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interpretation of the 387 Riot of
the Statues**

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A Pagan and Christian interpretation of the 387 Riot of the Statues

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Abstract

This paper explores the conflicting accounts of John Chrysostom and Libanius regarding events related to the 387 Riot of the Statues in Antioch. I argue that the differing accounts were both authors' attempts to shape the perception of the persons responsible for attaining the pardon. As such, each author was putting forth a respective model for politics in the late fourth century. For his part, Chrysostom held up the pardon as proof of a new Christian model for politics in which bishops and monks held sway with imperial officials and the emperor. Libanius, meanwhile, ignored the role of bishops and monks and instead credited the imperial official Caesarius and the emperor Theodosius. In doing so, he was ignoring the growing role of Christian officials in imperial politics in favor of a more traditional model of politics. Despite the fact that neither author was entirely accurate, there is clear evidence that Chrysostom's version of events carried the day. Ultimately, the events following the riot demonstrate the power of the Christian pulpit in the late fourth century. In short, Chrysostom used his sermons, which were both more frequent and earlier than Libanius' orations, to build an audience that was hostile towards Libanius' version of events.

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In the spring of 387, the citizens of Antioch fearfully awaited news of the emperor Theodosius' reaction to the famous "Riot of the Statues." During the riot, an event sparked by the announcement of a new imperial tax, statues of the emperor had been toppled and imperial portraits destroyed.¹ Immediately following the riot, many of its participants were arrested and put to death. But defacing the imperial visage was a capital offense, and the Antiochenes had every reason to believe that further punishment was imminent. Libanius relates that many citizens fled the city fearing that the response would be severe.² In an effort to assuage the emperor, Antioch's bishop Flavian departed for the capital only a couple of days after the riot.³ Within two weeks of the event, two imperial officials--Caesarius, the *magister officiorum*, and Ellebichus, the *magister militum*--arrived from the capital to investigate on behalf of the emperor.⁴ They arrested the town councilors, deprived the city of its metropolitan status, closed the public baths, hippodrome and theaters. Following an investigation lasting two days, Caesarius departed for Constantinople to report the findings to Theodosius. Less than three weeks later, news reached the city that Theodosius had decided to be merciful and the city and its councilors were pardoned.⁵

During the six dramatic weeks between the riot and the arrival of the pardon, John Chrysostom delivered twenty homilies that provide a great deal of information about the riot and the events that followed.⁶ The other main source is Libanius, who composed five orations and described events in his autobiography.⁷ While the authors give similar accounts of the cause of the

¹The chronology of the riot has been revised in a comprehensive study by Frans Van de Paverd, *St. John Chrysostom: the homilies on the statues* (Rome, 1991). All dates for events and Chrysostom's homilies are taken from Paverd 363-364. He places the riot on either February 25 or 26, 387. For analysis of the riot see: Dorothea French, 'Rhetoric and the rebellion of A.D. 387 in Antioch,' *Historia* 47 (1998), 468-84; J.N.D. Kelly, *Golden mouth: the story of John Chrysostom ascetic, bishop, preacher* (Ithaca, 1995), 72-82; Glanville Downey, *Ancient Antioch* (Princeton, 1963), 187-192. For the causes of the riots see: Robert Browning, 'The riot of A.D. 387 in Antioch: the role of the theatrical clagues in the later empire,' *Journal of Roman Studies* 42 (1952), 13-20.

²Libanius, *Oration* 23.2; *Oration* 19.45, in *Libanius selected works* II, Loeb Classical Library 452, trans. A.F. Norman, ed. G.P. Goold (Cambridge and London, 1977). Much of the fear according to Libanius stemmed from the executions of many of Antioch's leading citizens, including his own grandfather, by Diocletian following Eugenius' revolt in 303.

³February, 27 or 28.

⁴March, 15.

⁵Paverd notes that the exact date is difficult to determine, but places the arrival around April, 10.

⁶Traditionally, there are twenty one homilies associated with the Riot of the Statues. The first was actually delivered prior to the riot, leaving twenty homilies related to events surrounding the riot.

