APPENDIX II

DID JOHN CHRYSOSTOM VISIT ATHENS IN 367/8?

George of Alexandria's life of John Chrysostom, written c. 620, mentions a visit by the latter to Athens after he had completed his studies in grammar and rhetoric with Libanius in Antioch.¹ Chrysostom Baur disregards the supposed incident, taking it as something that George simply invented as an encomiastic appreciation of John Chrysostom's rhetorical brilliance.² This interpretation is difficult to understand. For one thing, as Baur himself admits, George of Alexandria was little more than a compiler, and so the invention of such an oddly detailed account with a certain Attic flavor about it is rather surprising. The second objection is that George has fitted the incident quite precisely into a perfectly plausible space in the established chronology of John Chrysostom's life. Let us consider the chronology first, and then the content of the narrative.

Robert E. Carter in a 1962 article worked through the chronologies of Chrysostom's early years proposed by C. Baur, S. Schiwietz, A. Moulard, and others, and established convincingly that the saint finished his education with Libanius in July 367, and received baptism at Easter 368.³ In between was a period of about nine months which cannot otherwise be accounted for. It is here that George of Alexandria inserted the narrative about Chrysostom's visit to Athens. There can be strictly speaking no objection to it on the ground of material possibility or motivation. For one thing, John's visit was quite short. The sailing season was still suitable for a swift passage from Antioch to Achaea in late July or August, although a return would not have been easy until the westerly March tradewinds. It is said that he left not long after the attack on Hellenic religion made in front of the archon Demosthenes because

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¹ The relevant sections are found in Douze récits byzantins sur Saint Jean Chrysostom, ed. François Halkin (Brussels 1977), 76–110. Hereinafter cited as V. Chrysostomi.
the bishop of Athens wanted to ordain him. But if John left "secretly" (λαθοργα), as George of Alexandria's narrative indicates, the young scholar may have returned to Antioch by an unplanned route on land or sea or both.

George of Alexandria's biography indicates that Chrysostom went to Athens "wishing to complete the rest of his education" (πληρωσα τα λειτουργα της παιδευσεως). His monastic biographer Palladius knew him only in later life. Robert Carter has shown that his account of Chrysostom's youth is hazy about chronology and not entirely trustworthy. Even if Palladius had known of the visit to Athens, he would have found it difficult to believe that the mature Christian intellectual that Chrysostom had become had ever harbored the desire to improve upon the rhetorical skills that had made him one of the most prolific Greek writers of the Christian sophistic. The young man often has ambitions that the old man looks back upon with a spirit of disdain or amusement. It would be naive to suppose that Chrysostom was a mature Christian homilist and exegete even in his youth, or to deny that youthful ambition inspired by Libanius' teaching once glowed within him. He may, in fact, have been under considerable family pressure to emulate the career of his father Secundus, who had attained the rank of magister militum per Orientem. As A.H.M. Jones has pointed out: "The service was often in practice hereditary. . . ." By 367, to be sure, with the demise of Julian the Apostate in the past, Christian sophists will have been more common even in Athens, although it was the professional competence of the teacher rather than his religion that decided students to study with him. Basil of Caesarea's studies in Athens are proof of this, as is the fact that Eunapius of Sardis' tutor, Prohaeresius, was a Christian (ante 363). There is nothing, strictly speaking, against Chrysostom's having gone to Athens on the ground of plausibility. The problem lies, rather, in the seeming lack of veracity of George of Alexandria's narrative.

We may safely regard the story of the pagan rhetor Anthemiou's possession by a daemon in front of the Athenian council for affirming the Hellenic peace of the gods as a later invention, although it is not impossible that Hellenes riding the fence over their religious allegiances sometimes suffered the physical symptoms of taboo hysteria.

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4 Supra, Ch. IV, Sect. 2. V. Chrysostomi, 87f.
5 V. Chrysostomi, 88, line 12.
6 V. Chrysostomi, 78, line 12.
7 Carter, "Chronology," 357.
8 Jones, Later Roman Empire, 599.
9 Infra, Ch. V, Sect. 3.