then there is an interesting and us important semantic phenomenon around the term μάρτυς. This expression was not distinctive<sup>35</sup> until mid AD 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The Greek noun μάρτυς as well as the verb μαρτυρέω simply meant “(be a) witness” or “testimony/to testify” without any further definition.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it

34 L. Duchesne assumed quite clearly the opposite: “Mais cet exil se place longtemps avant son épiscopat et ne suffit pas à justifier le titre de martyr”. He claims, that the *Depositio martyrum* lists only persons who had died either during an exile, or suffered a violent death. His proposal is indeed credible, when a presupposition has been made: Callistus has undoubtedly passed away due to an assault. In fact, the *Depositio martyrum* shows a great diversity when it comes to the catalogued martyrs, which makes it markedly difficult to define precise rules for in- or exclusion. On one hand, some martyrs are listed even though some of them are not connected with Rome at all, like the martyrs of Carthage: Cyprian, Perpetua and Felicitas. Yet others are not genuinely from the City of Rome but its vicinity, for instance from Portus, like Acontus and Ariston. On the other hand, well-known martyrs of Rome, most of whom (but not all of whom) died before the time of Callistus, like Justin martyr, are not listed. It is remarkable as well, that the entry relating to Peter and Paul is a collective one. They are mentioned using the consular dates of AD 258 and are commemorated on the same day instead of on the individual dates of their own martyrdom. *Le liber pontificalis. Texte, introduction et commentaire* 1 (ed. L. Duchesne; Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 2; Paris: de Boccard, 1886), XCII-XCIII, here XCIII. Hans Achelis, *Die Martyrologien. Ihre Geschichte und ihr Wert* (Abhandlungen der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse NF 3; Berlin: Weidmann, 1900), 15-18; Salzman, *On Roman time* (see note 10), 44-47 and Wischmeyer, “Die christlichen Texte” (see note 10), 45-55.

35 An exact differentiation seems to appear in the letter of the martyrs of Lyon and Vienna around AD 177 cited by Eusebius. The tortured survivors of the persecutions describe themselves as “confessors of moderate value” (ἡμεῖς δὲ ὁμόλογοι μέτριοι) in opposition to the others who are “already martyrs” (ἐκεῖνοι ἤδη μάρτυρες). Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5,2,3 (CGS 9,1, 502,18-21 Schwartz).

36 Although the term μάρτυς has biblical roots, there was no firm connection established between the original meaning “witness” and the upcoming secondary meaning “martyr” till the mid 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The first time that the word appears as a *terminus technicus* for one who suffers reprisals for witnessing to his or her Christian faith in the *Martyrium Polycarpi*. Cf. *Martyrium Polycarpi* 1,1 (ed. H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* [OECT; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972; Reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972], 2,7-8). The Latin equivalent *martyr* appears in north Africa approximately AD 180. Around the turn of the 2<sup>nd</sup> into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century the terminology has been established: the early Tertullian uses it already as a matter of course. However, there is no sign of any distinction in his works. He correlates it with confessors, e.g. Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 1,6 (CChr.SL 1, 3,25-27 Dekkers); Tertullian, *De Pudicitia* 22,1 (CChr.SL 2, 1328,1-2 Dekkers) and with individuals who have received their crown already like Perpetua. Tertullian, *De Anima* 55,4 (CChr.SL 2, 862,32f Waszink). The ambiguity of the expression disappears during the persecutions of Decius and Valerian. For instance, Cyprian of Carthage referring to a presbyter Moyses who “was then a *confessor* and now a *martyr*”. Cyprian, *Epistulae* 55,5,1 (261,72f D.): *tunc adhuc confessore nunc iam martyre*. See further Norbert Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer: Untersuchungen zur frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie* (Studien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 5; München: Kösel, 1961); Anna Maria Schwemer, “Prophet, Zeuge und Märtyrer: Zur Entstehung des Märtyrebegriffs im frühesten Christentum,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 96 (1999): (320-350) and Wiebke Bähnk, *Von der Notwendigkeit des Leidens: die Theologie des Martyriums bei Tertullian* (Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte 78; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), 110-123.

could be used for a martyr in the classical sense: someone who suffered a violent death or died during penal servitude. The same expression described at that time a *confessor* too, who has suffered persecution, was tortured or sentenced to penal servitude for his faith, but was not killed. A closer look at the *Refutatio* reveals that this work is not an exception to this rule. The expression μάρτυς is used there in both senses without any distinction.<sup>37</sup> It is, however, remarkable that it characterises only *confessores* in the *curriculum* of Callistus.

According to this comprehensive use of the terminology in the *Refutatio*, the expression “martyr” mentioned in the preface of the *curriculum* could correspond to a *confessor* as well as to a martyr in the classical sense. However, the term has to mean *confessor* in the introduction if only because the narrative part of the *curriculum* ends at the point when Callistus become a bishop. Furthermore, the Author refrains from mentioning any kind of explicit references to a possible death of Callistus. Therefore the expression “martyr” here means exclusively *confessor*, as in the *curriculum* of Callistus. Despite these issues, there is a broad consensus<sup>38</sup> that the *Refutatio* was written after the death of Callistus:

ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὁ θαυμασιώτατος Κάλλιστος συνεστήσατο· οὗ διαμένει τὸ διδασκαλεῖον φυλάσσειν τὰ ἔθη καὶ τὴν παράδοσιν.<sup>39</sup>

37 The Author refers to Justin as follows: “Tatian, however, although being himself a pupil of Justinus the Martyr [...]”. *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 8,16,1 (236,6-7 W.): Τατιανὸς δὲ, καὶ αὐτός γενόμενος μθητὴς Ἰουστίνου τοῦ μάρτυρος [...]. It is unambiguously clear, that the term describes here a martyr in the classical sense. Elsewhere, the Author describes the Christian co-prisoners of Callistus twice by using the expression martyr. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,10;11 (247,31; 248,2 W.).

38 Cf. Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 6), 114; Marcovich, “Introduction” (see note 14), 17.40, Marcovich, “Hippolyt von Rom” (see note 13), 381; Scholten, “Hippolytos II (von Rom)” (see note 13), col. 498; Perrin, “Rom und das westliche Abendland” (see note 4), 691 and see Castelli, “L’Elenchos” (see note 13), 21, especially 21 (note 2). From A. Brent’s point of view, the *Refutatio* was written in the lifetime of Callistus: “Had Callistus’ death itself occurred, then indeed we should have expected mention of it in the polemic sufficiently vicious in tone and intent to warrant disparagement [...]”. Brent obviously assumes, that the *curriculum* of Callistus simply serves the aim of the “character assassination”. According to the heresiographical concept of the author however, which shall be considered here as much as the “personal” aspects of the matter, there is no necessity to display the death of a heretical teacher at all, since no one less than the Holy Spirit takes over the refutation of all heresis. Cf. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 1, prooem 6 (3,1-3 W.). An additional methodical tool, like the dispersal of heretical groups after the death of their teacher in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Eusebius, is of no use for the author. Furthermore, Brent is failing to notice that, if Callistus suffered indeed a violent death “following the kind of popular riot”, as he had suggested, it would make it impossible for the author to destroy his “first” martyrdom. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman church* (see note 4), 287-289, 288-289. On the heresiographical concept of Eusebius of Caesarea see Meike Willing, *Eusebius von Cäsarea als Häreseograph* (PTS 63; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), especially 455-506. Without any further argumentation, but in order to support his own hypothesis, Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)” (see note 4), 46 clearly refuses it.

39 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,26 (251,2-3 W.).

These, then, the most amazing Callistus established, whose customs and tradition the school continues to preserve.

This remark suggests that, although the head of the school had already passed away, his school was still existing and spreading out the “concealed poison”<sup>40</sup> of its founder. The fact, that the Author does not mention the death of Callistus, raises questions about how he died and whether the death of Callistus was simply irrelevant to the Author, or whether his possible “second martyrdom” did not suit his argument. Unfortunately, there is no explicit answer to these questions, but there are some evidences which are worth following up.