⁷Libanius, *Selected works* II, in Loeb Classical Library 452, trans. A.F. Norman, ed. G.P. Goold (Cambridge and London, 1977). Libanius, *Autobiography and selected letters* I, in Loeb Classical Library 478, trans. and ed. A.F. Norman, (Cambridge and London, 1992). See also: Paverd, 16, notes 3 and 4; Paul Petit, 'Recherches sur la publication et la diffusion des discours de Libanius,' *Historia*, 5 (1956), 493 ff.

riot and the events immediately following it, they differ dramatically in assigning credit to the persons responsible for attaining the pardon. Chrysostom credits the embassy of Antioch's Bishop Flavian, Antioch's monks and Theodosius himself for saving the city.¹ Libanius, on the other hand, gives credit to Theodosius and his imperial officials.

The conflicting claims of Chrysostom and Libanius have been the subject of recent analysis by several scholars. This scholarship, particularly that of Frans van de Paverd and Dorothea French, has established that neither Chrysostom nor Libanius was entirely accurate in his description of the events leading to the pardon of Theodosius. The differences between the accounts have been explained as a product of differing rhetorical strategies, as characteristic of the eulogistic style of speech, and as the attempt by Chrysostom to comfort his congregation and to proselytize.² While these explanations are useful, they are not complete.

The focus of this study is going to be the mutually exclusive claims regarding the the person responsible for convincing Theodosius to pardon Antioch and its Town Councilors. My argument is that neither account is, nor were they intended to be, an accurate reflection of events. Instead, the differing accounts of Libanius and Chrysostom were the product of both author's attempts to shape the Antiochenes perception of the events leading to the pardon. No small issue was at stake, because the pardon represented access to the emperor, and therefore whoever received credit for the pardon would also be perceived as the link between the city and the imperial throne.³ Thus, each author interpreted and shaped events in order to ensure that the pardon would serve to validate their respective political vision.

The second aim of this study is an attempt to gauge the accuracy of both accounts. In other words, to attempt to determine which of the authors' accounts best reflected circumstances that resulted in the pardon. The final aim will be to examine how each author's accounts were received by the populace of Antioch. In the end, I will suggest that the Riot and the events surrounding it provide a snapshot of the very fluid political landscape of the late fourth century.

The first of Chrysostom's homilies, delivered just after Flavian had departed, illustrates clearly his view of the role he envisioned for Flavian.⁴ 'The sacred laws take and place under his hands even the royal head,' Chrysostom explains, adding that 'when there is need of any good thing from

¹Chrysostom, *Homiliae XXI de statuis ad populum Antiochenum habitae*, PG 49: 15-222. Translations of these homilies are adapted from W.R.W. Stephens, 'Twenty one homilies on the statues,' in *A select library of Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers of the Christian church*, ed. P. Schaff, (New York, 1889), ser. 1, 9: 317-489.

²Paverd, 135-148; French, 469-477; Kelly, 80-81.

³For discussions of the relationship between emperors and cities see: Peter Brown, *Power and persuasion in Late Antiquity: towards a Christian empire* (Madison, 1991), 89-118; Christopher Kelly, 'Emperors, government and bureaucracy,' in *CAH 13* (Cambridge, 1998), 154-55; Brian Ward-Perkins, 'The cities,' in *CAH 13*, 402; Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the rhetoric of empire* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1991), 136-138.

⁴February, 28.

above, the Emperor is accustomed to fly to the priest: but not the priest to the Emperor.¹ Indeed, Chrysostom claims that compared to the emperor, the priest has greater weapons, and the right to speak freely.² He adds that God would give Flavian the ability to speak and soften the heart of the emperor.³ The intervention of God would, according to Chrysostom, ensure that the petition of the bishop would be successful.⁴

The twenty-first homily, *In Episcopi Flaviani reditum*, delivered two weeks after the pardon had reached Antioch, provided Chrysostom with an opportunity to explain fully the role that Flavian had played in obtaining the pardon.⁵ In his account, the emperor had been assuaged by God and Flavian, and the city had been saved as a result. Chrysostom says:

