



VALENTINE OF ROME (BHL 8465) – EXTRACTS FROM THE PASSIONES OF MARIUS, MARTHA, AUDIFAX AND ABACUC (BHL 5543)

I **mentioned** that I would not be translating the “Passio” of St Valentine of Rome, priest (BHL 8465), because it was in fact just an extract from the Passiones of Marius, Martha, Audifax and Abacuc (BHL 5543); and that these had been translated rather splendidly by Michael Lapidge.^[1] But very few people will ever see the Lapidge volume, and the interest in Saint Valentine is renewed every year. So perhaps I might be permitted to give the St Valentine portions of that text, without footnotes, here.

I have over-paragraphed it for readability online. I’ve also inserted the start-position of each of the 5 *lectiones* from the *Acta Sanctorum* text, although I’ve not compared the two word for word, except at the end.

[Lect. I] 6. Then Claudius arrested a certain holy man named Valentine, a priest, and shut him in prison, bound with shackles and chains. After two days he ordered him to be brought before him in his palace near the amphitheatre. When he was brought into his presence, he said to him: ‘Why do you not make use of my friendship, and live with the commonwealth of our state? I hear marvellous things about your wisdom; yet although you are wise, you cause offence by your vain superstition.’

Valentine the priest said in reply: ‘If you knew God’s gift, you too would rejoice, and your state with you, if you were to reject demons and handmade idols, and to confess one God, the Father omnipotent, and Jesus Christ, His Son, the Creator of all things, “Who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all things which are in them”.’

A certain legal adviser (legisconsultor), who was standing near Claudius, replied, saying in a clear voice to Valentine, the priest: ‘What is your opinion concerning the god Jupiter, or Mercury?’

Valentine the priest said in reply: ‘I say nothing concerning them except that I know them to be wretched and foul men, who lived their lifetimes in filth and carnal delights and scorn of their bodies. And if you were to show to me their ancestry, you would see how foul they were.’

[Lect. II] The legal adviser replied out loud: ‘He has blasphemed the gods and the rulers of our state.’

7. On the same day Claudius was listening more patiently, and said in reply to Valentine: ‘If Christ is God, why do you not reveal to me what is the truth?’

Valentine the priest replied: ‘Let your majesty hear it. Listen to me, O king, and your soul will be saved, and your state will be increased, and your enemies will be eliminated, and in all undertakings you will be the victor; you will enjoy dominion in this life and in the future world. I admonish you in respect of one

thing, that you repent for the blood of saints which you have spilled, and believe in Christ, and thus be baptized: and you will be saved.'

Then Claudius said to those standing near him: 'Listen, Roman citizens and assembly of the republic, to what a sane doctrine is being revealed by this man.'

In reply, Calpurnius the prefect said aloud: 'You have been deceived, Your Highness, by false teachings: but if it is right that we abandon what we have worshipped and adored from our infancy, you decide.'

[Lect. III] 8. At that same time Claudius changed his mind and in sadness handed him over to Calpurnius the prefect, saying: 'Listen patiently to him, and if what he says is not sane counsel, do to him what the laws stipulate for sacrilege; if not, let his just petition be heard.'

Then taking Valentine the priest, Calpurnius the prefect handed him over to a certain Asterius, his chief officer (princeps), saying: 'If you can reduce him by gentle persuasion, I will report your accomplishment to Claudius, and you will be his friend, and he will enrich you with riches and possessions.'

Taking him, Asterius led him to his own home. When he entered the house of Asterius, Valentine the priest fell to his knees and prayed, saying, 'O God, Maker of all things visible and invisible, and Creator of the human race, Who sent Your Son our Lord Jesus Christ that You might free us from this world and lead us from the shadows to the true light, Who commanded us by saying, "Come unto me all who labour and are heavily laden, and I will refresh you"; convert this house, and grant light to it after the shadows, that it may recognize You as God and Christ in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.'

[Lect. IV] 9. Hearing this, Asterius the agent said to Valentine the priest: 'I admire your good sense, in that you say that your Christ is light.'

In reply Valentine said in a clear voice, 'And truly, because Jesus Christ the Lord, Who was born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the virgin, is the true light, Who illuminates every man who comes into this world.'

Asterius replied, saying: 'If He illuminates every man, I shall now establish if He is God; if not, I shall extinguish your folly. I have an adoptive daughter, whom I have loved since infancy, and suddenly two years ago she was blinded and disfigured by cataracts. I shall bring her to you; and when she is cured, I will do everything you ask of me.' Valentine the priest therefore replied: 'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, bring her to me.'