Of course, it could be in the interest to the Author to avoid mentioning the death of his opponent in the *Refutatio*, especially, if it was, as the *Acta* claims, violent. Such a “second martyrdom” would not only be the coronation of the earthly life of Callistus. It would also compensate for or, rather, render irrelevant a possible sense of deficiency attached to his life and his “first martyrdom”! The case of Cyprian (ca. AD 200-258), bishop of Carthage, demonstrates approximately three decades later the effect of a fulfilled martyrdom in a quite remarkable way. It is well-known that Cyprian fled from Carthage during the persecutions of emperor Decius in AD 250. He, or more precisely, the clergy of Carthage, thereupon received a sarcastic letter from Rome<sup>41</sup>, which forced him to explain himself and his not very exemplary behavior.<sup>42</sup> His assumed “slip-up” was corrected by his martyrdom during the Valerian persecutions in AD 258, as his legacy as well as the later reception impressively demonstrates.<sup>43</sup> Even the *Depositio martyrum* could potentially testify to the mighty power of a fulfilled martyrdom. In the case when the Author of the *Refutatio* and a certain “Hippolytus presbyter” listed in the *Depositio martyrum*<sup>44</sup> are identical persons as scholars propagated for a long time, or they are at least linked as A. Brent<sup>45</sup> proposed, the entry of the 13<sup>th</sup> of August would refer to an obviously heterodox teacher who was clearly venerated by the majority church after his death in exile.

A similar process might be applicable in the case of Callistus. If he had indeed died as a martyr by being thrown into that certain *puteus in trans Tiberim*,

40 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,11,3 (246,8 W.).

41 Cyprian, *Epistulae* 8 (40,1-43,66 D.).

42 Cyprian, *Epistulae* 20,1-2 (106,1-107,15 D.).

43 Cf. Geoffrey D. Dunn, “The reception of the martyrdom of Cyprian of Carthage in early Christian literature,” in *Martyrdom and persecution in late antique Christianity. FS Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (ed. Johan Leemans; Ephemerides theologicae Lovanienses, Bibliotheca 241; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 65–86.

44 *Depositio martyrum* (72,2-3 M.): *idus Aug. Ypoliti in Tiburtina. et Pontiani in Callisti*.

45 Cf. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman church* (see note 4), 204-367.

as the *Acta Callisti* claims, it would make any argumentations or attacks against his character, his “first” martyrdom or his doctrinal positions more difficult, not to say, impossible. But that is not all. Because the death of Callistus dates back just several years, the prospective Roman audience would most likely remember the dramatic end of the popular slave-bishop. Accordingly, it would be self-defeating for the Author to ignore one or both circumstances, even if he wanted to conceal the violent death of his opponent. By contrast, the refutation of the “first martyrdom” can be easily implemented. The *damnatio ad metalla* of Callistus took place at least 30 years before!<sup>46</sup> The chronological distance and the lack of any verifiability prepared a solid ground for any further argumentation. However, as I emphasized before, such an approach can only bear fruits if his opponent was not killed as a consequence of anti-Christian rioting.

A quick look on the preface of the *curriculum* of Callistus leads to an analogous conclusion. The majority of scholars agree with M. Marcovich and consider the main purpose of the “biography” to be a “regrettable vitriolic ‘character assassination’”<sup>47</sup>. However, the Author of the *Refutatio* speaks about a pretended martyrdom or better, about Callistus being a *confessor* in quotation marks. The often conjured “character assassination” is therefore on one hand an important tool for the destruction of the status of Callistus as a martyr. But on the other, according to the preface, it is clearly not the main aim of it. There should be at least one important –likely theological– reason<sup>48</sup> why the Author has specifically chosen the martyrdom to start with. Whatever this reason may be, it will not change the fact that the main line of the argumentation is focused on the martyrdom.<sup>49</sup> And such an approach is only reasonable if his intimate counterpart never had a second –violent– one.

46 An almost exact chronological classification helps to ground the reference of the *Refutatio* to Publius (?) Seius Fuscianus as a *Praefectus urbi*. He held this office approximately between mid AD 187 and mid AD 189 Therefore the legal process of Callistus and the beginning of the sentence in Sardinia had to be taking place in this period. Cf. PIR<sup>2</sup> S 317.

47 Cf. Marcovich, “Introduction” (see note 14), 40.

48 The “classical solution” since Döllinger is to interpret the controversy as a fight for the bishop's see, especially in combination with *Refutatio* 1, prooem. 6. Here –so the widely accepted interpretation– the Author claims the status of a bishop for himself. Because the episcopal election that both Callistus and the Author of the *Refutatio* had stood for had been held correctly, the Author needed and had found another target for his offensive. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 1, prooem. 6 (3,1-5 W.) and see 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 Gieseeler* (Regensburg: Manz, 1853), 123-125; 229-231.

49 See Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 6), 113; Hall, “Calixtus I.” (see note 7), 560.

### 3. The *Acta Martyrii Sancti Callisti*

While the *Depositio martyrum* includes only a short and unspecific note about Callistus and the *Refutatio* provides “just” a *curriculum* without any clue of a (violent) death, the *Acta Martyrii Sancti Callisti*<sup>50</sup> claims to know more and fill the gaps. It presents a vivid narrative relating the last weeks and sad destiny of the slave-bishop. As set out below, many of its details are novel-like and it can be hardly taken as an historical account.

A fire seriously damaged the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. Consequently Emperor Alexander (AD 222-235) ordered the consul Palmatius<sup>51</sup> to purify the City and punish the Christians. Palmatius, followed by soldiers, crossed the river Tiber and went to the “town of the Ravennatians” (*trans Tiberim in Urbe Ravennatium*<sup>52</sup>) to capture many Christians and the blessed Callistus (*ubi collecta erat multitudo Christianorum cum B. Calixto*)<sup>53</sup>. There he met the old priest (*senex presbyter*) Calepodius<sup>54</sup>, who explains to him the reason for the blindness, which plagues the soldiers, as a wonder of God. During an offering on the Capitoline Hill, *virgo templi nomine Juliana* cried out that the God of Callistus is the living and true God (*Deus Callixti, ipse est Deus vivus et verus*)<sup>55</sup>. Palmatius believed and asked to be baptized. Thereupon Calepodius prayed for him and Callistus baptized him and his household, altogether thirty-two persons, in the name of the Holy Trinity. Later, Palmatius converted senator Simplicius<sup>56</sup> and his household,

50 *Acta Martyrii Sancti Callisti* (Ed. I. Bollandus, *Acta Sanctorum. Octobris, VI, 12-14*. [2. Ed.; *Acta Sanctorum* 53; Bruxellis: Culture et civilisation, 1853], 439-441) = *Acta S. Callisti Papae Martyris Romae* (PG 10, 114-120, Migne).

51 Consul Palmatius is a fictional protagonist of the *Acta*. The *fasti* held no evidence about a consul with that name at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. *Acta Callisti* 1-5 (439-441 B.). Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1061.

52 The name *Urbe Ravennatium* appears as a topographical reference in the *Acta* for the first time. The name of the quarter is probably derived from *Castra Ravennantium*, the military camp for the *classarii*, the sailors of the imperial fleet deployed in Ravenna. The exact location of the camp (*castra*) is uncertain, however, it should be situated approximately between S. *Chrysogonus* (Basilica di San Crisogono in Trastevere) and S. *Maria trans Tiberim* (Santa Maria in Trastevere) somewhere along the Via della Lungaretta. It is notable that the *Liber Pontificalis* uses the same terminology, when it refers to the provenance of Callistus: *de regione Urberavennantium*. *Liber Pontificalis* XVII (141,1 D.), *Acta Callisti* 3 (440 B.), C. Lega, “Castra Ravennatium,” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae* 1 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1993): (254-255).

53 *Acta Callisti* 2 (440 B.).

54 As for the case of Calepodius, see below, 17f and note 69.

55 *Acta Callisti* 3 (440 B.).

