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Bishop Callistus I. of Rome (217?–222?): A Martyr or a Confessor?

Abstract: Doubtlessly, Callistus, Bishop of Rome (217?–222?), was added to the list of honored martyrs of the City of Rome (*Depositio martyrum*). But whether or not he actually was martyred, as the *Acta Callisti* suggest, is controversially debated. The author of the *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (*Elenchos*), an opponent of the bishop, does not at all refer to his death. He does mention, however, that Callistus was sentenced to the mines of Sardinia. After his return, Bishop Victor (189?–199?), and implicitly the author as well, acknowledges him as a confessor. Because the terminology is not definite at this point in time, the confessor Callistus is described as a *martyr* and added to the list of martyrs after his death. The missing narrative of his violent death that is implicated by the title *martyr* is invented by the *Acta*. The efforts to underscore the reliability of the *Acta* through the similarly novelesque *Historia Augusta* are unconvincing. Therefore the *Acta* are of no importance for the determination of the facts about the life and death of Bishop Callistus. However, they provide insights on the development of the tradition of Callistus in Trastevere, the Catacombs of Calepodius as well as the topography of Rome at the end of the 5th century.

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The biography of Callistus, ex-slave and bishop of the City of Rome at the beginning of the third century C.E., contains an unresolved puzzle concerning his death. Since his name appears in the *Depositio martyrum* he is entitled in the *Liber pontificalis* as a martyr,¹ and additionally since his death was described as violent in the

¹ *Liber pontificalis* 17 (ed. Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis* 1 [Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 2, 3,1B; Paris: de Boccard, 1886], 141,2–3): *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.

Acta martyrii Sancti Callisti, the majority of scholars² seem to agree that Callistus died a violent death due to his Christian confession, as narrated in the *Acta*. This is at least the impression left by a consultation of the recent literature.³ Such a

2 Some examples should illustrate the tendency mentioned above. For instance, Emanuela Prizivalli emphasizes in her otherwise excellent article: “Il martirio di C.[allisto] è fra i pochissimi riguardanti vescovi romani a potersi considerare sicuro” (Emanuela Prinzivalli, “Callisto I, santo,” *Enciclopedia dei Papi* 1 [Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2000]: [237–246] 244). Basil Studer assures: “È ben probabile invece ch’egli [Callisto] sia morto come martire.” (Basil Studer, “Callisto I,” *Nuovo Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiana* 1 [Genova: Marietti, 2006]: 841). David H. Farmer praises Callistus 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” (David H. Farmer, “Callistus,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* [5th ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011]: 74). Rebecca Lyman states succinctly: “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.” (Rebecca Lyman, “Callistus,” *Encyclopedia of the early Christianity* 1 [2d ed.; New York: Garland, 1997]: [204–205] 205). A quick look at the *Depositio martyrum* suffices to show that this assertion cannot be correct. There are other Roman bishops of the 3d 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: *Depositio martyrum* (MGH.AA 9, 71,4 Mommsen): *XIII kal. Feb. Fabiani in Callisti*. Bishop Sixtus II., who was killed on the 6th of August 258 by Emperor Valerian, is noted as *VIII idus Aug. Xysti in Callisti (Depositio martyrum* [71,26 M.]). 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 (Depositio martyrum* [72,2–3 M.]). Therefore, the sentence would be correctly rendered as follows: “and was the first bishop after Peter, (mentioned) in the *Depositio martyrum*.”

3 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: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1989), 64–69, 88–90; Giuseppe Ferretto, “Callisto I,” *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 3 (Roma: Istituto Giovanni 22 della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1963): 681–689. Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (VCS 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* (VCS 45; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 325–328 and repeated in idem, *A political history of early Christianity* (London: 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: Herder, 2003), (666–716) 708–709; Hélène Ménard, *Maintenir l’ordre à Rome: Ile-IVe siècles ap. J.-C.* (Epoques; Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2004), 155–159; Giovanni N. Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia),” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae: Suburbium* 2 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2004): 44–50. The summary of Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli, however, must not be

conviction is, however, slightly surprising. There have long been doubts among scholars with respect to the reliability of the *Acta*. Johann P. Kirsch already raised concerns over its trustworthiness and described it as an “erbaulicher Roman.”⁴ Later, in the 60s, Henneke Gülzow 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 Blutzweigen aufgenommen. Doch das beruht auf einer Legende.”⁵ Interestingly, those critical considerations about the death of Callistus attracted only marginal attention.⁶ In

considered an alternative solution to the death of Callistus but rather a (certainly not singular) mistake in the “Hippolytus” section: “Secundo 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).

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

5 Cf. Henneke Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie der römischen Gemeinde,” *ZNW* 58 (1967): (102–121) 117, esp. note 63. Although the final conclusions of Gülzow 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 $\pi\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\varsigma$, in a pounding-mill, usually operated by horses—but badly behaved slaves were also forced to perform there. Although $\pi\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ is a Latin word’s Greek transliteration and obviously derived from *pistrinum*, Gülzow returns it into Latin when he proposes, that “ $\pi\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\varsigma$ [hat] im Lateinischen u.a. puteum als Äquivalent.” (Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” [see above], 117). This word means not only a well, Gülzow points out, 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 was not 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 $\pi\sigma\tau\rho\acute{\iota}\nu\omicron\varsigma$, and the problem about the continuity and discontinuity of the tradition, it 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*.

