

SABAZIUS AND THE JEWS IN VALERIUS MAXIMUS: A RE-EXAMINATION

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There has long been accepted as a fact in the study of the cult of Sabazius an ostensible reference to Jews who, as early as 139 B.C., worshipped Sabazius, and were expelled from Rome by the *praetor peregrinus* Cornelius Hispalus.¹ The source of this information is often given without qualification as Valerius Maximus, 1, 3, 2. Even Eisele's thorough and generally sceptical article, s.v. 'Sabazius', in Roscher's *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie* (1909), accepts the statement and gives the usual indication of its source. The passage is generally cited as follows:

Cn. Cornelius Hispalus praetor peregrinus, M. Popilio Laenate, L. Calpurnio consulibus, edicto Chaldaeos citra decimum diem abire ex urbe atque Italia iussit, levibus et ineptis ingeniis fallaci siderum interpretatione quaestuosam mendacii suis caliginem inicientes. Idem Iudaeos, qui Sabazi Iovis cultu Romanos inficere mores conati erant, repetere domos suas coegit.

Now this statement was used in an influential article by Franz Cumont² as the keystone of an argument which sees widespread connections and even syncretism between Sabazius-cult and Judaism. Eisele generally accepts Cumont's thesis,³ and it has remained fairly standard since, together with the unquestioned acceptance of the ostensible reference in Valerius Maximus.

For instance, M. Hengel⁴ cites the passage, and then wavers between two interpretations: the transformation of Iao Sabaoth into Jupiter Sabazius by Valerius Maximus' source, or a reflection of an actual syncretism. He leans towards the latter view, that is essentially Cumont's thesis. Only in the notes is there awareness of the textual problem with Valerius Maximus, to be expounded more fully later in this paper.

M. Stern⁵ is more forthright in recognizing the textual problem, and actually prints Nepotianus' version (see below), which does not mention Sabazius, first, but does not seem to realize that there are problems even with Paris' epitome by itself. On the other hand, H. J. Leon⁶ upholds a view similar to the first of the views mentioned by Hengel, namely that Valerius' source confused the words Sabazius and Sabbath. Various other views are to be found summarized in Stern's commentary,⁷ but of them all, only that of J. Lewy⁸ comes close to divining what I consider to be the most likely situation, with his contention that Livy (taken to be Valerius Maximus' source) confused two *senatus consulta*, one dealing with the Jews and one with Sabazius. This seems, however, unlikely at so early a time, however misinformed Westerners may have been about Judaism, when Sabazius-cult was actually present for authors to know at first hand. Such a confusion is more likely to have taken place when Sabazius-cult was no longer around to be known.

If one goes back to the actual text of Valerius Maximus, one sees that the situation is anything but straightforward. In fact, before 1831, no reader of Valerius Maximus would have been able to read the text which is so often now taken for granted as reproducing what Valerius Maximus said. For instance, the Delphin edition of 1823, based on Kappius' edition of 1782, reads:

¹ More correctly Cn. Cornelius Scipio Hispanus, T. R. S. Broughton, *The Magistrates of the Roman Republic* 1 (1950), 482.

² CRAI 1906, 63 f. Some of my criticisms are anticipated by E. Bickermann, *RIDA* 5 (1958), 146, n. 25 and 148, n. 32.

³ *op. cit.*, 263-4.

⁴ *Judaism and Hellenism* 1 (1974), 263.

⁵ *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* 1 (1976), no. 147.

⁶ *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (1960), 3 f.

⁷ *op. cit.* (n. 5), 359.