56 A senator named Simplicius has not come down to us from the beginning of the AD 3<sup>rd</sup> century, but the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* knows a Simplicius, though in the context of the so-called martyrs of Cappadocia. Remarkably, he not only has the same feast as bishop

healed the wife of a certain Felix, named Blanda<sup>57</sup>, and had them baptized by Callistus, altogether sixty-eight persons. The Emperor Alexander was truly displeased. He had all of them beheaded and the body of Calepodius cast it into the Tiber at the Lycaon island (*in Tiberim ante insulam Lycaoniam*<sup>58</sup>). This happened on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. Callistus, who at that time was hiding in the house of a certain Pontianus (*domo Pontiani juxta*<sup>59</sup> *urbem Ravennatium*) with some members of his clergy, had the body of Calepodius fished out of the river and buried ten days later in his [Calepodius'] cemetery (*in cœmeterio ejusdem*)<sup>60</sup>. The Emperor

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Callistus, but the entry of the cappadocian martyrs follows immediate that of Callistus. *Acta Callisti* 4 (440 B.), *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (ed. Giovanni Battista de Rossi / Louise Duchesne, in *Acta sanctorum. Novembris II/1* [Acta sanctorum 64; Bruxelles: Culture et civilisation, 1931], 132). Cf. Hippolyte Delehaye, "Commentarius perpetuus in Martyrologium Hieronymianum," in *Acta sanctorum. Novembris II/2* (ed. Hippolyte Delehaye; Acta sanctorum 64; Bruxelles: Culture et civilisation, 1931), 556.

57 The married couple mentioned here is fictional as well. *Acta Callisti* 5 (441 B.). Cf. Verrando, "La Passio Calisti" (see note 8), 1061.

58 The *Insula Tiberina* bore different names since the antiquity. It was commonly known e.g. as *Insula Lycaonia* in the medieval times. The earliest references were found in a group of *passiones* of the AD 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is likely, that this particular name was established in everyday speech before it was integrated into those texts. M. A. Brucia assumes therefore a common use before the beginning of the AD 6<sup>th</sup> century. *Acta Callisti* 6 (441 B.). Cf. Verrando, "La Passio Calisti" (see note 8), 1063-1068; Margaret A. Brucia, *Tiber Island in ancient and medieval Rome* (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1991), 28-55; G. De Spirito, "Insula Lycaonia," *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae* 3 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1996): (97-98).

59 The hagiographer is evidently uncertain when he tries to localise some sites connected with Callistus. For instance, the house of Callistus remains fairly undefined: it is described simple as *quodam loco*. Also, the specific location of the *domus Pontiani* causes problems. Apart from the logical fact that it has to be somewhere in *urbs Ravennatium*, the hagiographer is at a loss. Yet the name Pontianus associated with the house where Callistus found refuge before his martyrdom is not necessarily a product of imagination. It could originate from the cemetery of Ponziano at Monteverde relatively close by. Another hypothesis suggests that it was a *domus ecclesia* in the time of Severus Alexander, or it may have been connected somehow with the *titulus Callixti*. However, since all relevant information originates –at the earliest– in the late AD 5<sup>th</sup> century, and even these "facts" are clearly subject to significant uncertainty, their historical value for the AD 3<sup>rd</sup> century should be considered as non existing. *Acta Callisti* 6 (441 B.). See also Verrando, "La Passio Calisti" (see note 8), 1060-1062; G. De Spirito, "Domus Pontiani," *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae* 2 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1995): (162).

60 The *Depositio martyrum* is the first to mention this particular cemetery: *pri. idus Octob. Callisti in via Aurelia. miliario III.* (72,14 M.). It is remarkable that the cemetery is characterized only by the distance to the gates and by the martyr buried there. An explicit name of the graveyard is not mentioned. According to G. B. de Rossi, this phenomenon is not singular, as the name of the catacomb usually remains unmentioned when the cemetery bears the same name as the venerated martyr buried here (Giovanni Battista De Rossi, *La Roma sotterranea cristiana* [Vol. 1; Roma: Cromo-Litographia Pontificia, 1880], 116-117). That means, according to the *Depositio martyrum*, that two cemeteries bore the name of Callistus at the beginning of the constantinian era: one at the *via Appia*, still known nowadays as Catacomb of San Callisto, and another, at *via Aurelia*. This confirms the latest and last entry on another list called *Depositio episcoporum*, which is also a part of the Codex-Calendar of 354. It notes on the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, that bishop Julius I. (AD 337-352) is to commemorated at the 3<sup>rd</sup> milestone of the Aurelian way called "Callistus": *prid. idus Apr. Iuli, in via Aurelia miliario III, in Callisti*. The next available sources are the *Acta Callisti* and the *Liber Pontificalis*. Both referring already to a *cymiterio Calepodi* as a matter of course. Accordingly, the name of that particular catacomb at the Aurelian way had to have been changed after AD 352 but before the composition of the

got to know the hiding place of Callistus and had him starved. But Callistus became even stronger, and a vision of Calepodius consoled him. During this time, he healed and baptized one of his guardians named Privatus<sup>61</sup>. When Alexander found out about this conversion, he had Privatus executed, defenestrated the “true bishop Callistus” and had him thrown into a well with a stone tied to his neck (*Calixtum vero Episcopum per fenestram domus præcipitari, ligatoque ad collum ejus saxo, in puteum demergi et in eo rudera cumulari*)<sup>62</sup>. Seventeen days later, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October, one of his priests Asterius (*presbyter ejus*)<sup>63</sup> recovered the body of Callistus and buried it in the Catacomb of Calepodio (*in cymeterio Calepodii via Aurelia*)<sup>64</sup>.

While the *Refutatio* is in many cases far too subjective and polemical when it comes to Callistus, the *Acta Callisti* appears far too objective and impersonal. The anonymous hagiographer obviously knows neither of the *Refutatio* nor of a narrative based on an oral tradition. In fact, his knowledge about the person or life of the slave-bishop seems to be extremely limited. The presented short summary of the *Acta* suffices to reveal the major problem of the hagiographer: the lack of any kind of available information on Callistus.<sup>65</sup>

This is easy to detect within the entire *Acta*. For example, it is noticeable from the beginning that the main story line and the largest part of the *Acta* clearly concerns the bishop but is dominated by the narratives about consul<sup>66</sup> Palmatius and his actions. In contrast, the role of the clerics is generally restricted, covering only several functions associated closely with an ecclesiastical environment. The Christian office holders of the *Acta*, mainly Calepodius, less often Callistus and very rarely Asterius are operating exclusively in the arenas of charity, liturgy and piety: they indicate and interpret the wonders as signs of God, converting, praying, baptizing and eagerly taking care of their deceased. The

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*Acta* from Callistus to Calepodius. The question, when and why this happened, is not to be answered from the sources. G. Verrando proposes that the new name of the catacomb was developed by the hagiographer based on an inscription of that cemetery. (Cf. note 69.) That would be a possibility. However, due to the fact, that the only reliable information provided by the *Acta* are those of the geographical references, it is instead likely, that the name Calepodius was already established and commonly used in the time of the composition. Furthermore, the prominent presence of Calepodius in the *Acta* as well as the obvious efforts of the hagiographer, to create a link between him and Callistus, lead to an analogous conclusion. *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.), *Depositio Episcoporum* (MGH.AA Mommsen) *Liber Pontificalis* XVII (141,5 D.). Cf. Aldo Nestori, “La catacomba di Calepodio al III miglio dell’Aurelia vetus e i sepolcri dei papi Callisto I e Giulio I,” *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 47 (1971): (169–278), 226–228; Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)” (see note 4), 44–50.

61 The soldier Privatus, his character as well as the story of his healing, is fictional and has the function of increasing the tension in the narrative. *Acta Callisti* 8 (441 B.) Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1061.



only significant distinction between the deeds of the different members of the clergy is linked to hierarchical position. The main tasks of a bishop seem to be concentrated on the catechumenates and baptisms, while his doctrinal responsibility is marked by the presence of a creed.<sup>67</sup> The remaining duties have to be carried out by his presbyters. This image of the “holy” or “blessed” bishop shown in the *Acta* reflects the idealized perception of a bishop in late Antiquity rather than in the preconstantinian church. It is likely however, that partly because of this distinct partition of the duties plays Callistus such a subordinate role in his “own” *Acta*.