Running off in some anxiety, Asterius brought the blind girl to Valentine the priest. Raising his hands to the heavens, Valentine, his eyes flowing with tears, said: 'O Lord God Almighty, Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies, Who sent Your Son Our Lord Jesus Christ to earth, so that You could lead us from the shadows to the true light, I call upon You as an unworthy sinner. But because You save all souls, and wish no one to perish, I therefore beseech Your mercy, so that all people may recognize that You are God, and the Father of all things and their Creator, Who opened the eyes in a man born blind, and even raised up Lazarus from the tomb when his corpse was already rotting. I invoke

You, Who are the true light, and the Lord of Principalities and Powers; let not “my will but Yours be done” over this girl Your servant, that You may deign to illumine her with the light of Your intelligence.’ And he placed his hand on her eyes, saying: ‘Lord Jesus Christ, illuminate Your servant, because You are the true light.’ And when he had said this, her eyes were opened.

[Lect. V] 10. When Asterius saw this, he and his wife fell at the feet of the blessed Valentine, and spoke as follows, saying: ‘Let us pray through Christ, through Whom we recognize the light, that you do what you know how to do, so that our souls may be saved.’

Valentine replied and said, ‘Do, therefore, what I say, and if you believe with all your heart, destroy all idols, and fast, and drop the charges against all (prisoners); let someone be baptized in making confession, and he shall be saved.’

Then he enjoined upon them a three-day fast. And because Asterius had many of the Christians in custody, he released them all. And when the three days of the fast were finished, and it was Sunday, Valentine baptized Asterius, together with all his household. And he summoned Callistus, the bishop, to him; when he arrived, he made the sign of the Cross on Asterius and his entire household—nearly forty-six persons of both sexes.

11. When Marius and his wife Martha, together with their sons, Audifax and Abacuc, heard of this event, that a blind girl had been illuminated by St Valentine and that as a result of the healing the entire household of Asterius had become believers, they came with great joy to the house of Asterius, giving thanks to God, and they remained there thirty-two days.

At the end of this time Claudius summoned Asterius, the chief officer (princeps). And it was reported to him that a girl had been healed of blindness in his house, and as a result of this miracle he had been baptized by Valentine in the name of Christ, together with his entire household.

Enraged, Claudius sent soldiers, and arrested all those whom he found in the house of Asterius. When they were brought before him in chains, among them being Marius and Martha, Audifax and Abacuc, all aristocrats from Persia who had come to pray at the shrines of the apostles, he ordered them to be separated from the assembly of other Christians, commanding that Asterius, with all his household be led in chains to Ostia, there to undergo trial with interrogation by means of torture.

...*

15. The emperor [Claudius] ordered that Marius and Martha, Audifax, and Abacuc should be kept for him, so that he could hear them in private audience; but he ordered that Valentine the priest should be beaten with staves and then undergo the sentence of capital punishment. He was beheaded on the Via Flaminia on 14 February. A certain matron, named Savinilla, recovered his body and buried it in the same place where he was beheaded; ** the Lord performs many miracles there, to the praise and glory of His name.

The section that I have omitted from the *Passio* of Marius etc, marked with *, is likewise

omitted from the extracts. But the text of the Valentine material does change, after the **. Instead of the “the Lord performs many miracles there, to the praise and glory of His name.”, we have:

accipiens coronam vitae, quam repromisit Deus diligentibus se. *** Ibi postea a Iulio Papa fabricata est ecclesia in honorem S. Valentini Presbyteri et Martyris, [ei ecclesia construitur.] et mirifice decorata, in qua devote petentibus beneficia Domini praestantur usque in hodiernum diem.

receiving the crown of life, which God has promised to those devoted to him.
*** There afterwards a church was built by Pope Julius in honour of St Valentine, priest and martyr, [the church was constructed for him] and adorned marvellously, in which the blessings of God for those who seek them devoutly shine forth until our own day.

Even in this, there are variations. The text above is given only in the “Roman” manuscript used by the *Acta Sanctorum* editors; many of the breviaries that they used have yet another piece of text instead:

capite plexum iuxta pontem Milvium, ubi postea S. Theodorus Papa ecclesiam Martyris nomine aedificavit, multisque locupletavit donis.

capite plexum near the Milvian Bridge, where later Pope Saint Theodore built a church in the name of the martyr, and enriched it with many gifts.

Not sure what “capite plexum” can mean – is it something about the head being buried there?

All this chopping and changing suggests that this “St Valentine” text, BHL 8465, being merely a set of extracts, was amended as those copying it saw fit. But then we are not dealing with a literary text here, after all, but a hagiographical one, where such tampering is routine.

Returning to the main text, it is interesting to see that the Latin “Seductus es” is rendered as “You have been deceived”. I’d wondered how to render this myself, perhaps as “You have been led astray”?

It is notable that in this text also, there is no romantic element.

1. ¹¹Michael Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs: Introduction, Translations, and Commentary*, Oxford University Press (2017), 420-435. [↩](#)