⁸ *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (1960), 166. S. Alessandri, *Stud. Class. e Or.* 17 (1968), 187 f., wishes altogether to deny the historicity of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in 139 B.C. on the grounds that

(1) it is not mentioned by any other source, (2) it is historically improbable that such an expulsion took place during a period of good diplomatic relations between Rome and the Jews, and (3) it is unlikely that there was any permanent community of Jews in Rome at so early a time. The author is also troubled by the association of Sabazius with the Jews in Paris' version, something which he attributes to the probable intrusion of a marginal gloss. Although the article does not directly address the problem which concerns us here, it is valuable in showing that the same passage presents no small number of difficulties when considered from other angles. Nonetheless, I find it hard to accept Alessandri's conclusion that Valerius Maximus deliberately invented the expulsion-story, in order to find favour with Tiberius.

C. Cornelius Hispallus praetor peregrinus, M. Popilio Laenate, Cn. Calpurnio coss., edicto Chaldaeos intra decimum diem abire ex urbe atque Italia iussit, levibus et ineptis ingeniis fallaci siderum interpretatione quaestuosam mendaciis suis caliginem incientes. Idem, qui Sabazii Iovis cultu [simulato] mores Romanos inficere conati sunt, domos suas repetere coegit.⁹

In order to grasp the reality of the situation, one must realize that Valerius Maximus 1, 3, 2 falls in the middle of a long lacuna. The text as given by Kappius and all earlier editors, starting with the Aldine edition of 1502, rests on two MSS (at least there are two such MSS still extant), Codex Bernensis 366¹⁰ of the tenth century, and Codex Berolinensis 46¹¹ of the fourteenth. These two MSS (the epitome in the Codex Bernensis is not in the original hand, but in that of a corrector not much later than the first scribe)¹² insert into the lacuna part of an epitome of Valerius Maximus written, as we now know, by a certain Julius Paris, who seems to have lived c. A.D. 400.¹³

Now, in 1831, there was published by A. Mai a tenth-century Vatican manuscript (Vat. Lat. 4929) containing the complete text of Julius Paris' epitome.¹⁴ It is this manuscript and this manuscript alone which gives the text adopted in Kempf's standard 1854 edition, and all subsequent ones, that is to say, the text which we give at the beginning of this paper.

Now we are fortunate in possessing another late-antique epitome of Valerius Maximus, this one by Januarius Nepotianus, who appears to have lived not long after A.D. 500. His text too was edited at the same time by A. Mai, from Vatican MS 1321, which is said to be no older than the fourteenth century. Although Nepotianus in general is not so reliable as Julius Paris, and includes more material taken from sources other than Valerius Maximus, he also includes some Valerian anecdotes totally omitted by Paris.¹⁵ For the passage in question, Nepotianus reads :

Chaldaeos Cornelius Hispalus urbe expulit et intra dies decem Italia abire iussit, ne peregrinam scientiam venditarent. Iudaeos quoque, qui Romanis tradere sacra sua conati erant, idem Hispalus urbe exterminavit, arasque privatas e publicis locis abiecit.

This text and that of Julius Paris—from Vat. Lat. 4929—are printed by Kempf in parallel columns. The striking thing about this version of the passage is that the Jews are mentioned but all mention of Sabazius is absent.

In sum, then, there are three manuscript traditions of the relevant passage in Valerius Maximus: (1) that of Julius Paris' epitome as used by the Codices Bernensis 366 and Berolinensis 46, (2) that of Nepotianus' epitome, and (3) that of Julius Paris' epitome as represented by Vat. Lat. 4929. Of these only the third implies Sabazius-worship by Jews.

Now, when we look at the context, we see that Valerius Maximus was enumerating measures taken by Cornelius Hispalus against various foreign cults in 139 B.C. Both Julius

⁹ I bracket *simulato*, as it is an addition to the text repeated by Kappius from Torrenius' 1726 edition, but omitted by Kempf and more recent editors. I have also regularized Kappius' spelling and punctuation somewhat.

¹⁰ See Kempf's edition of Valerius Maximus (1854), 78.

¹¹ Kempf, op. cit., 81-2. The Berlin MS appears to be dependent on the Bern MS, at least in this particular.

¹² Kempf, op. cit., 78-9.