It is remarkable that the no less sad destiny of Calepodius has been given such a prominent part in the narrative. The *Acta* could doubtlessly be called *Acta Martyrii Calepodii et Callisti*<sup>68</sup>. The otherwise completely unknown Calepodius<sup>69</sup>

62 *Acta Callisti* 8 (441 B.).

63 An inscription, found in the Catacomb of Comodilla and dated in the AD 5<sup>th</sup> century, mentions a certain Asterius, who was commemorated, according to the inscription, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October. ICUR 2, 6094: *Pascas(i)us vixit / plus minus annus XXII / fecit fatu(m) IIII idus / octobris VII ante / natale domni As / teri depositus in / pace*. The *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* knows also a martyr named Asterius of Ostia on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October: *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* (133, D./R.): *XIII KL NOUB IN HOSTIA. Asteri*. Later martyrologies however, as well as the *Acta Callisti* consider the 21<sup>st</sup> of October as *dies natalis*. Although the hagiographical tradition is in the case of Asterius strongly heterogeneous, the epigraphical reference suggests that Asterius was indeed an authentic martyr. *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.). Cf. M. Brandi, “Asterio, santo, martire di Ostia,” *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 2 (Roma: Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1962): (cols. 516-518); V. Saxer, “Asterius, Mart.,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* 1 (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1993): (col. 1103).

64 *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.).

65 According to Th. Baumeister, this observation does not seem to be a surprising one in the context of the Christian Community in the Capital of the Empire. On one hand, most of the records about the Acts of martyrs had been abandoned during the preconstantinian period. On the other, the Roman church of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century had obviously lacked interest in creating legends based on this material. This attitude had changed when the increasing pilgrimage had shown a developing wider interest in the life and death of the local martyrs of Rome. Cf. Theofried Baumeister, “Märtyrer und Martyriumsverständnis im frühen Christentum: Ursprünge eines geschichtsmächtigen Leitbildes,” in *Martyrium, Hagiographie und Heiligenverehrung im christlichen Altertum* (ed. Theofried Baumeister; Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte, Supplementband 61; Rom: Herder, 2009), 11-21, 20.

66 The role of “consul” Palmatius serves as an example of the Christianisation of the Empire, too. His conversion demonstrates two important aspects. The appearance of Palmatius makes it possible to stress that the “new faith” was attractive not only to *simplices* and illiterate *plebs* but also to well-educated members of the Roman society. Simultaneously, Christianity appears not only as a religion of *humiliores* and the poor, but it is represented at the very highest level of imperial hierarchy.

67 *Acta Callisti* 5 (441 B.).

68 In comparison, the “*passio*” –more precisely the death and burial of Calepodius– is presented in a far more elaborate and detailed way compared to that of Callistus. However, this does not mean that the hagiographer had better sources available or more reliable information on the life and death of Calepodius. It seems, rather, that he makes an extended use of his imagination, since the anonymity of his subject sets no borders at all. *Acta Callisti* 6 (441 B.).

69 During the excavations of the Catacomb of Calepodio eleven marble fragments of an inscription had been found with the following letters: – –]epodi[– – . At the first sight it is

is not only introduced here as a presbyter of Callistus, but he it is who appears in a vision to Callistus short before his martyrdom. This almost disproportionate presence of the *senex presbyter* clearly indicates the great efforts of the unknown hagiographer to find at least some kind of relation between him and the slave-bishop. After all, he needed a good explanation why Callistus was buried in the Catacomb<sup>70</sup> of Calepodio and not –as would be more reasonable– *in cimiterio suo* i.e. the Catacomb of San Callisto at the *via Appia*.

Incidentally, geographical references such as the locations of tombs or the mention of City districts bring some hard –tangible– facts into a rather fictional story. Especially the memorial places like the mentioned Catacomb at the 3<sup>rd</sup> milestone on the Aurelian way can be traced back to the AD 3<sup>rd</sup> century. How-

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looks like this epitaph was devoted to a certain Calepodius. But is this Calepodius the one mentioned in the *Acta*? The fragments were found in a half destroyed *loculus* in the gallery named A3, which is in fact not a proper gallery but rather a surviving part of another structure, the so-called basilichetta. (Fig. 1.) This complex was an extension to the oldest nucleus of the cemetery, the gallery A1 to the south, to create a subterranean “basilica” at a time when the cult of Callistus became more popular. Due to the increasing pilgrimage numbers, in a following phase of the development this basilichetta was largely destroyed by the building of the staircase S4 leading directly to the grave of Callistus. Consequently, the *loculus* of this certain Calepodius definitely had to have been dug after the basilichetta was established (Nestori guesses the time as that of bishop Julius I. in mid AD 4<sup>th</sup> century by repeating the vague testimonies of *Liber Pontificalis* XXXVI) but before the stair S4 was installed. Therefore it is highly likely that the deceased buried here cannot be the Presbyter Calepodius, since he died and was buried –according to the *Acta*– before Callistus. The theoretical possibility of a translation might be considered, but this option can be certainly excluded in the light of the Christian translation praxis in Rome. See hereto Pasquale Testini, *Archeologia cristiana: nozioni generali dalle origini alla fine del sec. VI; propedeutica, topografia cimiteriale, epigrafia, edifici di culto* (2. Ed.; Roma/Parigi/New York: Desclée, 1980), 132-134. Not only the archaeological evidence is meagre. The specifications made by the hagiographer on the date of his death as well as the descriptions of his burial are far too vague to be useful. Furthermore, no other document testifies to his life or death, nor even to his name. Therefore, yes, a tomb of a certain Calepodius existed. But it is obvious that this particular person cannot be the *senex presbyter* mentioned in *Acta*. Consequently, the life and deeds of the presbyter Calepodius are most likely fictional, as is his act of martyrdom. *Acta Callisti* 2-6 (440-441 B.) and *Liber Pontificalis* XXXVI (205,3-4 D.). Further see A. Amore, “Calepodio, Palmazio, Simplicio, Felice, Blanda e compagni,” *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 3 (Roma: Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1965): (669); Nestori, “La catacomba di Calepodio” (see note 59), 226-228 and 272-278; Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1060-1061; Sonke Lorenz, “Papst Calixt (217-222). Translationen und Verbreitung seines Reliquienkultes bis ins 12 Jahrhundert,” in *Ex ipsis rerum documentis. FS Harald Zimmermann* (ed. Klaus Herbers; Beiträge zur Mediävistik; Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1991), 213-232; Danilo Mazzoleni, “Le iscrizioni della catacomba di Calepodio,” *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 75 (1999): (597-694) and recently to the medieval paintings of the crypt with a nearly completed bibliography: Mara Minasi, *La tomba di Callisto: appunti sugli affreschi altomedievali della cripta del papa martire nella catacomba di Calepodio* (Scavi e restauri 6; Città del Vaticano: Pontificia Commissione di Archeologia Sacra, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> The suggestion, however, that the hagiographer has seen the Calepodius inscription in the catacomb and used it for “inspiration” could only be a solution if the stair S4 (Fig. 1) has first been built after the *Acta* had been written. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1061.

ever, the overwhelming majority of the locations mentioned<sup>71</sup> in the *Acta*, e.g. the *regione Urberavennantium* or the *Insula Lycaonia* reflects a City of Rome known by the hagiographer. The introduction of the *domus Pontani*<sup>72</sup> determined in Trastevere seems to be a typical motif of hagiographical literature.<sup>73</sup> It played a distinguished role in the demonstration of how the Christianisation of Rome took place. The conversion of the heart of the Roman Empire is shown to be a result of hard, persistent and self-sacrificing efforts: It took place step-by-step, or better, *domus-by-domus*<sup>74</sup>. These geographical localisations reflect a City at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and accordingly, they do not have any impact on the case of Callistus. Therefore, it is time to turn back to the –at least nominally– major protagonist of the *Acta*.