6 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. Friedrich W. Bautz, “Calixt I. (Kallistos), Papst, Heiliger, † 222,” *Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* 1 (2d unchanged ed.; Hamm: Bautz, 1990): 858–859; Reinhard M. Hübner, “Kallist von Rom,” in *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur* (ed. Siegmund Döpp;

contrast, a study by Giovanni N. Verrando,⁷ 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 to 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 to begin with the oldest objective witness to the martyrdom of Callistus. Even though the *Depositio martyrum* cannot be considered the first account of him, it plays, as Verrando⁸ pointed out, a key role in the controversy, because of its trustworthiness. 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 336.⁹ However, most of the entries, including that of Callistus, may reflect a state of veneration in a relatively early, presumably pre-Constantinian period. The relevant entry reads as follows:

*pri. idus Octob. Callisti in via Aurelia. miliario III.*¹⁰

On the 14th of October, Callistus [was buried] at the 3d mile of the Aurelian way.

3d ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 420–422, others express serious doubts about his final sufferings, like Stuart G. Hall, “Calixtus I. (Bischof von Rom, reg. 218–222),” *TRE* 7 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981): 559–563 or Clemens Scholten, “Calixtus I,” *LThK* 2 (3d ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1994): 891.

⁷ Giovanni N. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti e il santuario della via Aurelia,” *Mélanges de l’École 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[ist]i Coemeterium [via Aurelia]” [see note 3], 44–50).

⁸ Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1039.

⁹ Cf. Michele R. 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), 45–58.

¹⁰ *Depositio Martyrum* (72,14 M.).

The fact that Bishop Callistus has been added to the martyr-calendar reflects an active annual liturgical remembrance on the 14th 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*.¹¹ There is the questionable authorship¹² and the controversial discussion¹³ on

11 The text for this examination is based on the edition of Paul Wendland, ed., *Hippolytos: Refutatio omnium haeresium* (GCS 26,3; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 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, JbAC* 32 (1989): 210–214.

12 The discussion about the identity and personal integrity of the Author is for this examination irrelevant. For further information on the problem see Miroslav Marcovich, “Hippolyt von Rom,” *TRE* 15 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986): 381–387; Clemens Scholten, “Hippolytos II (von Rom),” *RAC* 15 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1991): 492–551; Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman church* (see note 4); Manlio Simonetti, “Introduzione,” in idem, ed., *Ippolito: Contro Noeto* (Biblioteca Patristica 35; Bologna: EDB, 2000), 7–146; Gabriella Aragione and Enrico Norelli, eds., *Des 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 a systematic 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) 34–45.

13 The majority of the scholars agree with Miroslav Marcovich, that the historical value of Callistus’ *curriculum* is limited, other than it is written “with a pen dipped in gall, not in ink.” (Miroslav Marcovich, “Introduction,” in idem, ed., *Hippolytus: Refutatio omnium haeresium* [PTS 25; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986], [1–51] 40) The main reason for questioning the reliability is the obvious tendentiousness of the narrative. Some common anti-heretical topics had been discerned by Karlmann Beyschlag within the text, too (Cf. Karlmann Beyschlag, “Kallist und Hippolyt,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 20 [1964]: 103–124). This second one is at least a documented objection.

its reliability—especially that of the *curriculum*¹⁴ of Callistus—, yet the *Refutatio* remains the most important document about the life—and I would like to add, also the death¹⁵—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

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 Simon Gerber states: “Gülzows . . . Aufsatz zu Hippolyts Calixt-Biographie schätzt die historische Glaubwürdigkeit von Hippolyts Bericht zu hoch ein.” (Simon Gerber, “Calixt von Rom und der monarchianische Streit,” *ZAC* 5 [2001]: [213–239] 214 [note 3]; Cf.: Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” [see note 5]; Henneke Gülzow, *Christentum und Sklaverei in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* [Bonn: Habelt, 1969]). 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 endeavor 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. Ulpianus, *Ad edictum* 30 in *Digesta* 19,5,18 [ed. Theodor Mommsen, *Corpus iuris civilis* 1 (16th ed.; Berlin: Weidmann, 1954), 293 (578,29–30)]) preferably in *primo stadio* (Ausonius, *Epigrammata* 36,2 [ed. Roger P. H. Green, *The Works of Ausonius: with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 76]). 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, 460,21–22 Brandt]) or *stigmata* (στίγματα—Clemens Alexandrinus, *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 (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 8,4: *Inscriptiones Africae Proconsularis Latinarum, Supplementum alterum* No. 22691 = 11029 [ed. Hermann Dessau and Réne Cagnat; Berlin: Reimer, 1916]), *proconsul Africae* (ca. 161/162 C.E.) in order to escape his master and the impending punishment (Ulpianus, *De officio proconsulis* 8 in *Digesta* 48,18,1,27 [862–863 (842,ca.7–24) M.]). 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.

14 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,1–16 (246,14–248,27 W.).

15 Verrando is especially suspicious of 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].” (Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” [see note 7], 1039). Nevertheless, he had made no effort at all to find an answer for the silence. This disqualifying presupposition excuses him from having to deal with the witness of the *Refutatio*.

this monumental heresiography has been much discussed in the last decades.¹⁶ The explanations offered are more or less convincing, but in my opinion there is just one certain conclusion: a plausible interpretation cannot be mono-causal. On the one hand, the Callistus controversy cannot exclusively explain the huge effort to compose such a voluminous and elaborate 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.¹⁷ 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 to when it comes to the question of purpose. It is highly unlikely that a simple theological disagreement, mainly in the field of Christology,¹⁸ 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) payback 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 practice¹⁹ implemented as a consequence

16 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* (NHS 19; Leiden: Brill, 1984), 8–9; Luise Abramowski, “Ein gnostischer Logos-theologe: Umfang und Redaktor des gnostischen Sonderguts in Hippolyts ‘Wiederlegung aller Häresien,’ ” in eadem, ed., *Drei christologische Untersuchungen* (ZNW Beihefte 45; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), (18–62) 19 (note 9); Marcovich, “Hippolyt von Rom” (see note 12), 383; Scholten, “Hippolytos II (von Rom)” (see note 12), 511–512; Ronald E. Heine, “The Christology of Callistus,” *JThS* 49 (1998): (56–91) 56–57; Castelli, “L'Elenchos” (see note 12), 26–29.

