

# Deflecting Attention and Shaping Reality with Rhetoric (the Case of the Riot of the Statues of A.D. 387 in Antioch)

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**ABSTRACT:** The Riot of Statues in Antioch 387 A.D. has been considered a relevant event not only because of the violence displayed but also because of the number and importance of the ancient sources that inform us of the happenings. Libanius of Antioch, a pagan sophist, and John Chrysostom, one of the Fathers of the Church, provide us with literary and rhetorical works that underline the different religious ideology and political views at the core of the struggle between paganism and Christianity in Late Antiquity.

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**RESUMEN:** La revuelta de las estatuas, acaecida en Antioquía en el año 387, constituyó un evento de importancia no sólo por la magnitud de los hechos violentos que en ella se produjeron sino porque tenemos importantes fuentes que nos informan detalladamente de lo ocurrido. Tanto el sofista pagano Libanio de Antioquía como Juan Crisóstomo, uno de los padres de la Iglesia, nos proveen con obras literarias de marcado carácter retórico que enfatizan las diferencias de estilo, ideología religiosa y política que estaban en el seno del conflicto paganismo-cristianismo en la Antigüedad tardía.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** christianity, John Chrysostomus, Libanius of Antioch, paganism, riot, rhetoric, Statues.

**RECEPCIÓN:** 31 de mayo de 2008.

**ACEPTACIÓN:** 30 de octubre de 2008.

# Deflecting Attention and Shaping Reality with Rhetoric (the Case of the Riot of the Statues of A.D. 387 in Antioch)\*

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*Reality (one of the few words which means nothing without quotes).* This statement belongs to Vladimir Nabokov,<sup>1</sup> although it can be applied to the events of the Riot of the Statues in Antioch 387 A.D.<sup>2</sup> It was just one event, but with two versions (the orations XIX-XXIII of the pagan sophist Libanius of Antioch, the Homilies on the Statues of the Christian John Chrysostom), and behind each version, a religious, political background. Rather than establishing dogmas or narrating the historical accounts, I would like in this article to put forward some hypotheses to discuss.

My working assumption is that the Riot of the Statues provided Libanius and John Chrysostom an ideal platform on which to project to their conceptions of politics, religion and culture. In this respect, I will aim to underline the fact that both of them used rhetoric not only as a useful, communicative tool but also as a device to help shape reality according to their own ideology. More specifically, this paper will deal with the transformation of the concept of the city through

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\* I would like to thank the support of the Secretaría de Estado de Universidades e Investigación del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia de España. An earlier version of this article was delivered in a seminar at the Centre for Late Antique Religion and Culture-University of Cardiff. It is a pleasure to acknowledge my gratitude to Dr. Nicholas Baker-Brian and Mark Hunter, and Nichola Durrant.

<sup>1</sup> Nabokov, Vladimir, 1971, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Browning, Robert, 1952, pp. 13-20; French, Dorothea, 1998, pp. 468-484; Leppin, Hans, 1999, pp. 103-123; Morais, Érica, 2006; Quiroga, Alberto, 2008; Van de Paverd, F., 1991.

the eyes of a pagan sophist and a pagan priest whose ideologies were expressed after the Riot of the Statues.

The scene was highly fascinating: a mostly Christian city —Antioch—, a pagan sophist who lied, a Christian preacher who tried to persuade his audience with subliminal and indirect messages, an ancient bishop who travelled from Antioch to Constantinople leaving his dying sister alone, an emperor prone to be persuaded. Everything happened in the transition towards the Christian Empire.

To begin with, a brief historical account: in February 387, an extraordinary tax (extraordinary because of its amount and its exceptional nature)<sup>3</sup> was demanded by the emperor Theodosius (either to commemorate his son and his own anniversary as emperor, or to support financially his continuous wars against barbarians and usurpers), something which gave rise to protests from the Antiochenes. As a result of these protests, a spontaneous demonstration went through Antioch, gathering more and more angry participants; the upraising soon became violent (because of the devil's intervention, according to Libanius and Chrysostom accounts),<sup>4</sup> until the imperial statues and portraits were stoned, humiliated and torn down. The reaction of the authorities, as quick as it was violent, took the shape of arrests and executions, and the population of the city fled in panic at the slaughters.