In the few cases where Callistus acts independently, the *Acta* presents him vaguely by using general terms. He appears as a *vero episcopus* who is saying pious (and doctrinally entirely correct<sup>75</sup>) words, and who is busy teaching and baptizing in the name of the Holy Trinity. The person and character of the bishop stay undefined, and he seems to be driven by the events rather than driving them. Even his last days are marked by greatest passivity. Callistus is a captive in the house of Pontianus where he patiently waits for his *corona*, which had already been announced by Calepodius. In fact, the story line of the *Acta* narrows the scope of actions of the bishop step-by-step, parallel to the successive increased pressure from the persecutors. This “holy” bishop merely fulfills his divine duty, enduring all circumstances until his personal ending. The last weeks of Callistus are presented in a rather schematic way: The major difference between the single episodes mainly consists in the various number of successfully converted and baptized individuals.

71 See hereto the notes 52, 58, 59 and 69.

72 Cf. note 59.

73 The motif of a *domus* as a setting in the hagiographical literature has four common types of usage: for baptism, as a prison, as a secret location for liturgical gatherings or as a place of martyrdom. Though this motif tends to be used in a rather schematic way, it often refers to certain existing buildings or constructions of the AD 5<sup>th</sup> century. Such geographical specifications support not only the localisation of certain events but help develop a monumental image of Rome. Cf. Steffen Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume: Heiligenmemoria und kollektive Identitäten im Rom des 3. bis 5. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.* (Millennium-Studien zu Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr. 11; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 437-440, who also provides an elaborate list of references to the different usages of this motif.

74 Cf. Diefenbach, *Römische Erinnerungsräume* (see note 73), 444-447.

75 There is no clue in the *Acta* about the monarchian Christology of Callistus described in the *Refutatio*. On this topic see Heine, “The Christology of Callistus” (see note 17); Gerber, “Calixt von Rom” (see note 14); Hermann Josef Vogt, “Die Trinitätstheologie des Papstes Kalixt I,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 179 (1999): (195–209).

To sum up, the *Acta* is not offering any specific, unique, or additional information around the person of Callistus which could give the impression that behind the numerous legendary elements the *Acta* could indeed be based on an historical reliable core. In fact, the deeds and words of Callistus, apart from the (mainly theological) anachronisms, could basically suit every arbitrary legendary or real bishop(-martyr) in the times of persecution. This impression is reinforced by the comparison of both narratives, in the *Refutatio* and in the *Acta*. The gap between the two Callistus figures presented there could not be broader: The slave-banker and the active organiser-bishop of the *Refutatio* faces the passive, idealized and pious *vero episcopus* of the *Acta*.

#### 4. The *Acta* and the *Historia Augusta*

Nevertheless, mostly Italian scholars regularly declare two motives in the narrative as authentic and therefore as a part of the “historical core”<sup>76</sup> of the *Acta*. The first of those non-fictional elements is the defenestration and tumble into a well with a stone tied to his neck. This motive “sembra essere veritiero perché tale da colpire la fantasia popolare e rimanere nella memoria”<sup>77</sup> so the scholars judge. Doubtless, the described picture can be very well imagined and remembered, too, and may speak for at least some historical reliability. However, apart of the fact that the exhibited reasoning is hardly enough to consider the note as historical correct, the manner of the assassination does not seem to be without (contemporary) analogy.<sup>78</sup> For instance, the opinion, or maybe

<sup>76</sup> The presumption of a certain historical core in the *Acta* is old and goes back to a study of P. Allard. Cf. Paul Allard, *Histoire des persécutions pendant la première moitié du troisième siècle* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1886), 188-190.

<sup>77</sup> Prinzivalli, “Callisto I, santo” (see note 3), 245.

<sup>78</sup> The motif of a stone tied around the neck, is not unknown in Christian-and especially in the hagiographical-literature. For instance, Lactantius mentions that Christian members of Diocletian’s imperial household, “having millstones tied about their necks, were cast into the sea”. Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 15,3 (CSEL 27,2 188,19-20 Brant/Laubmann): [...] *domestici alligatis ad collum molaribus mari mergebantur*. Also Quirinius, Bishop of Siscia (today Sisak in Croatia) in Pannonia was thrown into the river Save in Savaria (today Szombathely in Hungary) with a millstone about his neck. *Passio Quirini* 7,1 (ed. P. Chiesa, *Passio Quirini*, in *Le passioni dei martiri aquileiesi e istriani* 2 [ed. Colombi Emanuela; Fonti per la storia della chiesa in Friuli / Serie medievale 7; Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 2013], 572). Such a dreadful end is not only claimed for the legendary *Passio Quirini*, but also by Eusebius in the same context. Cf. *Eusebius Chronicon Ad ann.* 308 = 271. Olympiade (GCS 34, 717 Helm): *Nam manuali mola ad collum ligata, e ponte praecipitatus in flumen*. On the *Passio Quirini* see the introduction of Paolo Chiesa, “*Passio Quirini*,” in *Le passioni dei martiri aquileiesi e istriani* 2 (ed. Colombi Emanuela; Fonti per la storia della chiesa in Friuli / Serie medievale 7; Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 2013), 499-583, 499-

more precisely, the speculation, that those similarities between the death of Callistus and that of Emperor Elagabalus (AD 218-222), told in the *Historia Augusta*, are more than (un)fortunate coincidence, has still not lost its popularity.<sup>79</sup>

Three accounts about the death of Emperor Elagabalus come down to us. The majority of the scholars agree that though Cassius Dio<sup>80</sup> is in general the most reliable of them, in the case of Elagabalus, the historical tradition of Herodian<sup>81</sup> could be closer to the reality. Compared to them, the reliability of the *Historia Augusta* is in general thought to be dubious, as already Th. Mommsen<sup>82</sup> pointed out. The narratives of Herodian and Cassius Dio on the tragic ending of Elagabalus are comparatively short and, apart from minor differences, reflect the same course of events: assassination, mutilation, dragging all over the city and finally being thrown into some kind of water. The comparatively late version of the *Historia Augusta* amplifies the core presented by Herodian and Cassius Dio: the sewer was too small for the corpse, therefore they attached a weight and hurled it into the Tiber.<sup>83</sup> Since Elagabalus appears as the prototype of a “bad emperor”<sup>84</sup> in the *Historia Augusta*, the scenes around the death of

583, on his death 517-525. The non-Christian historiography lends its weight to this motif, too, as the example of *Historia Augusta* indicates it. Cf. below note 83.

79 Although A. Brent disagrees with the presumption of an “historical core” because of his own contra-cultural theory. He concludes: “Thus Callistus fell, or appeared in the eyes of his contemporaries to fall, for similar reasons and in a similar way to Elagabalus.” Brent, *The imperial cult* (see note 4), 325-328, here 327-328. He recently stated, when speculating on the succession lists of the chronographical tradition: “it would seem that Callistus dies in a riot in Rome that was associated somehow with similar riots following the death of Elagabalus. The fact must be that the author of *Elenchos* himself did not survive [...]” Allen Brent, “The *Elenchos* and the Identification of Christian Communities in Second – Early Third Century Rome,” in *Des évêques, des écoles et des hérétiques: actes du colloque international sur la ‘réfutation de toutes les hérésies’, Genève, 13-14 juin 2008* (ed. Gabriella Aragione and Enrico Norelli; Prahins: Éditions du Zèbre, 2011), 275-314.

80 Cassius Dio 80,20,2.

81 Herodian 5,8,8-9.

82 Already Th. Mommsen had advised against the ready use of the *Historia Augusta* because of its doubtful reliability: “[...] (Man ist) bei dem Gebrauch des ebenso gefährlichen wie unentbehrlichen Buches in stetiger Verlegenheit und Unsicherheit.” Theodor Mommsen, “Die Scriptores Historiae Augustae,” *Hermes* 25 (1890): (228-292), 281. The major problem is the lack of any verifiability for much of the material of the Author beyond Herodian and Cassius Dio. Many testimonies presented only by him are vivid as well as colourful and give an impression of being legendary. Therefore, one must concur: not even a part of a sentence can be used without careful examination. A. Lippold, “*Historia Augusta*,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 15 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1993): (cols. 687-723); Hartwin Brandt, “Facts and Fictions – die *Historia Augusta* und das 3. Jahrhundert,” in *Deleto paene imperio Romano: Transformationsprozesse des Römischen Reiches im 3. Jahrhundert und ihre Rezeption in der Neuzeit* (ed. Klaus-Peter Johné; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 11-23.