17 Clemens Scholten, “Autor, Anliegen und Publikum der Refutatio,” in Aragione and Norelli, *Des évêques* (see note 12), (135–166) 135–138.

18 Cf. Heine, “The Christology of Callistus” (see note 16); Gerber, “Calixt von Rom” (see note 13).

19 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

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 an elementary necessity²⁰ to relate his version to the *curriculum*²¹ of his antagonist soon after the beginning of Book 9 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 (πιστρῖνος), his Jewish debtors accuse him before the *Praefectus urbi* Fuscianus²² (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 (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. (189?–199?) of Rome exiles him to Antium with a monthly allowance. A few years later, Bishop Zephyrinus (199?–217?) entrusts him with organizing the κομητήριον²³ of the community.

heresies the Author had limited his approach to their “purpose and character.” Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 1, *prooemium* 8 (3,15–16 W.): ἀθέους αὐτοῦς ἐπιδειξωμεν καὶ κατὰ γνώμην καὶ κατὰ τρόπον καὶ κατὰ ἔργον.

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

21 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,1–16 (246,14–248,27 W.).

22 P.(?) Seius Fuscianus was a consul and *Praefectus urbi* in 188–189. According to the *Historia Augusta*, he was a fellow-pupil and friend to the later Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180). *Historia Augusta* 4: *Vita Marci Antonii Philosophi* 3,8–9 (BSGRT *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* 1, 49,18–23 Hohl; trans. David Magie, *The scriptores historiae Augustae* 1 [Loeb Classical Library 139; London: Heinemann, 1921], 139), cf. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani: saec. I, II, III* 7,2 (ed. Matthäus Heil and Klaus Wachtel; 2d ed.; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), s.v. S 317, p. 119–120.

23 Traditionally, this refers to the place that is nowadays called the Catacomb of San Callisto. Cf. Lucrezia Spera, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Appia),” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae: Suburbium* 2 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 2004): 32–44. Éric Rebillard, however, questions the traditional equation of κομητήριον 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: Cornell University 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; idem, “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,”

After the death of Zephyrin, Callistus obtained what he had “eagerly pursued”²⁴: 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 τοίῳδε ἴν.²⁵

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 sarcastic²⁶ 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.²⁷

[The Jews] stated, he is a Christian.

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 as 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:

in *Origine delle catacombe romane* (ed. Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai; Sussidi allo Studio delle Antichità Cristiane 18; Città del Vaticano: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Cristiana, 2006), 121–161.

24 Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,15 (248,17 W.): οὗ ἐθήρατο.

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

26 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.

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

κύριε Φουσκιανέ, μὴ σὺ αὐτῷ πιστεύε· οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶ Χριστιανός, ἀφορμὴν δὲ ζητεῖ θανάτου.²⁸

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 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.²⁹ Furthermore, after Callistus returns from Sardinia as a freedman, Bishop Victor “bans” him to Antium with “a certain monthly allowance.”³⁰ This regular payment by the church has to be interpreted as an acknowledgment of witness³¹ on the part of Victor and his fellow Christianities of Rome, rather than as an expression of a “forced exile.”³² 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 sentence in Sardinia.³³ Otherwise, the *curriculum* of

²⁸ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,9 (247,21–23 W.).

²⁹ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,10 (247,30–31 W.): ἐπιρώτα, τίνες εἶεν ἐν Σαρδονίᾳ μάρτυρες. See also 9,12,11 (248,2 W.) and Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 5), 113 (note 49).

³⁰ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,13 (248,10–11 W.): πέμπει αὐτὸν καταμένειν ἐν Ἀνθείῳ, ὅρισας αὐτῷ μηνιαῖόν τι εἰς τροφάς.

³¹ A *confessor*—but it was common for a charismatic-pneumatical office holder from the 2d century on, too—was not *per se* entitled to receive a *honorarium*. However, according to the testimony of the *Traditio Apostolica* 9 (FC 1, 238,1–21 Geerlings, 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. Cyprian, *Epistulae* 39,5,2 (CChr.SL 3B, 191,87–192,96 Diercks); See also Bernhard Kötting, “Die Stellung des Konfessors in der Alten Kirche,” *JbAC* 19 (1976): (7–23) 18–19; Georg Schöllgen, “Sportulae,” *ZKG* 101 (1990): (1–20) 2–4 and Bernhard Domagalski, “Der Diakonat als Vorstufe zum Episkopat,” *Studia Patristica* 29 (1997): (17–24) 17–20.

³² Cf. Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 5), 111–113.