Resultingly, Emperor Theodosius sent two emissaries to Antioch —Caesarius, *magister officiorum*, and Hellebichus, *magister militum*— in order to evaluate the situation. There were executions and trials to judge the behaviour of the population —especially the councillors—. In the meantime, one of the bishops of the city, Flavian, travelled to Constantinople as an ambassador to plead with Theodosius to forgive the

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<sup>3</sup> On the nature of the tax see Browning, Robert, 1952, p. 14; Depeyrot, G., 1996, pp. 20-23; King, Noel, 1961, pp. 50-65. See also Theodrt., *HE*, V, 20; Zos., *HN*, 4, 41.

<sup>4</sup> Chrys., *PG*, 49, 211; Lib., *Or.*, XIX, 29; XXII, 10.

city. Finally, the emperor succumbed to his pleas and forgave Antioch and the precautionary punishments (the closure of public places such as baths, and hippodrome, the distribution of food, the loss of the status of metropolis) were annulled and removed.

However, there are still some unsolved gaps regarding important issues about the riot. Firstly, we don't know what kind of tax was imposed on the Antiochenes. There are some hypotheses on what the tax really was: *lustralis collatio, superindicito* on the *possesores*, a "crysargion"… but none of these works completely. Secondly, Libanius and Chrysostom reached the same conclusion about the responsibility of the violent acts: superhuman beings were the instigators of the riot, affecting social groups (the theatrical claque in Libanius' opinion, non-Antiochenes according to Chrysostom).<sup>5</sup> However, this is a rhetorical *topos* to deflect the guilt of Antioch during the riot.

With regard to the culpability of the violent acts, there is an episode in the *Or.*, XIX, of Libanius which has been read in condemnatory terms:

There arrived the decree concerning the gold, something long dreaded. What up to then seemed incredible was only too credible: the land could not bear the burden, and so those who had heard the directive cast themselves to the ground, the majority revealing their utter incapacity: however much they might wish it, they would be incapable of doing what they could not, and their persons would be in the direst straits. They had recourse, then, to the support of the god, invoking his name, for he could persuade you to remit some of the burden.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Chrys., *PG*, 49, 38; Lib., *Or.*, XIX, 28. Browning, R., 1952, argued that the theatrical claque was behind the violent events (this theory has been supported by Liebeschuetz, John Hugo, 1972, p. 215). However, this idea found strong opposition in Van der Paverd, Franz, 1991, pp. 31-33.

<sup>6</sup> Lib., *Or.*, XIX, 25. Libanius' translations are taken from Norman, A. F., 1969, p. 285.

And further, in XX, 3:

Our city let herself down towards a good emperor when, after the recital of the imperial rescript, it tried to shake off the bonds of discipline by having recourse ostensibly to the god, for obviously such words could not remove any of its grievances.<sup>7</sup>

A propos of this chapter, A. F. Norman has said that the protesters were mainly Christians and the responsibility for the protest was placed on Christians: “The protesters are thus mainly Christians — a word he cannot bring himself to use: they form a πονηρὰ συμμορία, *Or.*, XX, 3”.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Paul Petit read this passage more moderately and considered that Christians and pagans alike shared the guilt for the riot:

Païens et chrétiens participent à l'affaire, sans distinction (...) Le rôle primordial, la claque du théâtre et les étrangers mis à part, revient encore aux jeunes gens: couper les cordes des lampes qui éclairent les bains n'est qu'une sorte de vaste chahut (...) D'ailleurs parmi les exécutés de la première heure se trouvent des enfants, selon nos deux sources contemporaines.<sup>9</sup>

A more moderate opinion is suggested by E. Burr when she argues that Libanius, far from blaming, only wanted to underline that the population of Antioch and the majority of the councillors were mostly Christian: “Most of the rioters were Christians simply because the demos was mostly Christian; they also assembled in front of the house of Bishop Flavianus”.<sup>10</sup>

We are in possession of unquestionable information: Libanius didn't leave Antioch as long as the riot and its conse-

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<sup>7</sup> Norman, Albert, 1969, p. 313.