¹³ The dates given for Paris and Nepotianus are those given by Kempf, op. cit., 46.

¹⁴ The *editio princeps* of Paris' epitome is in vol. III, pt. iii of A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e vaticanis codicibus edita ab Angelo Maio* (1825-38). I have followed D. M. Schullian, *Studies in honour of Ullman* (1960), 93, in referring to this manuscript as Vat. Lat. 4929, although Kempf refers to it as 4229. G. Billanovich, *Aevum* 30 (1956), 319 f., wishes to date both Vat. Lat. 4929 and Bernensis 366 to the ninth century. He also wishes to ascribe to Lupus of Ferrières (d. 862) the insertion of material from Julius Paris into the lacuna in the text of

Valerius Maximus. He is of the opinion that both the text of Julius Paris used by Lupus and that of Vat. Lat. 4929 are derived from an edition made at Ravenna by a certain Rusticus Helpidius in the second quarter of the sixth century, as part of an historical and geographical encyclopaedia, including also such authors as Pomponius Mela and Vibius Sequester. Vat. Lat. 4929, in Billanovich's opinion, was written by Heiric of Auxerre (d. 876-7), a pupil of Lupus, and contains the same work as Rusticus' encyclopaedia.

We do not need here to pass judgement on the rightness or wrongness of Billanovich's arguments, which, nonetheless, appear to me more enthusiastic than objective. Suffice it to say that Billanovich nowhere addresses himself to our question, namely divergences between the Julius Paris of Bernensis 366 and that of Vat. Lat. 4929. If one accepts his arguments, then on the basis of the hypothesis here advanced, one would have to add to them that Heiric had before him a text of Nepotianus (or the like), whereas his master Lupus for some reason did not.

¹⁵ Kempf, op. cit., 67-9.

Paris' epitome and that of Nepotianus agree in mentioning the expulsion of the Chaldaeans. Then Julius Paris' epitome, as represented by tradition (1), mentions the expulsion of the Sabazius-worshippers, whereas Nepotianus' epitome mentions that of the Jews.

Let us put forward as a hypothesis, then, that the original text of Valerius Maximus mentioned three acts of Cornelius Hispalus: (1) the expulsion of the Chaldaeans, (2) that of the Sabazius-worshippers, and finally (3) that of the Jews. In accordance with this hypothesis we may presume that Julius Paris saw fit to mention (1) and (2), where Nepotianus mentioned (1) and (3). But either the scribe of the Vatican MS of Julius Paris, or someone on whom he depended, had before him the epitome of Nepotianus or something belonging to the same tradition, which retained the expulsion of the Jews. Perhaps misled by the fact that *qui* in Julius Paris had no expressed antecedent, and wishing to supply one, our scribe introduced the Jews from what was originally an entirely separate notice in Valerius Maximus, and proceeded to make Sabazius-worshippers of them. Again, granting the original hypothesis, other misleading factors may have been, firstly, the similarity of the word Sabazius to Sabaoth and Sabbath, which may have caused some ancient confusion and certainly has caused a great deal of modern speculation (see the literature referred to at the beginning of this paper, as well as the Excursus), and secondly similarity of phraseology, if, as seems likely, the words *conati erant* stood in both notices.

So it may be suggested that this piece of evidence for a conflation of Sabazius-cult with Judaism in antiquity, given its dependence only on a tenth-century MS of a late-antique epitomator of Valerius Maximus, and given also the possibility outlined above of how a confusion of two originally independent notices could have come about, is a very unsure base on which to make any statements concerning syncretism. It should be pointed out here that some of Cumont's subsidiary pieces of evidence have also fallen by the wayside. (1) The alleged epithet *Pankoiranos* for Sabazius, from a Bithynian inscription, is now read *Pagisaranos*. Cumont should have avoided this error himself, for at the time he wrote, the reading which held the field was *Pansaganos*.¹⁶ (2) The reputed use of *Hagios* to describe Sabazius in an inscription of Nicopolis ad Istrum is now known to be rather the local epithet *Arsilenos*.¹⁷ The considerations presented in this article can only serve to weaken Cumont's edifice even further, as they cast doubt on the reliability of the fundamental piece of evidence for the whole structure.¹⁸

