The Homilies of John Chrysostom

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The Author and His Work

St John Chrysostom (c.347-407) was the most important Father of the Orthodox Church. Archbishop of Constantinople from 398 to 404, he was officially recognized as a Doctor of the Orthodox Church by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 due to his vast and important theological writings. He was the most productive among the Church Fathers, with over 1,500 works written by, or ascribed to him. His name was firmly associated with the Liturgy, but above all he was appreciated for his numerous sermons and as an extraordinary preacher. From the 6th century on he was called Chrysostomos, the “golden mouthed”. The fact that over 7,000 manuscripts including his writings exist, attests to the importance and great distribution of his works, many of which were translated into other languages. The great majority of them date after the Iconoclasm.

The homilies of John Chrysostom were read during the Service of the Matins (Orthros) mainly in Byzantine monasteries. They were transmitted in various collections or series from which only a few were selected for illustration.

Illustrated homilies of John Chrysostom

The exact number of illustrated manuscripts containing Chrysostomic sermons is unknown, but their number is extremely low in view of the very rich

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1 The translation of his relics to Constantinople and their deposition in the Church of the Holy Apostles marks the beginning of his cult in Byzantium. The Orthodox Church commemorates him on 27 January, 13 November and also on 30 January together with the other two Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus. On his biography and cult, see Brändle, Johannes Chrysostomus; Krause, Homilien, pp. 1-2; Tiersch, Johannes Chrysostomus. See also the vast bibliography on the Church Father at: <http://www.cecs.acu.edu.au/chrysovto几乎所有>Bibliography of the Church Father.

2 On the importance of John Chrysostom, see Krause, Homilien, pp. 2-3.

3 Madigan, Homilies, lists 30 manuscripts from the 9th to the 14th centuries. This unpublished thesis should be used with caution, since it contains numerous errors; for a critical view, see Krause, Homilien, pp. 8-10. Krause’s publication lists only those of the 11th and 12th centuries.
text tradition. Furthermore, as Weitzmann remarked: “Considering the wealth of illustrations in Gregory manuscripts, the contrast with what one finds in the homilies of John Chrysostom is striking.” The very rich production of the author, as well as the absence of a liturgical edition of his sermons, may explain this discrepancy. Moreover, the Chrysostomic sermons were edited in several different editions and collections.

No illustrated Chrysostom manuscript with figural illustration is known before the Iconoclasm. Weitzmann posited the existence of illustrated Chrysostom manuscripts before the Iconoclasm on the basis of the illustrated Chrysostom passages in the Sacra Parallela, *Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Par. gr. 923.* He concluded: “Yet there are two illustrations which can only be explained by the homily text and on these alone rests the evidence for an early illustrated John Chrysostom.” A Latin illustrated John Chrysostom manuscript, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, cod. 1007 [Salisb. 181], executed in c.800, was also used in support of this theory, although it displays elements that greatly differ from the Byzantine tradition. In the lack of more convincing evidence, the possibility of the existence of illustrated Chrysostom manuscripts before the Iconoclasm must remain open.

From the 9th century on, the main principle ruling the illustration of the Homilies of John Chrysostom is the decoration with headpieces or strips and large opening initials inserted at the beginning of each sermon. Some manuscripts also contain full-page miniatures and in very rare cases framed miniatures are incorporated. These types of illustration are not bound to specific sermon collections as we will see. The codices to be presented below all share common features: they are large-scale manuscripts (at least 30 cm high) and their text is written in minuscule script in two columns. Regarding the layout of the pages there is consistency in the hierarchy of the script, according to which the headings are written in a more careful manner and sometimes even with use of gold.

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5 On this manuscript, see chapter 29 in this volume.
6 Weitzmann, Sacra Parallela, p. 244.
7 Weiner, Illuminierte Handschriften, no. 26; Krause, Homilien, pp. 3-4.