<sup>8</sup> Norman, Albert, 1969, p. 285, note b.

<sup>9</sup> Petit, Paul, 1955, p. 240.

<sup>10</sup> Burr, Elisabeth, 1996, p. 59.

quences lasted, whilst the bishop Flavian went to Constantinople to intercede before the emperor Theodosius on behalf of Antioch. In turn, John Chrysostom took care of his religious congregation, and composed and declaimed XXIV Homilies on the Statues. In fact, Libanius, bishop Flavian and John Chrysostom focus their attention on the religious view of the riot.

*Vir bonus dicendi peritus versus vir sanctus dicendi peritus* —a sophist against a bishop—. In other words, the model of a city at the epicentre of which is the agora and the school of rhetoric against the city of God. This is a simplified panorama of the change<sup>11</sup> that was taking place in the cultural, religious and social elites in the late antique society, but it corresponds to the leitmotif of Libanius's orations on the statues. It is obvious that he did nothing to solve what was quite a problematic situation, but what was the situation that forced Libanius to fake his journey to Constantinople? Why didn't he mention the negotiations between Flavian and the emperor Theodosius?

“Let us call the imaginary ‘Sophistopolis’. It is of course a Greek city and worships Greek gods. Most important, it is (like classical Athens) a democracy, where the rhetor —both politician and expert in oratory— is something of a hero”.<sup>12</sup> This statement of Donald Russell defining the natural environment of the sophist will be outdated and anachronistic by the fourth century. We can find the legal background of this change in the Codex Theodosianus dispositions which show the continuous growth of duties and privileges of the figure of the bishop, including economical and judicial matters.<sup>13</sup> They could teach, and give directions for daily life, and social

<sup>11</sup> Whether this change can be described as “decadence” is an issue yet to be answered, Cameron, Averil, 2002, pp. 170-173.

<sup>12</sup> Russell, Donald, 1983, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> *CTh*, XVI, 1, 3; 5, 6; I, 27, 1; XI, 16, 10; XI, 16, 18.

welfare and eventually they became the leaders of the cities, the institutionalized elite of the new Christian empire. To sum up, the bishops succeeded to the role of the sophists:

El rétor de la Antigüedad Tardía se convierte así en el obispo de la Edad Media y la Retórica sigue siendo lo que siempre fue, la Retórica sigue siendo política, continúa enseñando a conducir a las masas por la palabra, a convertir el lenguaje en política.<sup>14</sup>

But Libanius was not blind and was aware of that swift transformation. Unlike Themistius and Ammianus Marcellinus, he was adamantly impervious to considering Christianity as a cultural pool that may end up conflating both cultures of paganism and Christianity alike. On the contrary, the sophist focused all of his efforts on criticising the decline situation of the schools of rhetoric, the core of the *paideia* he taught. Thus, he rated the cities of the empire according to their possibilities of teach rhetoric: Berito was “a city that behaves improperly”, and Rome was inferior to Antioch because the Siriac city had more schools of rhetoric.<sup>15</sup> The pagan rhetoric, consequently, was the panacea, the medicine to heal the empire:

Well! Even if everything else reconciled me to the present situation, would not the state of oratory alone be enough to set me at odds with it? Rhetoric, that in the past used to flash like lightning, is now under a cloud: it used to attract young students from far and wide, but now it is considered a mere nothing. It is held to be like the stony ground on to which the sower scatters seed and then is enraged to lose his crop also. It is from other sources that the yield comes —from Latin, by all that is holy, and law—. Previously, if they had any training, they had to bring in their law books and stand, with eyes fixed on the orator, waiting for the words, “You, read that, please”. But now they are even secretar-

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<sup>14</sup> López Eire, Antonio, y De Santiago Guervós, Javier, *Retórica y comunicación política*, Madrid, Ed. Cátedra, 2000, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> Lib., *Or.*, XI, 270; XXXIX, 17.

ies in the highest office of state, while the student of eloquence, rather than of that stuff, is a laughing-stock for them and laments his own plight.<sup>16</sup>

On the other side, Christianity was developing its own rhetoric to support its own values, and that meant a divorce between classical rhetoric and the classical values the rhetoric contained.<sup>17</sup> Libanius always considered *lógoi* (speech) and *hiera* (the sacred) as indissoluble,<sup>18</sup> but the privileged situation of Christian elites during the fourth century requiring rhetorical skills to persuade and polemicize was a breach in the pagan substratum of rhetoric. In Libanius's terms, *lógoi* remained essentially the same to a great extent but *hiera* was absorbed and redeveloped by the Christian message.