The city has won renown, because when such a danger had overtaken her, passing by at once all those who were in power, those who were surrounded with much wealth, those who possessed great influence with the Emperor, it fled for refuge to the Church, to the Priest of God, and with much faith, rested itself entirely upon the hope which is from above!⁶

Here, Chrysostom depicts the city as having been saved precisely because it bypassed traditional civic leaders and turned instead to Flavian. Chrysostom adds that Theodosius has won renown because, ‘it was made apparent that he would grant to the priests that which he would not to any other.’⁷ Both the city and the emperor should be praised for their reliance upon the bishop. For Chrysostom, the reliance of the city upon its bishop and the emperor's willingness to listen to him reveal a new political order in which Christianity and its bishops are central.⁸

Chrysostom goes on to relate in detail the arguments that Flavian employed. There are striking similarities between Flavian's arguments to Theodosius, as reported by Chrysostom, and Chrysostom's prediction in the third homily of what the bishop would say to the emperor. These similarities suggest that Chrysostom was not relying upon information he received from Flavian upon

¹Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 3.2 (PG 49.50). See also *Ad Pop.* 3.1 (PG 49.48), where Chrysostom says that Flavian's speech to the emperor will be shaped by knowledge of the divine laws.

²Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 3.2 (PG 49.38).

³Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 3.2 (PG 49.49).

⁴See also *Ad Pop.* 6.2 (PG 49.83-84), where Chrysostom describes how God slowed down the first embassy of city officials from Antioch so that Flavian could overtake them and reach the emperor first.

⁵April, 25.

⁶Chrysostom, *Ad pop.* 21.1 (PG 49.211).

⁷Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.2 (PG 49.213).

⁸For the increasing political influence of bishops see: Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 71-158; Drake, *Constantine and the bishops: the politics of intolerance* (Baltimore and London, 2000), 393-440; Alan Wardman, *Religion and statecraft among the Romans* (Baltimore, 1982), 135-168; Glen Bowersock, ‘From emperor to bishop: the self-conscious transformation of political power in the fourth century A.D.’ *Classical Philology* 81 (1986), 298-307.

his return, but instead constructed his account of this meeting on the basis of what he believed ought to have happened.¹ For this very reason, however, the arguments are useful for insight into his understanding of the relationship between the bishop and the emperor. Chrysostom says that Flavian told Theodosius that he should consider:

what it is for all posterity to hear it reported, that when so great a city had become liable to punishment and vengeance, that when all were terrified, when its generals, magistrates and judges were all in horror and alarm, and did not dare to utter a word on behalf of the wretched people; a single old man, invested with the priesthood of god, came and moved the heart of the Monarch . . . and that the favor which he bestowed upon no other of his subjects, he granted to this one old man, being actuated by a reverence for God's laws!²

In this passage, Chrysostom again emphasizes that the old political order has been supplanted by a new Christian one. Chrysostom claims that Flavian said to the emperor: 'Some when they go on an embassy bring gold, and silver, and other gifts of that kind. . .but I come into your presence with the sacred laws; and instead of all other gifts, I present these; and I exhort you to imitate your lord. . . .'³ Theodosius in turn, according to Chrysostom, responded,

How, said he, can it be anything wonderful or great that we should remit our anger against those who have treated us with indignity. We, who are ourselves but men; when the Lord of the universe, having come as He did on earth and having been made a servant for us, and crucified by those who had experienced His kindness, besought the Father on behalf of his crucifiers, saying 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do?''⁴

Thus, in Chrysostom's account, the emperor viewed the pardon within the larger Christian context of Christ's forgiveness. By placing the emperor's reasoning in this context, a new political order is implied. Rather than the traditional civic leaders, it is now the bishop or priest who holds sway with the emperor and becomes the link between the emperor and the city. It is also significant that in this instance Chrysostom refers to 'bishops' thereby

¹Paverd, 149-158, discusses the argument in detail and shows that Flavian's speech is very similar to Chrysostom's prediction of what the bishop would say in *Ad Pop.* 3 (PG 49.47-60). Kelly, 81, suggests that Chrysostom's speech was largely the product of his own imagination.

²Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.4 (PG 49.219).

³Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.3 (PG 49.219).

⁴Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.4 (PG 49.219-220).

implying that any bishop, not just Flavian would hold a similar relationship to the emperor.¹

After illustrating the prominent role Christianity had played saving the city, Chrysostom turns to the lesson that non-Christians should draw from these events. He says:

Let the Gentiles henceforward be ashamed, or rather instead of being ashamed, let them be instructed; and leaving their native error, let them come back to the strength of Christianity, having learned what our philosophy is, from the example of the Emperor and the Priest.²

For Chrysostom, the manner in which the city was saved by the emperor and priest is clear proof of the power of Christianity and should inspire non-Christians. While proselytizing non-Christians was clearly one of Chrysostom's goals, it does not seem to have been his only one. Rather, he also wanted to show the power of the bishop and God in relation to the emperor. For example, according to Chrysostom, Flavian told the emperor that non-Christians were eagerly awaiting his sentence, and that if it were to be favorable they would say,

how great is the power of Christianity, that it restrains and bridles a man who has no equal upon earth; a sovereign, powerful enough to destroy and devastate all things; and teaches him to practice such philosophy as one in a private station had not been likely to display.³

While one product of Theodosius listening to the bishop will be the conversion of non-Christians, it is important to realize that Chrysostom is just as intent upon showing that a new political order is in place. The nature of this order is more clearly stated when, according to Chrysostom, Flavian told Theodosius that by sending the bishop on this embassy Antioch had 'pronounced the best and the most honorable judgment on you, which is, that you respect the priests of God, however insignificant they may be, more than any office placed under your authority!'⁴

¹Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.2 (PG 49.213). 'The priest has won renown from God and men and this affair has also adorned the Emperor with more splendor than the crown. First, in that it was made clear that he would grant to the priests that which he would not to any other.' This is one of a couple of instances where he uses a plural form for priest and is significant because he is emphasizing in a more general manner about the unique status priests have with Christian emperors.

²Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.4 (PG 49.220). For similar passages regarding the lesson that non-Christians would learn by Theodosius listening to Flavian see: *Ad Pop.* 17.2 (PG 49.175); *Ad Pop.* 21.3 (PG 49.217).

³Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.3 (PG 49.217).

⁴Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.3 (PG 49.219). Chrysostom's point is that the priests' power is insignificant by traditional standards, but that Theodosius by listening to the bishop has made it

In addition to the role Flavian played, Chrysostom earlier had ascribed a significant contribution to the monks of Antioch. In *Homily 17*, he describes the arrival of the imperial officials Caesarius and Ellebichus, their tribunal, and the events that followed. According to Chrysostom, the officials jailed the city councilors and were under orders to execute them.¹ Before the execution could be carried out, however, a group of local monks, headed by the famous 'barley eater' Macedonius, intervened and convinced the two officials to suspend the sentences.² In Chrysostom's account, the monks convinced the officials that they could travel to the capital and attain a pardon for the councilors. At first, the officials hesitated, saying that 'they had no power over the outcome. For it was unsafe and dangerous not only to insult the Emperor, but even to dismiss those who had insulted [him], when taken, without punishment.'³ The monks, however, persisted until the judges were convinced to suspend the sentences. The judges were in fact so impressed that, according to Chrysostom, they refused to let the monks undertake this long journey.⁴ Instead, they promised to carry the petitions themselves with the hope of receiving a pardon for the councilors.⁵ The judges, Chrysostom reports, believed that they 'would successfully importune the Emperor to dismiss all anger (which, indeed, we are now expecting that he will).'⁶

Libanius' *Oration 21* tells a very different story from that of Chrysostom. Libanius says that Caesarius personally encouraged him, prior to departing for Constantinople to report to Theodosius, by saying that none of the imprisoned councilors would lose their lives.⁷ Libanius also says that Caesarius, 'cheered us also by telling us of the report he was going to send on our behalf to the emperor we had wronged--namely that it was more creditable for the emperor to forgo punishment than to exact it. . . .'⁸ Thus, Libanius confirms the optimism described by Chrysostom at the time Caesarius departed for the capital. The important difference, however, is that there is no indication that the imperial officials went beyond the scope of their authority by suspending

significant. By using the plural form of priests Chrysostom suggests that this special relationship was not limited to Flavian, but was one that all bishops and priests (terms that he uses interchangeably in the homilies) would enjoy.