³³ Louis 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.” (Louis Duchesne, *Le Liber Pontificalis* 1 [Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d’Athènes et de Rome 2, 3,1B; Paris: de Boccard, 1886], XCII–XCIII, here XCIII). He claims, that the *Depositio martyrum* lists only persons who had either died 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 the one hand,

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 important semantic phenomenon around the term μάρτυς. This expression was not distinctive³⁴ until mid 3d century C.E. The Greek noun μάρτυς as well as the verb μαρτυρέω simply meant “(be a) witness” or “testimony/to testify” without any further definition.³⁵ Moreover, it 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

some martyrs are listed even though some of them are not connected with Rome at all, like the martyrs of Carthage: Cyprian or 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) had 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 258 and are commemorated on the same day instead of on the individual dates of their own martyrdom. Cf. 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 9), 44–47 and Wischmeyer, “Die christlichen Texte” (see note 9), 45–55.

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

35 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 2d 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 is in the *Martyrium Polycarpi* 1,1 (OECT *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* 2,7–8 Musurillo). The Latin equivalent *martyr* appears in North Africa approximately 180. Around the turn of the 2d to the 3d 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, 862,32–33 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 (261,72–73 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 M. Schwemer, “Prophet, Zeuge und Märtyrer: Zur Entstehung des Märtyrerbegriffs 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.

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.³⁶ It is, however, remarkable that it characterizes 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 becomes 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 consensus³⁷ that the *Refutatio* was written after the death of Callistus:

³⁶ The Author refers to Justin as follows: “Tatian, however, although being himself a pupil of Justinus the Martyr” (Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 8,16 [236,6–7 W.]: Τατιανὸς δὲ, καὶ αὐτὸς γενόμενος μθητῆς 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.).

³⁷ Cf. Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 5), 114; Marcovich, “Introduction” (see note 13), 17, 40; idem, “Hippolyt von Rom” (see note 12), 381; Scholten, “Hippolytos II (von Rom)” (see note 12), 498; Perrin, “Rom und das westliche Abendland” (see note 3), 691, and see Castelli, “L’Elenchos” (see note 12), 21, especially note 2. From 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, *Hippolytus and the Roman church* [see note 3], 288–289). Brent obviously assumes that the *curriculum* of Callistus simply serves the aim of a 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, prooemium 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. Cf. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman church* (see note 3), 287–289. On the heresiographical concept of Eusebius of Caesarea see Meike Willing, *Eusebius von Cäsarea als Häreseograph* (PTS 63; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), esp. 455–506. Without any further argumentation, but in order to support his own hypothesis, Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)” (see note 3), 46 clearly refuses it.

ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ὁ θαυμασιώτατος Κάλλιστος συνεστήσατο· οὗ διαμένει τὸ διδασκαλεῖον φυλάσσον τὰ ἔθη καὶ τὴν παράδοσιν.³⁸

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”³⁹ 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 on.

Of course, it could be in the interest of the Author to avoid mentioning the death of his opponent in the *Refutatio*, especially if it was, as the *Acta* claim, 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. 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 250. He, or more precisely, the clergy of Carthage, thereupon received a sarcastic letter from Rome,⁴⁰ which forced him to explain himself and his not very exemplary behavior.⁴¹ His assumed slip-up was corrected by his martyrdom during the Valerian persecutions in 258, as his legacy as well as the later reception impressively demonstrate.⁴² Even the *Depositio martyrum* could potentially testify to the mighty power of a fulfilled martyrdom. If the Author of the *Refutatio* and a certain *Hippolytus presbyter* listed in the *Depositio martyrum*⁴³ are identical persons, as scholars propagated for a long time, or if they are at least linked, as Allen Brent⁴⁴ proposed, the entry of the 13th of August would refer to an obviously heterodox teacher who was clearly venerated by the majority church after his death in exile.

³⁸ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,12,26 (251,2–4 W.).

³⁹ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 9,11,3 (246,8 W.): τὸν ἐνδομυχοῦντα αὐτῷ ἰόν.

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

⁴¹ Cyprian, *Epistulae* 20,1,1–2 (106,1–107,15 D.).

⁴² 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: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter* (ed. Johan Leemans; Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses, Bibliotheca 241; Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 65–86.

⁴³ *Depositio martyrum* (72,2–3 M.): idus Aug. Ypoliti in Tiburtina. et Pontiani in Callisti.

⁴⁴ Cf. Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman church* (see note 3), 204–367.

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*, as the *Acta Callisti* claim, 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!⁴⁵ 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 agrees with Miroslav Marcovich and considers the main purpose of the biography to be a “regrettable vitriolic ‘character assassination.’”⁴⁶ 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 the 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—reason⁴⁷ 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.⁴⁸ And such an approach is only reasonable if his intimate counterpart never had a second—violent—one.

⁴⁵ 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-187 and mid-189. Therefore the legal process of Callistus and the beginning of the sentence in Sardinia had to be taking place in this period. Cf. *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* (see note 22), s.v. S 317.

⁴⁶ Cf. Marcovich, “Introduction” (see note 13), 40.

⁴⁷ The classical solution since Döllinger is to interpret the controversy as a fight for the bishop’s see, especially in combination with Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 1, *prooemium* 6 (3,1–10 W.). 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. 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 Gieseler* (Regensburg: Manz, 1853), 123–125, 229–231.

⁴⁸ See Gülzow, “Kallist von Rom” (see note 5), 113; Hall, “Calixtus I.” (see note 6), 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*⁴⁹ claim to know more and fill the gaps. They present a vivid narrative relating the last weeks and sad destiny of the slave-bishop. As set out below, many of their details are novel-like and they can hardly be taken as an historical account.