The events of the Riot of Statues provides us with a clear illustration of this process. After the riot, Libanius returned to the things he was used to: to composing speeches which would have influence as long as their diffusion allowed them. Conversely, according to Christian sources, bishop Flavian travelled to Constantinople, delivered a speech before emperor Theodosius and obtained the forgiveness for the city.<sup>19</sup> Rhetoric, then, became the tool of the sophist and the bishop in such a problematic circumstance. That bishop Flavian was the best delegate to plead for forgiveness to emperor Theodosius can be proved not only because of the common religious background they shared,<sup>20</sup> but also because by the end of the fourth century Antioch was a highly christianized city, and most of the population considered the bishop to be the best

<sup>16</sup> Lib., *Or.*, II, 43-44. Norman, Albert, 1969, p. 35.

<sup>17</sup> Cameron, Averil, 1991, is the cornerstone of the studies devoted to Christian rhetoric. See also Auski, Paul, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Lib., *Or.*, LXII, 8: οικεία γάρ, οἵματι, καὶ συγγενῆ ταῦτα ἀμφότερα, ιερὰ καὶ λόγοι.

<sup>19</sup> In this context, our main source is Chrysostom's XXIth Homily on the Statues.

<sup>20</sup> On Theodosius and nicenism, see Leadbetter, Bill, 2000.

option to intercede on their behalf. Besides, despite the apologetic nature of the texts of Libanius defending the superiority of paganism, the sophist was aware that his situation within the social elites was becoming weaker. This is why the pragmatic rhetoric delivered by Flavian caused the orations of Libanius on the riot to be swansong.<sup>21</sup>

δεινὸν τὸ τὰς Πειθούς πρόσωπον.<sup>22</sup> This Sophoclean line fits properly with the intention of Chrysostom writing his homilies on the statues that are, according to J. J. Murphy, “the most striking example of the fourth century”.<sup>23</sup> The corpus of these homilies contains few direct references to the events of the Riot, although every single allusion to it tries to highlight the leadership of the bishop Flavian. In fact, most of them are intense propagandistic appeals to the figure of Flavias as the only hero and the real peacemaker according to John Chrysostom’s description. The reason why Chrysostom composed these panegyric lines to praise Flavian is obvious: Flavian had to appear to be the most outstanding figure in Antioch. Apparently, it was the same reason that compelled Libanius to write his orations XIX-XXIII. However, there is an important difference: while the sophist attempted to take over a difficult situation —i.e the transition towards a Christian empire—, the leitmotif of the homilies on the statues was to set up bishop Flavian as the only bishop of Antioch, as the siriac city witnessed an important schism by which Antioch had more than one bishop during almost all the fourth century.

The schism of Antioch went back to 327 when bishop Eustathius was deposed. Since then, new bishops were imposed and deposed according to their theological tendencies: the churches of Alexandria, Rome and Antioch struggled in their

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<sup>21</sup> I borrow the expression from Anderson, Graham, 1993, p. 46.

<sup>22</sup> Soph., Frg. 865.

<sup>23</sup> Murphy, James, 1974, p. 299.

effort to set up their bishops in the antiochene “cathedra”; as a result of that, Antioch had more than one bishop until the end of the fourth century.<sup>24</sup> Bishop Paulinus and bishop Meletius, who had separate congregations and celebrated the liturgies in different places,<sup>25</sup> were the main antagonist in the context of this conflict. John Chrysostom followed the meletian faction until Meletius died, and then was a constant assistant of Flavian, consecrated as the successor of Meletius. Indeed, in some of his writings the portrait of Meletius and Flavian is expressed very similarly in order to represent a religious and political continuity.<sup>26</sup> It's in this context where it's possible to establish a “meletian period” in Chrysostom's work: the *Encomium to Eutathius*, the *Encomium to Meletius* and some of the homilies in the corpus of the *Homilies on the Statues* can be regarded as supportive works in his mission to present Flavian as the principal bishop of Antioch.