¹Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 17.2 (PG 49.174-175).

²Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 17.2 (PG 49.174-175). On the intervention of the monks see Theodoret, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.19, 2d ed. by F. Scheidweiler and L. Parmentier. Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller, 44 (19), (Berlin, 1954). Tr. B. Jackson, *The ecclesiastical history of Theodoret*. In *A select library of Nicene and Post-Nicene fathers of the Christian church*, ed. P. Schaff and H. Wace, ser. 2, 3: 1-159 (New York, 1892); Theodoret, *Religious History* 13, ed. P. Canivet and A. Leroy-Molinghen, 2 vols. (Paris, 1977-79). Tr. R.M. Price *A history of the monks of Syria*, (Kalamazoo, 1985).

³Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 17.2 (PG 49.174).

⁴Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 17.2 (PG 49.174).

⁵Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 17.2 (PG 49.174).

⁶Chrysostom, *Hom.* 17 (PG 49.174).

⁷Libanius, *Or.* 21.8. 'He sat me down as his side, clasped my arm, and by so doing gave me encouragement to believe that none of those arrested would lose his life, and that indeed was enough for me.'

⁸Libanius, *Or.* 21.10.

the sentences.¹ There is also no mention of the role the monks played in persuading the imperial officials. Because Chrysostom's optimism would seem unfounded if Caesarius were directly defying an imperial order, and because Libanius does not suggest that he had done so, it seems very likely that a report back to the emperor was part of the officials' initial orders.²

The scenario that seems most likely is that the imperial officials initially had the authority to suspend the death sentences of the city councilors before reporting back to Theodosius. Libanius' failure to mention the monks does not rule out their intervention, but it does raise doubt about the extent of their role. In Chrysostom's account, the monks' intervention is the sole reason that the councilors were not executed immediately. The likely reason for this exaggeration is that Chrysostom was shaping the events to fit his own understanding of the relationship between spiritual and temporal authority. The monks, like Flavian, had stepped into a role traditionally dominated by those 'who were surrounded with untold wealth, and those who had great license of speech toward the emperor. . . .'³ In doing so, they represented a new political order in which Christianity was at the forefront. In contrast, Libanius gives a more traditional picture of the judges meeting with local elites, including himself, before making their decision.⁴

Libanius and Chrysostom's choice of the person ultimately responsible for the final pardon of the city also reveals these competing claims. As discussed earlier, Chrysostom's final homily gives credit to Flavian for persuading the emperor and saving the city. Libanius, however, makes no mention of Flavian and instead gives credit to Caesarius and Theodosius. Libanius' *Oration 20*, which praises Theodosius, contrasts sharply with Chrysostom's description of Flavian's role. Describing the emperor's pardon, Libanius says that Theodosius drew up a list that covered the following categories: 'property, shows, baths, refugees, those whose life is in hazard, the restoration of the city authorities to their position. . . .'⁵ As Paverd has pointed out, only Caesarius could have told the emperor about the status of the councilors, since it was he and Ellebichus who had imprisoned them after Flavian had already departed for the capital. Therefore, it is certain that Caesarius had met with the emperor before the final pardon was issued.⁶ Ultimately, there is no way to determine conclusively how much of a role either Caesarius or Flavian played. Paverd, using internal evidence from both Chrysostom and Libanius, argues that both Caesarius and

¹See also *Or.* 21.14, where Libanius, who was not afraid to take any opportunity for personal credit, says that he rode ahead of Caesarius to address him, but was prevented from making a long address because Caesarius' report was so favorable.

²On the duties of the *magister officiorum* see A.H.M. Jones, *The later Roman empire 284-602: A social economic and administrative survey* (Norman, 1964), 368-369; M. Clauss, *Der magister officiorum in der Spätantike* (Munich, 1980).

³Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 17.2 (PG.174).