A fire seriously damaged the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline Hill. Consequently Emperor Alexander (222–235) ordered the consul Palmatius⁵⁰ 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*)⁵¹ to capture many Christians and the blessed Callistus (*ubi collecta erat multitudo Christianorum cum B. Calixto*).⁵² There he met the old priest (*senex presbyter*) Calepodius,⁵³ who explained to him the reason for the blindness which plagued the soldiers, as a wonder of God. During an offering on the Capitoline Hill, *virgo templi nomine Juliana*⁵⁴ cried out that the God of Callistus is the living and true God (*Deus Callixti, ipse est Deus vivus et verus*).⁵⁵ 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 Simplicius⁵⁶ and his household, healed the wife

⁴⁹ *Acta Martyrii Sancti Callisti* (ed. Johannes Bollandus, *Acta Sanctorum* 54 [Okt. VI; 2d ed.; Bruxelles: Culture et civilisation, 1853], 439–441) = *Acta S. Callisti Papae Martyris Romae* (PG 10:114–120).

⁵⁰ 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 3d century. *Acta Callisti* 1–5 (439–441 B.). Cf. Verando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1061.

⁵¹ *Acta Callisti* 3 (440 B.). The name *urbs 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 *classiarii*, 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. Chrysogono* (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* 17 [141,1 D.]; cf. Claudia Lega, “Castra Ravennantium,” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae* 1 [Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1993]: 254–255).

⁵² *Acta Callisti* 2 (439 B.).

⁵³ *Acta Callisti* 2 (439 B.). As for the case of Calepodius, see below, page 408 and note 69.

⁵⁴ *Acta Callisti* 3 (440 B.).

⁵⁵ *Acta Callisti* 3 (440 B.).

⁵⁶ A senator named Simplicius has not come down to us from the beginning of the 3d century, but the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* knows a Simplicius, though in the context of the so-called

of a certain Felix, named Blanda,⁵⁷ and had them baptized by Callistus, altogether sixty-eight persons. Emperor Alexander was truly displeased. He had all of them beheaded and the body of Calepodius cast into the Tiber at the Lycaon island (*in Tiberim ante insulam Lycaoniam*).⁵⁸ This happened on the 1st of May. Callistus, who at that time was hiding in the house of a certain Pontianus (*domo Pontiani juxta urbem Ravennatium*)⁵⁹ 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*).⁶⁰ The Emperor got to know the hiding place of

martyrs of Cappadocia. Remarkably, he not only has the same feast as Bishop Callistus, but the entry of the Cappadocian martyrs follows immediately that of Callistus. *Acta Callisti* 4 (440 B.); *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* Oct. 14 (ed. Giovanni Battista de Rossi and Louise Duchesne, *Acta sanctorum* 64 [Nov. II,1; Bruxelles: Apud Socios Bollandianos, 1894], [1–148], 132). Cf. Hippolyte Delehaye, “Commentarius perpetuus in Martyrologium Hieronymianum,” in *Acta sanctorum* 64 (Nov. II,2 [ed. Hippolyte Delehaye; Bruxelles: Culture et civilisation, 1931]), 556.

57 The married couple mentioned here is fictional as well. *Acta Callisti* 5 (440 B.). Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1061.

58 *Acta Callisti* 6 (441 B.). 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 5th–7th centuries. It is likely that this particular name was established in everyday speech before it was integrated into those texts. Margaret A. Brucia assumes therefore a common use before the beginning of the 6th century (Margaret A. Brucia, *Tiber Island in ancient and medieval Rome* [Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1991], 28–55). Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1063–1068; Giuseppe De Spirito, “Insula Lycaonia,” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae* 3 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1996): 97–98.

59 *Acta Callisti* 6 (441 B.). 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 ecclesiae* 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—from the late 5th century, and even these facts are clearly subject to significant uncertainty, their historical value for the 3d century should be considered as non-existing. See also Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1060–1062; Giuseppe De Spirito, “Domus Pontiani,” *Lexicon topographicum urbis Romae* 2 (Roma: Edizioni Quasar, 1995): 162.

60 *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.). 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 Giovanni 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 B. De Rossi, *La Roma sotterranea cristiana* 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

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.⁶¹ 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*).⁶² Seventeen days later, on the 14th of October, one of his priests, Asterius (*presbyter ejus*),⁶³ recovered the body of Callistus and buried it in the Catacomb of Calepodio (*in cymeterio Calepodii via Aurelia*).⁶⁴

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 12th of April, that Bishop Julius I. (337–352) is to be commemorated at the 3d milestone of the Aurelian way called “Callistus”: *prid. idus Apr. Iuli, in via Aurelia miliario III, in Callisti (Depositio Episcoporum [MGH.AA 9, 70,13 M.]*). The next available sources are the *Acta Callisti* and the *Liber Pontificalis*. Both referring already to a *cymiterio Calepodii* as a matter of course (*Acta Callisti* 9 [441 B.]; *Liber Pontificalis* 17 [141,5 D.]). Accordingly, the name of that particular catacomb at the Aurelian way had to have been changed after 352, but before the composition of the *Acta*, from Callistus to Calepodius. The question when and why this happened is not to be answered from the sources. 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. 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 3), 44–50. ⁶¹ *Acta Callisti* 8 (441 B.). 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. Cf. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1061.

⁶² *Acta Callisti* 8 (441 B.).

⁶³ *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.). An inscription, found in the Catacomb of Comodilla and dated in the 5th century, mentions a certain Asterius, who was commemorated, according to the inscription, on the 20th of October: *Inscriptiones christianae Urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores* 2 (ed. Giovanni B. de Rossi; Rome, 1888), 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 19th of October: *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* ([133] D./R.): *XIII KL NOUB IN HOSTIA. Asteri*. Later martyrologies however, as well as the *Acta Callisti* consider the 21st 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. Cf. Maria V. Brandi, “Asterio, santo, martire di Ostia,” *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 2 (Roma: Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense, 1962): 516–518; Victor Saxer, “Asterius, Mart.,” *LThK* 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1993): 1103.