Among the twenty-four Homilies on the Statues, only the homilies III, VI, XVII and especially XXI really concern the riot. Far from being simple accounts about the events, these homilies intened to persuade his audience about the supremacy of the meletian faction within the meletian schism and to publicize the actions and words of Flavian as well as show him as the bishop who interceded with the emperor Theodosius and obtained the pardon that saved the situation. For instance, the description of bishop Flavian through these homilies is conducted by hagiographical elements. In Homily III, bishop Flavian is preparing his travel to Constantinople, but this travel included physical and spiritual sacrifices: the inconvenience (or disability) of his age (he was very old by then), the harshness of the journey, leaving his sister on her deathbed (she

<sup>24</sup> In spite of the importance of this schism, little attention has been paid to it, see. Cavallera, Ferdinand, 1905; Chadwick, Henry, 2001, pp. 405-430; Maraval, Pierre, 1995; Sotomayor, Manuel, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Chadwick, Henry, 2001, pp. 418-419.

<sup>26</sup> Chrys., PG, 50, 519. See also Guinot, Jean, 2004, pp. 462-463.

was ill and about to die), the uncomfortable position of facing the wrath of the emperor:

For having learnt that “the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep”, he took his departure; venturing his own life for us all, notwithstanding there were many things to hinder his absence, and enforce his stay. And first, his time of life, extended as it is to the utmost limits of old age; next, his bodily infirmity, and the season of the year, as well as the necessity for his presence at the holy festival; and besides these reasons, his only sister even now at her last breath! He has disregarded, however, the ties of kindred, of old age, of infirmity, and the severity of the season, and the toils of the journey; and preferring you and your safety above all things, he has broken through all these restraints. And, even as a youth, the aged man is now hastening along, borne upon the wings of zeal!<sup>127</sup>

This text represents a sea change in the conception of Christian literature as saints and bishops enduring the challenges of an increasingly Christianised society succeeded martyrs as social references.

In Homily VI, Flavian was already travelling to Constantinople when God decided to intervene by delaying the journey of the informants who wanted to report to Emperor Theodosius about the outrageous events of the riot, so Flavian would get to Constantinople first, and therefore be able to speak to Theodosius first:

For that this hindrance on the road, was not without God’s interposition is evident from this. Men who had been familiar with such journeys all their lives, and whose constant business it was to ride on horseback, now broke down through the fatigue of this very riding; so that what hath now happened is the reverse of what took place in the case of Jonah. For God hastened him when unwilling, to go on his mission. But these, who were de-

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<sup>127</sup> Chrys., *PG*, 49, 47. Translation by Schaff, Paul, taken from the website [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

sirous to go, He hindered. O strange and wonderful event! He wished not to preach of an overthrow; and God forced him to go against his will. These men with much haste set forward to be the bearers of a message of overthrow, and against their will again He has hindered them! For what reason think you? Why, because in this case the haste was an injury; but in the other case, haste brought gain. On this account, He hastened him forward by means of the whale; and detained these by means of their horses. Seest thou the wisdom of God? Through the very means by which each party hoped to accomplish their object, through these each received an hindrance. Jonah expected to escape by the ship, and the ship became his chain. These couriers, by means of their horses, expected the more quickly to see the Emperor; and the horses became the obstacles; or rather, neither the horses in one case, nor the ship in the other, but the Providence of God everywhere directing all things according to its own wisdom!<sup>128</sup>

Homily XXI, delivered when Theodosius had already forgiven Antioch, is a mixture of several literary genres —including a transcription of the speech Flavian addressed to Theodosius, a real *genus iudiciale* oration— with the sole intention of praising Flavian. The homily makes no references to pastoral issues as it is an encomium to the meletian bishop.