⁴Libanius, *Or.* 21.6-16.

⁵Libanius, *Or.* 20.38.

⁶Paverd, 139.

Flavian played some part in attaining the final pardon from Theodosius.¹ The only thing of absolute certainty is that Theodosius was aware of the status of the city councilors (i.e. that the death sentences had been suspended), and that this knowledge could only have come from Caesarius. Thus, the only tangible fingerprints in this case are those of Caesarius. Accordingly, it is possible that Flavian had little or no influence over the emperor's decision since we only have Chrysostom's claim of Flavian's meeting with Theodosius. There is no hard evidence, however, either to substantiate, or to rule out, Chrysostom's description of Flavian's role. In my view, the most likely scenario is that Flavian met with Theodosius, but that the advice of his trusted official Caesarius was critical for the outcome of events.

Regardless of which account is more accurate, Chrysostom and Libanius were able to make their competing claims regarding the pardon because of the manner in which it reached Antioch. Neither Flavian nor Caesarius personally delivered the pardon to Antioch. Rather, it arrived via imperial courier. Thus, a certain amount of ambiguity would have existed regarding the person responsible for swaying Theodosius. Chrysostom states that Flavian, because his rate of travel would be too slow, sent 'forward another person in his stead; one among those who were skilled in horsemanship, to be the bearer of good news to the city.'² If Flavian sent forward this courier before or after he himself had departed from Constantinople is difficult to determine, because Chrysostom's narrative is unclear. Not surprisingly, he is more concerned with highlighting the fact that Flavian had not selfishly delayed the arrival of the pardon for his own personal glory.³ Either way, Chrysostom's description of events makes it clear that Flavian did not personally deliver the pardon to Antioch.

Libanius states that it was Caesarius who attained the courier, presumably after he had personally received the pardon from the emperor, to ensure that the pardon reached Antioch quickly.⁴ Determining which account is more accurate is difficult given the nature of the evidence. Paverd supports Libanius arguing that Caesarius as *magister officiorum* had access to the public post, while Flavian did not.⁵ While this conclusion is tempting, it does not take into account the ability of the emperor to grant Flavian special privileges for Flavian.⁶ In the end, there is simply not enough evidence to determine who was secured the courier to take the pardon to Antioch. What is important, however, is that both accounts make it clear that when the pardon was

¹Paverd, 135-149. Kelly, 79-80, accepts this conclusion. Downey, 192 also says that both Caesarius and Flavian played a role in gaining the pardon from Theodosius. For a discussion of the chronology of Flavian's and Caesarius' arrival in Constantinople see Paverd, 144.

²Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.4 (PG 49.220).

³Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 21.4 (PG 49.220-221).

⁴Libanius, *Or.* 21.23.

⁵Paverd, 47. He is citing Jones, *LRE*, 369.

⁶Anne Kolb, 'Transport and communication in the Roman state: The *cursus publicus*,' in *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire* (London and New York, 2001), ed. Colin Adams and Ray Laurence, 95-105. Kolb cites an example of Constantine securing passage on the *cursus publicus* for a bishop and his officials, 101-102.

delivered neither Caesarius nor Flavian was in Antioch. Thus, both Chrysostom and Libanius were able to claim credit for their respective sides.

For the citizens of Antioch, there existed two mutually exclusive accounts of the persons responsible for the events leading to the pardon. After the pardon arrived, delivered personally by neither Flavian nor Caesarius, the citizens had the opportunity to choose which one they believed. The partisan accounts of Chrysostom and Libanius almost necessitated a choice, since acceptance of one could only be achieved by rejection of the other. Libanius himself hints at this competition, saying that his aim was to render a 'report to try to inform posterity of your (Caesarius') services in our hour of need.'¹ Given the fact that Libanius was writing at a later date than Chrysostom, and given the nature of Chrysostom's narrative, this statement can be viewed as an assertion that his account is accurate while Chrysostom's is not.