EXCURSUS

The most recent treatment of the passage in Valerius Maximus is that by Marcel Simon in an article entitled 'Jupiter-Yahvé'.¹⁹ Here the possibility that Valerius Maximus, or his source, committed an error is discussed but dismissed. Rather the view is defended that Jupiter Sabazius was a formula equivalent to Yahvé Sabaoth, designed to make Judaism comprehensible and acceptable to pagans.

I find this difficult to believe. Even admitting the acceptability of the main equation, Yahvé-Jupiter, in Hellenized Jewish circles, one is left with the question as to the origin of the equation Sabaoth-Sabazius. Simon²⁰ does not seem to see any difficulty in assuming that Jupiter Sabazius would have been a comprehensible concept in the Rome of 139 B.C. Yet this is open to considerable doubt. If one looks at the earliest certain references to Sabazius, those in Aristophanes²¹ and Theophrastus,²² and the decree set up in Sardis in the reign of Artaxerxes III (admittedly known only from a reinscribed version),²³ one sees that Sabazius is in none of them identified with Zeus. In fact, in the Sardis decree, the worship of Sabazius is seen as being in conflict with that of the locally sanctioned Zeus. The Zeus-Sabazius identification makes its first recorded appearance in the long Pergamene inscription of

¹⁶ For this inscription and the history of its readings, see most recently E. Schwertheim and S. Şahin, *ZPE* 24 (1977), 260-1.

¹⁷ Mihailov, *IG Bulg* II, 678.

¹⁸ I would like to thank Professors A. Thomas Kraabel and Sherman E. Johnson for their help and suggestions in correspondence, which aided me in defining the ideas presented in this paper. Valuable suggestions were also made by the Editorial Committee.

¹⁹ *Numen* 23 (1976), 40 f., especially 52-6.

²⁰ *op. cit.*, 55.

²¹ *Wasps*, 8-10; *Birds*, 876; *Lysistrata*, 388; *Horae*, frag. 566 (Edmonds). All these seem to indicate that Sabazius is an ecstatic divinity.

²² *Charact.* 16, 4.

²³ L. Robert, *CRAI* 1975, 306-30.

135 B.C.²⁴ which records the establishment of the cult there by Stratonice, mother of Attalus III, who brought it with her from Cappadocia. These events could have taken place in 189/8 B.C. at the earliest (the year in which Stratonice married Eumenes II), and the identification with Zeus may have been an attempt to make the cult more acceptable at Pergamum. It certainly is no evidence for the common identification, at so early a time, of the two divinities in the general Mediterranean world. With the exception of our passage, which may well reflect an identification more current in Valerius Maximus' day than in 139 B.C., the next document in which the identification is made is a Bithynian inscription²⁵ of A.D. 99, and from that point on it is general.

The only article in the fairly extensive bibliography on this subject which emphasises the importance of Pergamum in the supposed identification of Sabazius with the Jewish god is that of E. Bickermann, 'The Altars of Gentiles',²⁶ not cited by Simon. But, on the whole, his conclusion that it would have to be Pergamene Jews who had come to Rome that Cornelius Hispalus expelled narrows the grounds on which the statement usually attributed to Valerius Maximus can be defended, and makes its reliability even less likely.

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²⁴ Dittenberger, *OGIS*, no. 331 = C. B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence* (1934), nos. 65-6.

²⁵ F. K. Dörner, *Inschriften und Denkmäler aus Bithynien* (1941), 62, no. 34.

²⁶ *RIDA* 5 (1958), 137 f., especially 148-50. See n. 2 above.