Self-sacrifice in favour of Antioch, the intervention of God, the final defeat of the devil (Chrysostom pointed to him as responsible for the violent acts), and comparisons to biblical figures such as Jacob, Moses are hagiographical elements readapted to the times of post-Constantinian literature. John Chrysostom did not hesitate to insert these elements into his homilies in order to create the image of Flavian as the most sacred and influential bishop in Antioch. Therefore, the rhetorical and oratorical skills of Chrysostom in the service of political and theological matters had one main target: to take advantage of the confused situation in Antioch after the riot

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<sup>28</sup> Chrys., PG, 49, 83. Translation by Schaff, Paul, taken from the website [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

and publicize the meletian faction of the nicenism as the only one to rule the church of Antioch:

C'est dans ce moment d'incertitude sur l'avenir de la cité que Saint Jean Chrysostome a prononcé les 21 homélies aux Antiochiens. Celles-ci sont un témoignage sur les événements rappelés, par Jean Chrysostome, aux chrétiens ou bien aux demi-chrétiens affolés qui s'étaient réfugiés dans l'Eglise. Elles présentent aussi l'intérêt de montrer, à travers le discours chrysostomien, la position de l'Eglise chrétienne dominante à Antioche, c'est-à-dire l'Eglise qui a la mainmise sur les lieux de culte chrétiens de la cité, Eglise à laquelle Saint Jean Chrysostome appartient. Cette Eglise est niceenne et même, pourrions nous dire, mélétiennne puisque le schisme d'Antioche a rebondi, en 362, avec l'ordination de l'eustathien Paulin (...) Ainsi, pour comprendre l'engagement chrétien dans la défense de la cité, il est absolument nécessaire de replacer la sédition des Statues et ses suites dans le contexte historique du schisme d'Antioche et d'examiner à travers les homélies de Saint Jean Chrysostome comment les partisans de Flavien ont mis en place toute une stratégie de représentation et de défense de la cité.<sup>29</sup>

In the case of the Riot of Statues, two plus two did not equal four: if we add the Libanius narration of the violent events to the Chrysostom homilies, the result is not a complete, true and faithful account of the events of the Riot. Furthermore, if we compare the orations of the sophist and the homilies of the priest we will discover deep contradictions, and different and conflicting ways of analysing the same fact. The relationship between Libanius and Chrysostom has been studied to different levels, but since Goebel's work *De Ioannis Chrysostomi et Libanii orationibus quae sunt de seditione antiochenium*, in 1910, the orations XIX-XXIII and the Homilies on the Statues have not been compared.<sup>30</sup> And although the homilies are not

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<sup>29</sup> Soler, Emmanuel, 1997, p. 462.

<sup>30</sup> Partial studies on the relationship between Libanius and Chrysostom have been carried out by Hunter, David, 1989, 1998.

completely devoted to the Riot and its consequences (while Libanius orations did so), parallels about the content of both works can be established.

Some of the similarities are due, as Norman pointed out, to the concomitance of the theme;<sup>31</sup> and it could be added, as well, that Libanius and Chrysostom turned to the very same rhetorical topoi. However on some occasions these similarities have their roots in deeper reasons as shown by two events in the context of the Riot.

In the first, a desperate mother begs for her son, one of the Antiochenes who was jailed after the riot. John Chrysostom wrote this passage in his Homily XVII:

When the mother of one of the accused, uncovering her head, and exposing her grey hairs, laid hold of the horse of the judge by the bridle, and running beside him through the forum, thus entered with him the place of justice, we were all struck with astonishment, we all admired that exceeding tenderness and magnanimity. Ought we not, then, to have been much more impressed with wonder at the conduct of these men? For if she had even died for her son, it would have been nothing strange, since great is the tyranny of nature, and irresistible is the obligation arising from the maternal pangs! But these men so loved those whom they had not begotten, whom they had not brought up, yea rather, whom they had never seen, whom they had not heard of, whom they had never met, whom they knew only from their calamity, that if they had possessed a thousand lives, they would have chosen to deliver them all up for their safety.<sup>32</sup>

In reply, Libanius appears to answer Chrysostom with the following words in his oratio XXII, an encomium to the *magister militum* Hellebicus:

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<sup>31</sup> Norman, A. F., 1969, p. 259.