83 *Historia Augusta* Heliog. 17,1-3. Throughout this paper, English translations of the *Historia Augusta* follow the *Scriptores historiae Augustae* (ed. David Magie; 3. vols.; The Loeb classical library 139.140.263; London: Heinemann, 1922-1932).

84 Cf. Martijn Icks, “Heliogabalus, A Monster On The Roman Throne. The Literary Construction Of A Bad Emperor,” in *KAKOS, Badness and Anti-Value in Classical Antiquity* (ed. Ralph Rosen and Ineke Sluiter; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), 477-488.

Elagabalus must therefore be cruel and humiliating, as a punishment for his dreadful deeds and for better entertaining the audience. Disliked or disgraced persons are usually treated with “special” care in the *Historia Augusta*. The *scriptores* often has additional punishments to offer in such cases, like this: “But this, the senate's decision, was not enough; the people decided that after they were put to death they should be dragged about and cast into the sewer (*in cloacam*)”<sup>85</sup>. The motivation behind the dramatic setting of the well and the stone tied to the neck in the *Acta* is fairly similar. The hagiographer needs an impressive and stirring culmination of his narrative, which also accents the cruelty of the persecutors and magnifies the persistence and holiness of his main protagonist. Both Authors, that of the *Acta* as well as that of *Historia Augusta* help themselves, as they seize a popular and at the same time deviant conception. Despite the analogies, a literary dependence of the *Acta* on the *Historia Augusta*, not least because of the latter's positive image of Alexander Severus, can not be assumed. Therefore, in accord with Pietrzykowski it can be asserted: “Die ähnliche Umstände der Tode Elagabals und des Papstes Kallistus mögen ausschließlich ein Werk der Zufalls gewesen sein.”<sup>86</sup>

The other “core element” is identified as the circumstance that the body of Callistus remains seventeen days in that well in Trastevere before it is buried at the *via Aurelia*<sup>87</sup>. According to G. N. Verrando, this motif represents a singular aspect of his martyrdom which has to be based on an unmodified oral tradition.<sup>88</sup> However, the unique character of the unburied body does not seem to be as singular as it is claimed to be. The *Acta* itself “reports”, for instance, that the *corpus sanctus* of Calepodius had spent ten days in the Tiber before it was recovered and buried properly.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the tragic destiny of Asterius, a presbyter of Callistus and organizer of the burial of his bishop, shows certain analogies. He passed away only six days after the burial of Callistus when he was thrown from a bridge into the river Tiber. His body was found and buried a day later in Ostia on the 21<sup>th</sup> of October.<sup>90</sup>

85 *Historia Augusta* Gord. 13,8 (Loeb 140, 404 Magie).

86 Michael Pietrzykowski, “Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal,” in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*. II, 16, 3, (ed. Wolfgang Haase; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 1806–1825, 1825.

87 *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.).

88 See Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1060 and especially 1060 (note 100) for further reference.

89 *Acta Callisti* 6 (441 B.).

90 *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.). See further annotation 63.

Not even the specified period of seventeen days, that the cadaver of Callistus should have spent in the *puteus*, could be used readily as an indicator for oral tradition. Although the number seventeen carries no symbolic meaning at all it has to be seen rather as an instrument in the hand of the hagiographer to stress once again the unlimited cruelty of Alexander: The Roman legislation, in contrast to the Greek, had no automatic denial of buries for criminals.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, when presbyter Asterius has to pay with his life for taking care of the corpse, the zenith of cruelty and that of the dramaturgy has been reached.

Finally, the immediate chronological and causal circumstance of the martyrdom should be examined. The *Acta* claims that Callistus died during the reign of Emperor Alexander, who was in person responsible for the persecutions and especially for the death of Callistus and his fellow clergy.<sup>92</sup> To the very unfortunate of this assertion, at this point the scholars and sources widely agree, that the time of Alexander is marked by religious tolerance and broad syncretism.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, an official persecution ordered directly by the Emperor appears rather unlikely. In order to rescue the historicity of the *Acta*, some scholars suggest that a local<sup>94</sup> persecution or riot could have led to the tragic end of Callistus. Within the *Historia Augusta*, furthermore, an explanation for such a riot has been found:

[Heliogabalus] *dicebat praeterea iudaeorum et Samaritanorum religiones et Christianam devotionem illuc transferendam, ut omnium culturarum secretum Heliogabali sacerdotium teneret.*

[Elagabalus] declared, furthermore, that the religions of the Jews and the Samaritans and the rites of the Christians must also be transferred to this place, in order that the priesthood of Elagabalus might include the mysteries of every form of worship.<sup>95</sup>

91 See Stefan Schruppf, *Bestattung und Bestattungswesen im Römischen Reich. Ablauf, soziale Dimension und ökonomische Bedeutung der Totenfürsorge im lateinischen Westen* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2006), 68-70.

92 *Acta Callisti* 1 (439 B.): *Palmatius: Christiani. Alexander dixit: Ego praecepi semel atque iterum, ut ubicumque inventi fuerint, puniantur, aut offerant diis immortalibus libamina.*

93 *Historia Augusta* Alex. 22, 29, 43, 49, (Loeb 140, 218-220, 234-236, 264-266, 276-278 Magie) Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6, 21; 6, 24; 6, 28. (566,22-568,14; 570,18-572,10; 582,1-13 Sch.) Cf. Marta Sordi, *Il Cristianesimo e Roma* (Storia di Roma 19; Bologna: L. Cappelli, 1965), 233-246; Marta Sordi, *The Christians and the Roman Empire* (London/New York: Croom Helm, 1986), 88-92; Dal Covolo, *I Severi e il Cristianesimo* (see note 4), 74-90; Verrando, "Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)" (see note 4), 46-47.

94 Sordi: *Il cristianesimo e Roma* (see note 93), 238-39; Sordi, *The Christians* (see note 93), 86-88. Prinzivalli, "Callisto I, santo" (see note 3), 245 stresses: „[...] ma di un brutale assassinio, avvenuto nel susseguirsi concitato di un tumulto.“; Verrando, "Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)" (see note 4), 47.

95 *Historia Augusta* Heliog. 3,5 (Loeb 140, 110-112 Magie).

The *plebs* –so the hypothesis goes– have taken advantage of the precarious situation, especially of the lack of a strong political power after the assassination of Elagabalus. The mob could have seen the Christians as the accomplices of the Emperor, since these had been favored<sup>96</sup> by the widely hated Elagabalus. A riot broke out, and its consequence is well known.

Well, the suggestion is handsome, but it raises several problems. First of all, as already mentioned, the value of the *Historia Augusta* is usually recognized as low.<sup>97</sup> Secondly, the reliability of this particular annotation seems to be especially suspicious.<sup>98</sup> That means, this hypothesis is based on a dubious annotation of an unreliable work. However, despite of all doubts, the section could still be trustworthy. Therefore, thirdly, the *Historia Augusta* describes that Elagabalus had those *religiones et Christianam devotionem*<sup>99</sup> transferred in order to incorporate them with the cult of Elagabalus. It could be understood, as M. Sordi did, as those cults being held in the Emperor's favour. The problem is that her account is based on the separation of the annotation from the immediate context. If the

96 The core of this hypothesis goes back to M. Sordi in the mid-sixties. She argues that, even though the *Historia Augusta* has some problems, this particular notice “é apparasa, e non a torto, a molti studiosi attendibile”. The testimony of the annotation fits well the religious policy of Elagabalus known from other sources. The Severer since Caracalla have been following a rather liberal policy which could be characterized with “sincretismo e il subordinazionismo”. The assumption is followed up by the problematical part of the hypothesis: “Il favore mostrato da Eliogabalo verso i cristiani”, when the cult of the *religio illicita* Christianity was transferred to the Palatin. This can be explained with the “toleranza di Eliogabalo, che fu forse aperta benevolenza [...]”. Sordi: *Il cristianesimo e Roma* (see note 93), 238.