⁶⁴ *Acta Callisti* 9 (441 B.).

While the *Refutatio* is in many cases far too subjective and polemical when it comes to Callistus, the *Acta Callisti* appear 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.⁶⁵

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 concern the bishop but are dominated by the narratives about consul⁶⁶ 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 only significant distinction between the deeds of the different members of the clergy is linked to their 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.⁶⁷ 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, Callistus plays such a subordinate role in his own *Acta*.

⁶⁵ According to Theofried 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 the 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 3d 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, "Martyrer und Martyriumsverständnis im frühen Christentum: Ursprünge eines geschichtsmächtigen Leitbildes," in idem, ed., *Martyrium, Hagiographie und Heiligenverehrung im christlichen Altertum* (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 christianization 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 (440–441 B.).

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*.⁶⁸ The otherwise completely unknown Calepodius⁶⁹ is not only introduced here as a presbyter of Callistus, but it is he who appears in

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: – –]lepodii[– – . At first sight it 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 (Figure 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-4th century by repeating the vague testimonies of *Liber pontificalis* 36 [205,3–4 D.]) 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* (2d ed.; Roma: 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 (439–441 B.). Further see Agostino 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 60), 226–228, 272–278; Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1060–1061; Sönke Lorenz, “Papst Calixt (217–222): Translationen und Verbreitung seines Reliquienkultes bis ins 12. Jahrhundert,” in *Ex ipsis rerum documentis: Festschrift 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).

a vision to Callistus shortly 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 Catacomb⁷⁰ 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 3d milestone on the Aurelian way can be traced back to the 3d century. However, the overwhelming majority of the locations mentioned⁷¹ in the *Acta*, e.g. the *regione urbe Ravennantium* or the *Insula Lycaonia* reflects a City of Rome known by the hagiographer. The introduction of the *domus Pontani*⁷² determined in Trastevere seems to be a typical motif of hagiographical literature.⁷³ 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*.⁷⁴ These geographical localisations reflect a City at the end of the 5th and beginning of the 6th 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* present him vaguely by using general terms. He appears as a *vero episcopus* who is saying pious (and doctrinally entirely correct)⁷⁵ words, and who is busy teaching and

⁷⁰ 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 (Figure 1) has first been built after the *Acta* had been written. Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1061.

⁷¹ See hereto the notes 51, 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 5th century. Such geographical specifications support not only the localisation of particular 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: 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 16); Gerber, “Calixt

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 numbers of successfully converted and baptized individuals.

To sum up, the *Acta* are 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 a historically 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 organizer-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”⁷⁶ 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,”⁷⁷ 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 from the fact that the exhibited reasoning is hardly enough to consider the note as

von Rom” (see note 13); Hermann Josef Vogt, “Die Trinitätstheologie des Papstes Kalixt I,” *Theologische Quartalschrift* 179 (1999): 195–209.

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

⁷⁷ Prinzivalli, “Callisto I, santo” (see note 2), 245.

historically correct, the manner of the assassination does not seem to be without (contemporary) analogy.⁷⁸ For instance, the opinion, or maybe more precisely, the speculation, that those similarities between the death of Callistus and that of Emperor Elagabalus (218–222), told in the *Historia Augusta*, are more than (un)fortunate coincidence, has still not lost its popularity.⁷⁹

Three accounts about the death of Emperor Elagabalus come down to us. The majority of the scholars agree that though Cassius Dio⁸⁰ is in general the most reliable of them, in the case of Elagabalus, the historical tradition of Herodian⁸¹ could be closer to the reality. Compared to them, the reliability of the *Historia Augusta* is in general thought to be dubious, as Theodor Mommsen⁸² already

78 The motif of a stone tied around the neck is not unknown in Christian—and especially 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. 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), 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 annum* 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, 499–583, on his death 517–525. The non-Christian historiography lends its weight to this motif, too, as the example of *Historia Augusta* indicates. Cf. below, note 83.

79 Although 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 3), 325–328, here 327–328. He recently stated, when speculating on the succession lists of the chronological 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 Aragione and Norelli, *Des évêques* [see note 12], 275–314).

80 Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana* 80,20,2 (ed. Ursulus P. Boissvain, *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt* 3 [Berlin: Weidmann, 1955], 472,28–473,4).

81 Herodian, *Regnum post Marcum* 5,8,8–9 (BSGRT, 122,2–13 Lucarini).

82 Mommsen already 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 Scriptorum 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

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.⁸³ Since Elagabalus appears as the prototype of a “bad emperor”⁸⁴ in the *Historia Augusta*, the scenes around the death of 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 by the *scriptores*. They often have additional punishments to offer in such cases: “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*).”⁸⁵ 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 the *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, cannot be assumed. Therefore, in accord with Pietrzykowski it can be asserted: “Die ähnlichen Umstände der Tode Elagabals und des Papstes Kallistus mögen ausschließlich ein Werk der Zufalls gewesen sein.”⁸⁶

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. Cf. Adolf Lippold, “Historia Augusta,” *RAC* 15 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1993): 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-P. Johne; Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), 11–23.

83 *Historia Augusta* 17: *Antoninus Heliogabalus* 17,1–3 (BSGRT *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* 1, 235,16–23 Hohl; trans. David Magie, *The scriptores historiae Augustae* 2 [Loeb Classical Library 140; London: Heinemann, 1924], 139–141).