<sup>32</sup> Chrys., *PG*, 49, 173. Translation by Schaff, Paul, taken from the website [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

Among those to be examined was a fine young man who had won renown in many embassies and all forms of public service, and had taken his father's place in fulfilling civic duties. His mother, then, bared her head and loosed her aged hair, ran to his bosom, took her hair in her hands and clasped it about him, pleading for her son with pitiful cries. Her tears flowed over the general's feet, his over her head. No one dragged her away, nor yet did he himself repulse her. He so devoted himself to her long-drawn prayers that he seemed to be superhuman.<sup>33</sup>

Chrysostom focuses the core of his story on the philanthropy of the monks who descended upon Antioch from the nearest mountains in order to help the antiochene population that did not run away. The city, consequently, would be saved by the monks. Inversely, Libanius stressed the fact that the young son was a councillor who always performed his duties in favour of the *boulē* and the city. What is also remarkable is the contrast between the celestial power (the monks) and the administrative jurisprudence (the young councillor).

Having read both stories, it seems that Libanius and Chrysostom were looking for an excuse to display their conceptions of a city. In the Christian model of a city as proposed by Chrysostom, the monks exemplify the Christian concept of *charitas* because of their generosity and devotion. Above all Chrysostom attempts to underline the supremacy of Christian power and influence over the hyperbolic imperial administration. Libanius, on the other hand, aims to highlight the innocence of this councillor, as he tries to defend the role of the *boulē* as the essence of a city, and the pre-eminence of Hellebicus, the *magister militum*, as a symbol of political order over the rest of the powers. These are, therefore, two different interpretations of the city illustrated in different versions of the same episode.

The second episode concerns more directly the religious background. In the sixth Homily of his corpus of Homilies on

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<sup>33</sup> Lib., *Or.*, XXII, 22. Translation taken from Norman, A. F., 1969, p. 391.

the Riot, Chrysostom describes the following scene in which God spoke to some informants on their way to Constantinople to report to Theodosius about the events of the riot: “Why are you in rush? Why do you hurry to sink such an important city? Don’t you bring good news to the emperor? Stay here until I order my servant, as a good doctor, move forward and anticipate your project”.<sup>34</sup>

Libanius also appeals to superhuman beings in his account of the Caesarius journey to Constantinople to report to Theodosius in favour of Antioch:

Such then was his resolve, but all his energy would have been in vain had it not had the backing of Fortune. She may set some things moving, but others she robs of their objective. Without this divine connivance, what would the plans of men be worth?<sup>35</sup>

I would argue that the insertion of the story of Caesarius is a counter answer to the Chrysostom’s account of Flavian’s trip to Constantinople to beg pardon before the Emperor Theodosius. Libanius replies to the hagiographical elements in Chrysostom’s account (God helping a saint) with a story based on the help of Fortune.<sup>36</sup>

Leaving apart the religious struggle, the controversy affected both the political and social roles of the city. Consequently, Libanius and Chrysostom moved their pieces (bishop, monks; and councillors, *magister officiorum* and *militum*) on the chessboard that was the city of Antioch, threatened by the

<sup>34</sup> Chrys., *PG*, 49, 83. Translation by Schaff, Paul, taken from the website [www.ccel.org](http://www.ccel.org).

<sup>35</sup> Lib., *Or.*, XXI, 17. Translation taken from Norman, A. F., 1969, p. 361.

<sup>36</sup> Libanius enthusiastically worshiped Fortune, see Misson, Jaques, 1914, p. 93: “Au contraire, bienfaiteurs des hommes, ses dieux les suivent partout du regard, les éclairent et les fortifient, les préservent des dangers et leur procurent de bonnes occasions, leur dictent la conduite à suivre par la loi morale qu’ils ont portée et qu’ils sanctionnent. Ils s’occupent des individus, comme des sociétés grandes ou petites”.

consequences of the Riot of the Statues, in their desperate pursuit to achieve an influential social and religious foothold.

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