97 See further note 82.

98 The Editor, O. F. Butler considered that this notice is almost certainly a later addition, since the listed religions would have no significance in combination with the cult of Elagabalus. Also S. Stertz considers that this passage “has generally not been believed by modern scholars.” Though there are many reasons to question the reliability of this notice, he emphasizes that the “account may be suspected but cannot be summarily dismissed”. He supports his theory by noting that Elagabalus was circumcised and abstained from consumption of pork, which provided a reason for his interest in Judaism and Christianity. However, this supportive argument of S. Stertz is odd, since the two certain characteristics, circumcision and abstention of pork, were common in many cults of the Middle East. Moreover, Christians has refrained from both forms of ritual act. Pietrzykowski puts it in a nutshell: “Alles in allem: das Christentum wurde zur Herrschaftszeit Elagalabls geduldet, spielte aber in der Religionspolitik dieses Kaisers keine Rolle.” Orma F. Butler, *Studies in the life of Heliogabalus* (University of Michigan studies. Humanistic series 4; New York: MacMillan, 1908), 126; Stephen A. Stertz, “Christianity in the ‘Historia Augusta’,” *Latomus* 36 (1977): (694–715), 699; F. Stummer, “Beschneidung,” *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 2 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1954): (cols. 159–169); Martin Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal* (Historia Einzelschriften 62; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989), 14–15; Pietrzykowski, “Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal” (see note 86), 1825.

99 It would be interesting to know what exactly was supposed to have been transferred to the temple of Elagabalus, since the listed cults did not have specific objects or relics as the focus of devotion at that time.



sentence directly before the cited section is considered, it reveals unambiguously the true nature of the imperial intention:

[...] *templum fecit, studens et Matris typum et Vestae ignem et Palladium et ancilia et omnia Romanis veneranda in illud transferre templum et id agens, ne quis Romae deus nisi Heliogabalus coleretur.*

He built a temple, to which he desired to transfer the emblem of the Great Mother, the fire of Vesta, the Palladium, the shields of the Salii, and all that the Romans held sacred, purposing that no god might be worshiped at Rome save only Elagabalus.<sup>100</sup>

According to the *Historia Augusta*, the Emperor tried to merge and unify all the mentioned cults into the cult of Elagabalus, to consolidate the monarchical position of his own cult over all others. Elagabalus attempted in fact to set up a universal, pagan monotheism in Rome.<sup>101</sup> The transfer of relics with extremely important symbolical meaning for the roman self-conception should be seen against this background. It was to make sure that all those cults were under direct control: primarily by the cult of Elagabalus, and ultimately by the Emperor itself. In this respect, the alleged transfer of the cults of the Christians and Jews should be understood rather as an expression of subordination and control than as a sign of “being in favour”. More trustworthy sources<sup>102</sup> relating to the religious policy of the Emperor offer a more nuanced and authentic picture: On the one hand, the Christians are not persecuted. On the other hand, they are just one group among many. The religious policy of Elagabalus allowed Christians to live a normal every day life, without suffering negatively or enjoying positive discrimination.<sup>103</sup> There is no historically reliable evidence which would support the assumption that Elagabalus regarded the Christians with favour.<sup>104</sup> In this light, it is likewise difficult to propose a causal coherence between a hypotheti-

<sup>100</sup>*Historia Augusta* Heliog. 3,4 (140, 110-111 Magie).

<sup>101</sup>Even his entitlement, to be a *sacerdos amplissimus Dei invicti Solis Elagabali*, let him hold a sacred office which must have been considered higher than that of *Pontifex Maximus*. Numerous inscriptions mention his entitlement in the first instance, before the pontifical one. Cf. CIL 10, 5827; CIL 11, 3774. See also Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (Handbuch der klassischen Altertums-Wissenschaft 5,4; München: Beck, 1902), 305 and Gaston H. Halsberghe, *The cult of Sol Invictus: With a frontispiece* (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’empire romain 23; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 70-72. Also, Brent emphasizes the endeavours of Elagabalus to promote a universal monotheism and to reflect this cosmic order in the imperial order. Brent, *A political history of early Christianity* (see note 4), 236-238.

<sup>102</sup>Cf. *Herodian* 5,6,3-5.

<sup>103</sup>Cf. Pietrzykowski, “Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal” (see note 86).

<sup>104</sup>Pietrzykowski concludes as follows: “Wiederum findet die These von einem wohlwollendem Verhältnis Elagabals zum Christentum ebenfalls keine Bestätigung.” Pietrzykowski, “Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal” (see note 86), 1825.

cal riot in *trans Tiberim* due to the personal “preference” of the Christians by the Emperor.

Finally, a chronological observation should complete the argumentation. Between the assassination of Elagabalus on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March and the hypothetical violent death of Callistus on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September is a gap of six and half months. Therefore a spontaneous reaction or emotional act due to the death of Elagabalus, which could provide a plausible motivation for the rioters, can be excluded without any difficulty. What remains is a serious doubt about a correlation between the both incidents.

To conclude, the chronological arrangement of the *Acta* is obviously incorrect: there is no evidence which would substantiate a claim that a persecution occurred under the Emperor Alexander. The auxiliary construct looking for a local riot based on the *Historia Augusta*, which should assure at least some historical reliability for the legendary *Acta*, does not persuade. The chronological distance between the death of Elagabalus and Callistus, the dubious character of the *Historia Augusta* as well as the lack of motivation on the part of the rioters demolish little by little the plausibility of an assumed local riot. However –and this is the major strength of the daring hypothesis– neither those alleged turmoils nor the notice of the *Historia Augusta* can be falsified, because of a lack any other relevant sources.

## 5. Conclusions

The previous survey illustrates unambiguously that the historical value of the *Acta Callisti* is very restricted. As G. N. Verrando pointed out correctly, the ha-

giographer, along with the Compiler of the *Liber Pontificalis*<sup>105</sup>, reflects only commonly known traditions of Trastevere and the Catacomb of Calepodio at the *via Aurelia* at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> and at the beginning of the AD 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, the *Acta* provides valuable information on the history of piety, the topography of the late 5<sup>th</sup> century Rome as well as to the development of the cult of the martyrs and to the hagiographic tradition. The value of the *Acta* is –I would say– less than minimal for the AD 3<sup>rd</sup> century, and so for the life and especially for the death of Callistus.

The listing of bishop Callistus in the *Depositio martyrum* can be entirely explained with the help of the *Refutatio*. The occurrences of his life, especially that of his *damnatio in metallum* in Sardinia, have provided enough justification to honor him already in his lifetime as a *confessor* using the indistinct expression “martyr”. Such a point of view is confirmed not only by Victor, the bishop of Rome at that time, but as well by his “arch-enemy”, the Author of the *Refutatio*.

The *Refutatio*, written after the death of Callistus, does not mention his death at all. A violent death would not only unambiguously point out his upright character but it would also correct former errors, as the example of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage illustrates. Furthermore, a “second martyrdom” would completely destroy the argument of the *Refutatio* against the “first martyrdom”. Therefore it is highly unlikely –and for a listing in the *Depositio martyrum* completely unnecessary to assume– that Callistus was killed during a riot in Trastevere as the *Acta* claims to “know”.