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: Brill, 2008), 477–488.

85 *Historia Augusta* 20: *Gordiani tres* 13,8 (BSGRT *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* 2, 39,24–26 Hohl; trans. David Magie, *The scriptores historiae Augustae* 2 [see note 83], 405): *atque parum fuit quod senatus iudicaverat, illud populi iudicium fuit quod occisi tracti sunt et in cloacam missi*.

86 Michael Pietrzykowski, “Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal,” *ANRW* 2,16,3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986): (1806–1825) 1825.

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*.⁸⁷ According to Verrando, this motif represents a singular aspect of his martyrdom which has to be based on an unmodified oral tradition.⁸⁸ However, the unique character of the unburied body does not seem to be as singular as it is claimed to be. The *Acta* themselves report, for instance, that the *corpus sanctus* of Calepodius had spent ten days in the Tiber before it was recovered and buried properly.⁸⁹ 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 21th of October.⁹⁰

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 burials for criminals.⁹¹ 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* claim 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.⁹² Unfortunately for this assertion, the scholars and sources widely agree that the time of Alexander is marked by religious tolerance and broad syncretism.⁹³ Therefore, an official

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

88 See Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1060 (note 99) for further reference.

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

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

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* 18: *Severus Alexander* 22; 29; 43; 49 (BSGRT *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* 1, 267,6–268,2; 272,26–273,19; 285,8–286,2; 290,4–21 Hohl; trans. David Magie, *The scriptores historiae Augustae* 2 [see note 83], 219–221; 235–237; 265–267; 277–279); Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6,21.24.28 (566,22–568,14; 570,18–572,10; 582,1–13 S.); Cf. Marta Sordi, *Il cristianesimo e Roma* (Storia di Roma 19; Bologna: Cappelli, 1965), 233–246; eadem, *The Christians and the Roman*

persecution ordered directly by the Emperor appears rather unlikely. In order to rescue the historicity of the *Acta*, some scholars suggest that a local⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵

The *plebs*—so the hypothesis goes—has 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 favored⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ Secondly, the reliability of this particular annotation seems to be especially suspicious.⁹⁸ That means, this hypothesis is based on a dubious annotation of an

Empire (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 88–92; Dal Covolo, *I Severi e il Cristianesimo* (see note 3), 74–90; Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)” (see note 3), 46–47.

94 Sordi, *Il cristianesimo e Roma* (see note 93), 238–239; eadem, *The Christians* (see note 93), 86–88; Prinzivalli, “Callisto I, santo” (see note 2), 245 stresses: „ma di un brutale assassinio, avvenuto nel susseguirsi concitato di un tumulto.“; Verrando, “Cal(l)isti Coemeterium (via Aurelia)” (see note 3), 47.

95 *Historia Augusta* 17: *Antoninus Heliogabalus* 3,5 (225,11–14 H.; trans. 111–113 M.).

96 The core of this hypothesis goes back to Marta Sordi in the mid-sixties. She argues that, even though the *Historia Augusta* has some problems, this particular notice “è 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, Orma 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 (Orma F. Butler, *Studies in the life of Heliogabalus* [University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series 4; New York: MacMillan, 1908], 126). Also Stephen Stertz considers that this passage “has generally not been believed by modern scholars” (Stephen A. Stertz, “Christianity in the ‘His-

unreliable work. However, despite all doubts, the section could still be trustworthy. Therefore, thirdly, the *Historia Augusta* describes that Elagabalus had those *religiones et Christianam devotionem*⁹⁹ transferred in order to incorporate them with the cult of Elagabalus. It could be understood, as Marta Sordi did, that those cults are 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 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 worshipped at Rome save only Elagabalus.¹⁰⁰

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.¹⁰¹ The transfer of relics with extremely important

toria Augusta,' " *Latomus* 36 [1977]: [694–715] 699). 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 Sertz is odd, since the two certain characteristics, circumcision and abstention of pork, were common in many cults of the Middle East. Moreover, Christians refrained from both forms of ritual act. Pietrzykowski puts it in a nutshell: "Alles in allem: Das Christentum wurde zur Herrschaftszeit Elagabals geduldet, spielte aber in der Religionspolitik dieses Kaisers keine Rolle." (Pietrzykowski, "Die Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal" [see note 86], 1825); See also: Friedrich Stummer, "Beschneidung," *RAC* 2 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1954): 159–169; Martin Frey, *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal* (Historia Einzelschriften 62; Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989), 14–15.

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.

100 *Historia Augusta* 17: *Antoninus Heliogabalus* 3,4 (225,7–11 H.; trans. 111 M.).

101 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 the *Pontifex maximus*. Numerous inscriptions mention his entitlement in the first instance, before the pontifical one. Cf. *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 10: *Inscriptiones Bruttiorum, Lucaniae, Campaniae, Siciliae, Sardiniae Latinae* no. 5827 (ed. Theodor Mommsen; Berlin: Reimer, 1883); *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* 11: *Inscriptiones Aemiliae, Etruriae, Umbriae Latinae* no. 3774 (ed. Eugen Bormann; Berlin: Reimer, 1888). See also Georg Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (Handbuch der

symbolic 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 himself. 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 favor. More trustworthy sources¹⁰² 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 everyday life, without suffering negatively or enjoying positive discrimination.¹⁰³ There is no historically reliable evidence which would support the assumption that Elagabalus regarded the Christians with favor.¹⁰⁴ In this light, it is likewise difficult to propose a causal coherence between a hypothetical 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 11th of March and the hypothetical violent death of Callistus on the 27th of September is a gap of six and a 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

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 3], 236–238).