As to which account was more accepted by the citizens of Antioch, there can be little doubt. In his autobiography, Libanius frankly admits with no small amount of bitterness that his orations were not well received. In a describing his audiences during the orations he delivered following the riot, Libanius says:

My audiences were not now as they used to be, formed of the governor and great numbers he used to bring from the many provinces. The reason was that here I saw independence, there subservience involved; here I had an audience of friends, there one in which the unfriendly appeared also, and that put a blight on my oratory.²

Unfortunately, Libanius does not specify which of his orations were delivered at this time, but he does say that they were 'numerous.'³ Regardless of which orations Libanius delivered, this passage suggests that his audience was smaller, as well as occasionally hostile. In *Oration 23*, composed before the arrival of the pardon, Libanius says that many people fled the city following the riot.⁴ More importantly, he relates that nearly all of his students quit attending classes.⁵ Thus, as the events unfolded Libanius, by his own admission, was left without his usual audience.

Chrysostom, on the other hand, relates that his audience grew substantially in the aftermath of the riot. In *Homily 15*, he tells how the congregation grew following the closure of the hippodrome and orchestra: 'Before this, many of our own people used to hasten to them; but now they are all fled from there to the church, and all alike join in praising our God!'⁶ Thus, Chrysostom had a

¹Libanius, *Or.* 21.1.

²Libanius, *Autobiography*, sec. 254.

³Libanius, *Autobiography*, sec. 253.

⁴Libanius, *Or.* 23.2; *Autobiography*, sec. 252.

⁵Libanius, *Or.* 23.2.

⁶Chrysostom, *Ad Pop.* 15 (PG 49.153)

large and fearful audience on which to impress his version of events.¹ Perhaps even more important than the size of his audience was the timing of Chrysostom's twenty homilies.² As mentioned earlier, many of these were delivered nearly contemporaneously to the events they describe. Libanius, however, only delivered *Oration* 23 before the pardon arrived. Thus, for nearly two months, Chrysostom had the field to himself to shape the views of his audience. This perhaps best explains why Libanius' version of events was not well received. Chrysostom had already given his listeners a version of events which they accepted. In the end, Libanius' orations proved to be too little, too late.

Conclusion

Peter Brown has argued that the riot offered Theodosius a chance to decide who would "reap the credit for changing his heart to mercy."³ Apparently relying on Chrysostom's version of events, Brown argues that Flavian and the monks were successful in changing Theodosius' mind and thus shared credit with the emperor for saving the city.⁴ For Brown, this episode signifies that imperial favor was now firmly on the side of Christianity. However, because the pardon was delivered by an imperial courier rather than personally by either Flavian or Caesarius, the situation was more ambiguous than Brown suggests. This ambiguity allowed both Chrysostom and Libanius to offer competing claims about who was responsible for saving the city. Thus, rather than being a situation where imperial favor was granted, the pardon created an atmosphere where the appearance of imperial favor could be fought for and won on a local level.

For his part, the popular young presbyter John Chrysostom held up the arrival of the pardon as proof for a new political order in which Christianity, its bishop, and its monks were at center stage. One of Antioch's leading spokesmen Libanius attempted to counter with a vision of traditional imperial politics, which offered an imperial official and the emperor as the saviors of the city. Despite the fact that the evidence suggests that neither of the authors' accounts was complete, Chrysostom seems to have carried the day. In this sense, Peter Brown's argument that this event was a sign of the emergence of Christian bishops and monks into the political realm is borne out by the evidence.⁵ In this particular case, however, the Christian bishop and monks

¹Regarding the composition of Chrysostom's audiences in both Antioch and Constantinople see: Wendy Mayer, 'John Chrysostom and his audiences: distinguishing different congregations at Antioch and Constantinople,' *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997), 70-75.

²On the importance of the Christian sermon see: Cameron, *Christianity and the rhetoric of empire: the development of Christian discourse* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1991), 47-88.

³Brown, *Power and persuasion*, 106.

⁴Brown, 106-107; Peter Brown, *Poverty and leadership in the later Roman empire* (Hanover, 2002), 70.

⁵Brown, *Power and persuasion*, 71-117.

appear to have emerged not by imperial favor, but rather by the timeliness and persuasiveness of John Chrysostom's homilies.