<sup>105</sup>The *Liber Pontificalis* hardly provides any reliable “Sondergut” to the case of Callistus. The name of his father (*ex padre Domitio*) and his origin are not verifiable, since we know from the *Refutatio* that he was a slave. Despite the complications, Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)” (see note 4), 47 based on G. B. de Rossi, wants to find an authentication of that information. He even proposes that one of the brick stamps (*Callisti Domitorum*) might bear a reference to the “padre adottivo” of Callistus. Given the acute lack of any information about the life of Callistus at the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century it is, however, more likely that the Editor of the *Liber Pontificalis* had seen a brick stamp –as cited above– during his visit at the sanctuary of Callistus, and that since he did not know that Callistus was a slave, he had thought to fill a gap in a convincing manner. Other information, namely *hic fecit basilicam trans Tiberim*, is neither archaeologically traceable, nor very likely. *Hic constituit ieiunium die sabbati...* refer to the ember weeks at the beginning of Lent. Similar traditions can be found in Pseudo-Isidore, Gelasius I. and Leo the Great. Therefore, without further evidence, this notice should be considered as doubtful, too. Cf. Prinzivalli, “Callisto I, santo” (see note 3), 244f. Interestingly, all geographical references in the *Liber Pontificalis* point to Trastevere, where obviously a very strong local tradition concerning Callistus existed. However, this “fattore determinante la dipendenza del Liber Pontificalis dalla Passio Callisti”, concludes Verrando, in accord with L. Duchesne. *Liber Pontificalis* (141,1-7 D.), cf. Duchesne, *Le liber pontificalis* (see note 34), XCIII and 141; Hall, “Calixtus I.” (see note 7), 362-363, Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1056-1058.

<sup>106</sup>See Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 8), 1074-1076.

Finally, a short historical reconstruction should illustrate the development of Callistus from a *confessor* to a *martyr*. After his non-violent death, Callistus was added as a *confessor* to the Roman calendar of martyrs, which became later the martyrology *Depositio martyrum*. His life and deeds seem to have been buried in oblivion in the course of time. Bishop Julius of Rome (AD 337-352), perhaps led by similar interests to those of his successor Damasus I. of Rome (AD 366-384), maybe “rediscovered” but definitely propagated the cult of Callistus by *fecit basilicas II, una in urbe Roma iuxta forum et altera trans Tiberim*<sup>107</sup>. The connection between Callistus and Trastevere was (re-)gained through his building construction and other activities. In the AD 5<sup>th</sup> century pilgrimage put the life and death of the martyrs again in the centre of attention. It became more and more clear that the proceedings of the martyrdom of a certain martyr named Callistus, listed in the Roman feast calendar, had remained unmentioned. At this time, the *Refutatio* was already forgotten, just like other narratives about the life of the bishop. Even if that had not been the case, the distinctive use of the expression *martyr*, made a story of violent or bloody death necessary for the making of a martyr. And this was how the creation of a legend began.

## 6. Figures

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<sup>107</sup>*Liber Pontificalis* XXXVI (205,3-4 D.): “He constructed two basilicas, one in the City of Rome close to the forum and the other across the Tiber”.

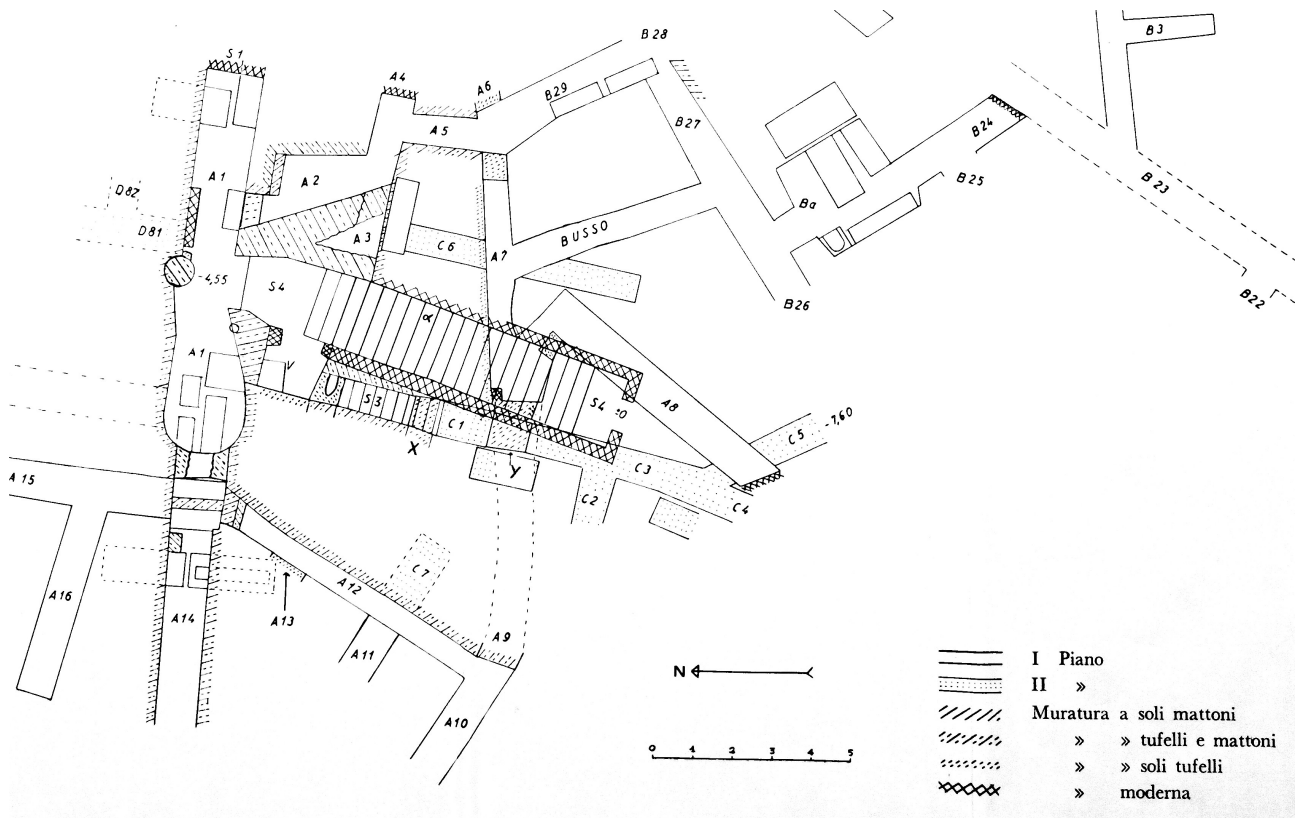


Figure 1: Floor plan of the earliest nucleus of the Calepodio catacomb. Nestori, "La catacomba di Calepodio" (see note 59), Tavola II.

## 7. Zusammenfassung

Es steht außer Zweifel, dass Kallistus, Bischof von Rom (217?-222?) auf die Ehrenliste der stadtrömischen Märtyrer (*Depositio Martyrum*) aufgenommen wurde. Ob er aber jemals den Märtyrertod erlitt, wie dies die *Acta Callisti* versucht nahe-zulegen, ist hingegen kontrovers diskutiert. Der Autor der *Refutatio omnium Hae-resium* (Elenchos), ein dem Bischof abgeneigter Zeitgenosse, weiß nichts über seinen Tod zu berichten. Er erwähnt jedoch, dass Kallistus als Strafe in die Bergwerke Sardinien verurteilt wurde. Nach seiner Rückkehr wurde er von Bi-

schof Viktor (189?-199?), indirekt auch von seinem Widersacher, dem Autor, als Bekenner anerkannt. Aufgrund noch nicht etablierter Terminologie wird Kallistus als *martyr* bezeichnet und nach seinem Tod in die Märtyrerliste aufgenommen. Die *Acta* knüpft hier an und füllt die „Lücke“ um den vom Märtyrertitel abgeleiteten „Märtyrertod“ des Kallistus mit einer erbaulichen Narration. Die Bemühungen, die Glaubwürdigkeit der *Acta* durch die ebenfalls romanhafte *Historia Augusta* zu erweisen, sind limitierter Überzeugungskraft. Obwohl die *Acta* für die Erschließung des Lebens bzw. des Todes des Bischofs ohne Bedeutung ist, stellt sie ein bedeutendes Zeugnis für die Entwicklung der kallistischen Lokaltradition in Trastevere und in der Katakomben des Calepodius sowie für die Topographie Roms im ausgehenden 5. Jahrhundert dar.