102 Cf. Herodian, *Regnum post Marcum* 5,6,3–5 (116,33–117,16 L.).

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

104 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).

nor the notice of the *Historia Augusta* can be falsified, because of a lack of any other relevant sources.

5. Conclusions

The previous survey illustrates unambiguously that the historical value of the *Acta Callisti* is very restricted. As Verrando pointed out correctly, the hagiographer, along with the compiler of the *Liber Pontificalis*,¹⁰⁵ reflects only commonly known traditions of Trastevere and the Catacomb of Calepodio at the *via Aurelia* at the end of the 5th and at the beginning of the 6th century C.E.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the *Acta* provide valuable information on the history of piety, on the topography of the late 5th century Rome, as well as on the development of the cult of the martyrs, and on the hagiographic tradition. The value of the *Acta* is—I would say—less than minimal for the 3d century, and thus also 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 the one 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*.

105 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 3), 47 wants to find an authentication of that information based on de Rossi. He even proposes that one of the brick stamps (*Callisti Domitiorum*) 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 5th 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* refers 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. Prinziavalli, “Callisto I, santo” (see note 2), 244–245. 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 Duchesne. *Liber pontificalis* (141,1–7 D.); cf. Duchesne, *Le liber pontificalis* (see note 33), XCIII and 141; Hall, “Calixtus I.” (see note 6), 362–363; Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1056–1058.

106 See Verrando, “La Passio Calisti” (see note 7), 1074–1076.

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* claim to know.

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 (337–352), perhaps led by similar interests to those of his successor Damasus I. of Rome (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*.¹⁰⁷ The connection between Callistus and Trastevere was (re-)gained through his building construction and other activities. In the 5th century pilgrimage put the life and death of the martyrs again in the center 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.

107 *Liber pontificalis* 36 (205,3–4 D.): “He constructed two basilicas, one in the City of Rome close to the forum and the other across the Tiber.”

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Figure

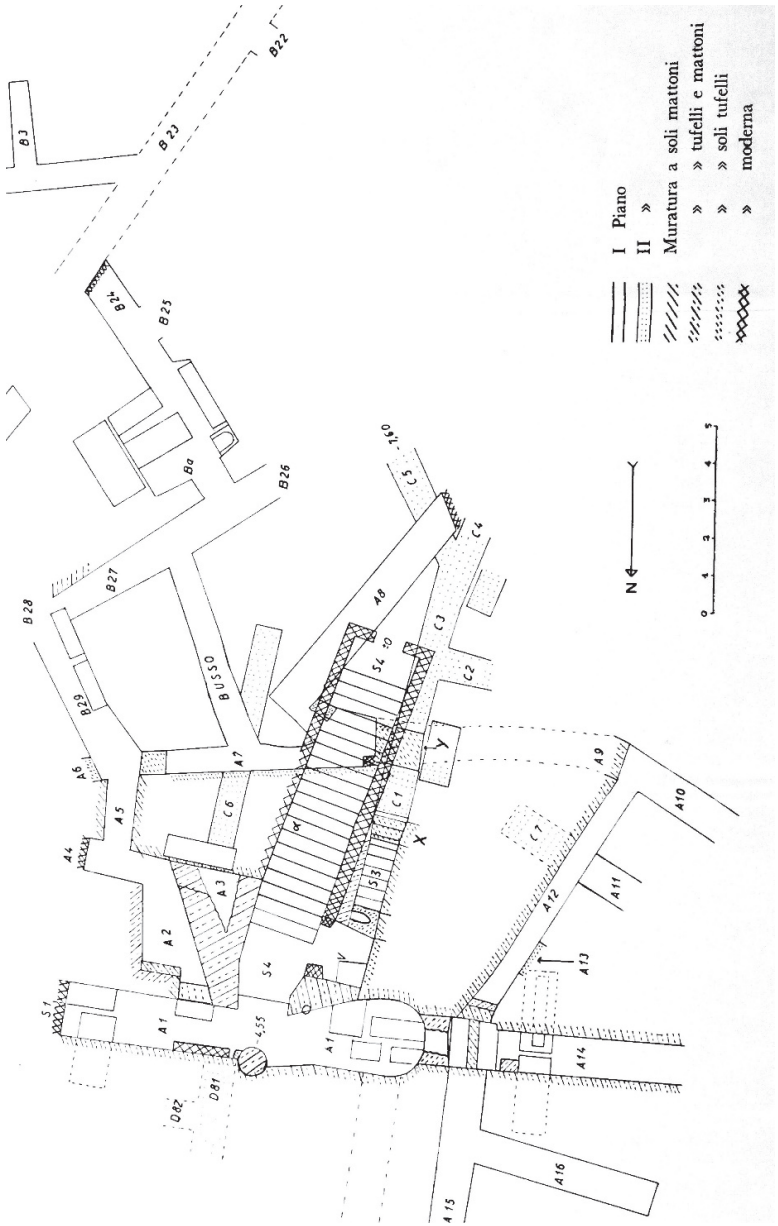


Figure 1: Floor plan of the earliest nucleus of the Calepodio catacomb. Aldo Nestori, “La catacomba di Calepodio al III miglio dell’Aurelia vetus e i sepolcri dei papi Callisto I e Giulio I,” *Rivista di Archeologia Cristiana* 47 (1971): (169–278), Tavola II.